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Intention and ability as predictors of change in adult daughters' prosocial behavior towards their mothers.

Inhalt	Seite
Abstract	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Method	5
2.1 Subjects and procedure	5
2.2 Questionnaires	6
3. Results	8
3.1 Direct effects	9
3.2 Indirect effects	10
4. Discussion	12
References	14
Footnotes	17
Abbildung und Tabellen	

Abstract

Change in help given by adult daughters to her mothers was investigated on the basis of the theory of planned behavior. At least three weeks before daughters gave self-reports of their helping behavior, the following predictor variables were measured by questionnaire: Intention to help, ability and resources to help as indicators of behavioral control, social norms, subjective norms, perceived justification of mother's needs, and several demographic variables. Each variable, including the behavioral criterion, was assessed thrice with a 9-months delay between two adjacent times of measurement. Hierarchical regression analyses were used to test different change models and to estimate change-effect parameters ($264 < N < 308$). Accordant to the theory of planned behavior, change in helping behavior was found to depend substantially on intention to help and on behavioral control. Change in behavioral control was affected by the distance between daughter's home and mother's home as well as by perceived justification of mother's needs. Change in intention to help could be predicted from justification of mother's needs, behavioral control, and quality of the relationship between daughter and mother. Each of these change effects was found to hold for the two 9-months delays as well as for the 18-months delay.

1. Introduction

Adult children, as well as younger children, are often confronted with the needs and desires of their parents, e.g., the wish for practical help with household chores, to be cared for in cases of illness, to remain in contact by letters, phone calls or visits, the wish for emotional support, or the wish to have parental values regarding religious or political questions accepted. Compliance with these needs or desires varies interindividually as well as intraindividually, and it changes over the time. What are the compliance with parental needs? We tried to answer this question for the daughter-mother-dyad in a two-year longitudinal questionnaire study which was part of a research project, "Development of interpersonal responsibility and interpersonal guilt" (Montada, 1981; Montada, Dalbert, & Schmitt, in press).

Most of the research on prosocial activities of adult children toward their parents has been conducted within family sociology (i.e., Braun & Articus, 1983; Lang & Brody, 1983; Seelbach, 1978; Shanas & Sussman, 1977). The overwhelming majority of these studies examined sociological/demographic variables as predictors of interindividual differences in the active support of the elderly but not intraindividual change or psychological factors of filial responsibility.

The model examined in this paper draws upon Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), Liska's criticism of that theory (Liska, 1984), as well its extension to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Schifter & Ajzen, 1985).

In this theory, behavior is assumed to be controlled by sets of variables: motivational ones leading to a wish or an intention to act in a specific manner and non-motivational ones, namely, perceived own abilities and resources. Ajzen and Madden (1986) call this latter set of variables perceived behavioral control. In line with the theory of planned behavior, we assumed that perceived behavioral control has direct effects on the

intention to act and on actual behavior. Since daughters have experiences with their own previous behavior toward their mothers, they know about their resources and abilities to help and thus should take them into account when developing an intention to help or not to help. At the same time, they are not in perfect control of the situation. Unexpected obstacles may arise. Under conditions like these, Ajzen and Madden (1986) report evidence for a direct effect (not mediated by the intention to act) of perceived abilities and resources on actual behavior.

Filial helping behavior often seems to be in conflict with role demands of occupation and marriage (Lang & Brody, 1983). Hence, perceived behavioral control should be predictable from those demographic variables that affect the time available for supportive activities and the costs caused by them.

According to the theory of planned behavior, the intention of a daughter to act prosocially towards her mother depends not only on behavioral control but also on subjective norms (i.e., perceived social pressure) to comply or not to comply with the needs of her mother. In addition to subjective norms, social norms are considered as predictors of intention. They refer to some kind of social evaluation of one's own behavior. Social norms and subjective norms have to be differentiated from personal norms which have also been presumed to cause behavior and especially prosocial activities (e.g., Schwartz, 1977). The model used here does not include personal norms in this sense.

Experimental research on prosocial behavior emphasizes the importance that cognitive appraisals of situational factors have. For example, willingness to help depends on the intensity of the need perceived (Bickman & Kamzan, 1973; Tipton & Browning, 1972; Wagner & Wheeler, 1969), on the awareness of consequences in case of no help (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1963; Schwartz, 1968), and on the perception of the need as being self-inflicted (Barnes, Ickes, & Kidd 1979; Berkowitz, 1969; Schopler & Matthews, 1965; Schwartz & Ben David, 1976; Weiner, 1980). We assumed that in the sample case of our

research, the most powerful situational appraisal would be the daughters evaluations of how justified the maternal needs were (Dalbert, 1987). This variable should permit prediction of the intention to act.

There is evidence from experimental research on altruism (Bierhoff, 1980) and from studies on the daughter-mother-dyad (Cicirelli, 1983) that an emotionally warm relationship between a person in need for help and a potential helper makes prosocial behavior more likely. In line with this evidence, we assumed that the quality of the relationship between daughter and mother should be a significant predictor of the intention to act prosocially.

Bentler and Speckart (1975) have found independent effects of past behavior on present behavior. This effect, which could be due to a motive to behave consistently (Festinger, 1954) or to stable self-attributions as, e.g., friendliness or competency (Uranowitz, 1975), has to be controlled for when testing the hypothesis that behavioral control exerts a direct effect on behavior. In our study, we considered not only retrospective reports on previous activities of the same category but also results from a prospective longitudinal study. All variables were measured three times nine months apart. This way, it was possible to control for the effects of behavior at time 1 on behavior at time 2 and of behavior at time 1 and 2 on behavior at time 3.

The second strategy is a general method to analyze the conditions of change for any variable measured at least twice (Dalbert, in press): By means of hierarchical regression analysis, all those variables can be detected that exert effects on the criterion variable independently of the respective autoregressor. The autoregressor of prosocial behavior is previous prosocial behavior, the autoregressor of intention to act are previous intentions, the autoregressor of social norms are previous social norms, etc. Effects of variables that are independent of autoregressive effects are effects on change.¹

Indirect effects on change in prosocial activities were analyzed by path analyses. A variable exerts an indirect change effect on prosocial behavior if it has an independent direct change effect on another variable which predicts , change in prosocial behavior directly.

The major hypotheses of the present study may be stated as follows: (a) Change in the intention to act prosocially towards one's mother can be predicted from subjective and social norms, justification of the mother's need, quality of the relationship between mother and daughter, and perceived ability and resources. (b) Intention and perceived ability and resources, in turn, predict change in prosocial behavior, (c) Perceived own ability and resources depend on demographic variables.

2. **Method**

2.1 Subjects and procedure

807 daughters (with mothers still alive) participated in this study. Subjects belonged to a random sample --diminished by self-selection-- drawn from a population stratified, according to three factors: (1) Place of living (Trier, a city of about 100.000 inhabitants in West Germany; living in a rural community in the vicinity of Trier for the last ten years); (2) age (three cohorts: born 1957-1962, 1947-1952, 1929-1934); (3) marital status (single, married/living together in a partnership). For the oldest cohort, "widowed daughters" were included in the category "single" because the population of single daughters born between 1929-1934 with living mothers was extremely small. Thirty-five percent of the subjects had an educational level of high school or above. The results reported in this paper are based on data from 264 - 308 daughters for whom data from all three time of measurement were available. No significant differences were found between subjects who dropped out after the first or second time of measurement and those who finished all three observation periods (Dalbert, 1987).

2.2 Questionnaires

At the beginning of the first time of measurement, the following demographic data were collected: (1) Year of birth the daughter, and (2) of the mother, (3) number of brothers and sisters of the daughter, (4) educational level of the daughter, as well as (5) place of living at the beginning of the investigation. At the beginning of each time of measurement, the following seven potentially changing demographic variables were collected: (1) marital status of the daughter and (2) of the mother, (3) distance between home of daughter and home of mother, (4) financial situation of the mother estimated by the daughter, (5) financial situation of the daughter, (6) employment status of the daughter, (7) number of children of the daughter.

All but one of the psychological variables dealt with in this paper were related to a list of 34 potential needs or desires a mother might address to her adult daughter, including the need for contact (e.g., phone calls, visits, letters), the need for practical and psychological help (e.g., help with household chores, listening to worries), the desire to have her own values (e.g., religious issues) accepted by the daughter, etc. At the beginning of each time of measurement, the daughters were asked to select individually those five needs/desires they felt to be especially important to their mothers. This procedure helped to ensure that the issues focussed on in the questionnaires were of high actual centrality for our subjects. With the exception of quality of relationship, all variables were measured with respect to these five individually selected needs/desires. In order to increase the validity of answers, subjects had to insert into the wording of every single item the specific need/desire of their mother they were reporting about.

Social norms (SN) were measured by the following items: "It is appropriate for an adult daughter ... to visit her mother regularly." (example). Answers had to be given on six-point rating scales ranging from 1 = exactly to 6 = not at all. The SN-questionnaire was administered five weeks after the collection of the demographic variables described above. Internal

consistency of the five SN-items ranged from $\alpha = .66$ to $.71$ for the three times of measurement. This seems to be acceptable for such a short scale. The SN-true-score was estimated as the mean of the five SN-item-scores.²

Four weeks later, justification of mothers' needs (JN) perceived by the daughter was assessed by the following items: "The need or the desire of my mother that ... I should listen to her worries (example) ... is ... 1 = totally justified ... 6 = absolutely not justified." (six-point rating scale). Internal consistency of the five JN-items ranged from $\alpha = .66$ to $.77$. Again, the JN-true-score estimated as the mean of the five JN-item-scores.

Three weeks later, we assessed the intention to act (I), perceived own ability and resources to perform the request activity (AR), and perceived subjective norms (NO). The intention items were worded as follows: "I am willing to comply with the need/desire of my mother ... to help her do the shopping (example) ... 1 = entirely ... 6 = absolutely not (six-point rating scale). Subjects were instructed to answer these items with regard to the immediately following weeks.

Ability and resources as indicators of perceived behavioral control were assessed by way of the following items: "My ability and resources to comply with the need/desire of my mother ..., that I take care of her during a temporary illness (example) ..., are 1 = very good ... 6 = very poor." (six-point rating scale).

Subjective norm-items (NO) were worded as follows: "If I do not comply with the need/desire ... of my mother ... to listen to her worries (example) ... most of my best friends will probably consider this ... 1 = very correct ... 6 = very incorrect." (six-point rating scale). Internal consistencies varied for intention (I) from $\alpha = .71$ to $.77$, for ability and resources (AR) from $\alpha = .66$ to $.71$, and for perceived subjective norms (NO) from $\alpha = .77$ to $.83$. True-scores for I, AR, and NO were again estimated as

the mean of the respective five item-scores.

Prosocial behavior (B) was assessed three weeks later. For each of the five needs/desires selected, two items had to be answered: (1) "I have complied with the need/desire of mother ... to stand by her in her anxiety about falling ill (example) ... 1 = entirely ... 6 = absolutely not." (six-point rating scale). (2) What I wanted to achieve with respect to this need/desire I have ... 1 = entirely ... 6 = absolutely not achieved." (six-point rating scale). Subjects were instructed to refer to the time since the intentions had been assessed (a period of about three weeks). Internal consistency of these ten items varied from alpha = .78 to .87. B-true-score was estimated as the mean of the ten B item-scores.

The quality of the relationship between daughter and mother (QR) was measured with a seven item scale developed by Kreuzer (1982). This scale contains items like: "I dearly love my mother.". Items had to be answered on six-point scales ranging from 1 = quite sure ... 6 = not at all. Internal consistency coefficients amounted to, at least, .93. QR-true-score was estimated as the mean of the seven QR-item-scores.

3. Results

As indicated before, data were analyzed by way of hierarchical multiple regression. The autoregressor was always entered first into the regression equation. In a second step, all variables assessed earlier than the criterion were entered into the equation. The sequence of analyses began with variables assessed at the third time of measurement as criterion variables. In no case did a predictor variable assessed earlier than the autoregressor at time 2 have significant effect. Only predictor variables assessed at time or later than the autoregressor effected the significantly. This was true, too, when the time 2-criteria were regressed on their time 1-autoregressors and when the time 3-criteria were regressed on their time 1-autoregressors.

Interactions between the predictor variables identified well as between the predictor variables and the birth c were tested (Cohen, 1978). None proved to be significant.

Prediction of change in adult daughters' prosocial behavior

insert Table 1 about here

3.1 Direct effects

As shown in Table 1, significant predictors ($p = .05$) of prosocial behavior at time 3 (B3) were: previous prosocial behavior (B2), current intention to act (I3), and current perceived own ability and resources (AR3) (cf., part 1 of Table 1). No other variable had a significant effect. This very clear result was replicated for the regression of time 2-behavior (B2) on time 1-variables (cf., part 2 of Table 1), as well as for B3 when regressed on time 1-variables (cf., part 3 of Table 1). At least 56% of the variance in prosocial behavior can be explained by the accepted model. The regressors intention (I) and ability and resources (AR) explained between 15% and 28% of the criterion variance or between 25% and 44% of the explained variance (= change effects).

In summary, the direct effects on change in behavior found here accord to our hypotheses: Change in prosocial behavior is predicted by the intention to act as well as by actual perceptions of own abilities and resources. These two variables have independent effects in addition to former prosocial behavior.

3.2 Indirect effects

Indirect effects on change in prosocial behavior are exerted by all predictors of intention to act (I) and perception of own abilities and resources to act (AR). We assumed the latter variable to depend on demographic factors. Again, this hypothesis was tested by hierarchical regression analysis. Previous perceptions of abilities and resources (AR2 or AR1, respectively) were entered first. In a second step, all variables antecedent to AR3 were entered into the regression equation including previous prosocial behavior.

insert Table 2 about here

As evidenced by Table 2, the variable distance between home of daughter and home of mother (DIS), one of the twelve demographic variables assessed, had an independent effect on the perception of own abilities and resources for prosocial behavior consistently across all three times of measurement. Distance was assessed with a seven-point rating scale, 1 meaning that daughter and mother were living together in the same house, 7 meaning that domiciles were more than 250 kilometers apart. Justification of mother's needs (JN) is the third variable exerting an independent effect on perceived ability and resources (AR) consistently across all three times of measurement. This effect had not been expected.

In summary: (a) The greater the amount of formerly perceived abilities and resources, (b) the less distant the domicile of daughter and mother, and (c) the more the maternal needs were judged as justified, the more actual abilities and resources to comply with the desires of the mother were perceived. All regressors together explained between 33% and 45% of the variance in AR1, AR2 and AR3. Five % to 11% thereof (or 11% to 28% of the variance explained) were due to the predictors JN and DIS (= change effects).

The following four variables predict the intention to act prosocially (I): (a) quality of the relationship between mother and daughter (QR), (b) perceived own abilities and resources (AR), (c) justification of need (JN), as well as (d) former intention (I).

insert Table 3 about here

The change effects on the intention to act prosocially (I) were, however, not quite as consistent across the three times of measurement as the change effects on the criteria regarded so far (cf., Table 3). The weight of the autoregressor (I1) diminished as the distance between times of measurement increased (compare part 2 and part 3 of Table 3). To explain changes in the intention of adult daughters' prosocial behavior towards their mothers, the perception maternal needs as justified or not is the most important variable. It has an independent effect consistently across all three times of measurement. Additionally, change in intention depends on the quality of relationship (QR) and perceived own abilities and resources (AR).

insert Table 4 about here

Contrary to our expectations, subjective norms (NO) and social norms (SN) had no effect on change in the intention to act. However, as Table 4 shows, social norms (SN) and quality of the relationship (QR) exert direct effects on the perception of mother's needs as justified or not (JN), and thus affect the intention to act (I) indirectly.

Table 5 summarizes for all three times of measurement the direct and indirect effects on prosocial behavior of all variables explored. Indirect effects greater than .10 were considered to be significant because variables having indirect effects of that size would surpass the level of significance of $p = .05$ (depending on the standard error (σ_b) if their

direct effects on prosocial activities were tested while excluding the variables mediating their effects.

insert Table 5 about here

4. Discussion

The results combined in Table 5 evidence clearly that for all three times of measurement, the most significant predictors for change in filial prosocial behavior were (a) the intention to act prosocially (I), (b) perceived own abilities and resources (AR), and (c) the perception of the mother's needs as justified (JN).

Figure 1 pictures the corresponding model of change and gives as an example the standardized regression coefficients as well as the explained variance (R^2) resulting from the analyses of the third time of measurement with a nine months interval.

insert Figure 1 about here

This model of change evidences the significance of the intention to act (I) as well as of perceived own abilities and resources (AR) for predicting prosocial activities in the family context.

However, Figure 1 also shows the differences between these two strong predictors of prosocial behavior with respect to their own antecedents. Aside from going along with changes in subjective evaluations of the situation of the mother (JN), change in the perception of one's own abilities and resources (AR) typically also depends on objective factors such as an increasing distance between domiciles of mother and daughter. At this point, one could ask whether distance and the kind of maternal desire

interact. For some maternal desires the distance between domiciles might be more important for the perception of one's abilities than for others. For example, the perception of one's abilities may be rather independent of the distance as far as the maternal wish to remain in contact by letters or phone calls is concerned. On the other side, the distance might be very important regarding maternal wishes for help with heavy household chores. However, our data did not yield any evidence of such interactions.

The perception of maternal needs as justified (JN) determined both change in the intention to act (I) and change in the perception of own abilities and resources (AR). The more justified the daughter considered her mother's needs to be, the more likely change in prosocial behavior will result (indirect change effect).

The quality of the relationship between daughter and mother (QR) has a direct change effect on the intention to be prosocially but not on perceived ability and resources.

The indirect change effects of QR on behavior increase as a function of the time between measurements (see Table 5). Increasing the interval between assessments from 9 to 18 months, QR as well as JN became significant predictors of prosocial behavior when the intention to act was omitted from the prediction equation.

These results clearly point out the theoretical difference between performed behavior and the intention to behave: At shorter intervals, the quality of the relationship between daughter and mother influences only the intention to act prosocially but not the prosocial activity itself. A possible explanation might be that the quality of the relationship is only of long-termed significance, whereas, when assessed at shorter intervals, it will be more the situational evaluations and cognitions that have effects on actual intentions to act. This evidence ought to be taken into consideration when discussing results using the intention to act rather

than the actually performed behavior as criterion.

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Footnotes

¹Such an effect on change remains constant if the difference between post- and pre-test ($Y_2 - Y_1$) or the residual variable ($Y_2 - E(Y_2|Y_1)$) is used instead of only Y_2 (Dalbert, in press). Y_2 is the criterion variable and Y_1 autoregressor, assessed at the preceding time of measurement.

²The means and standard deviations of these and all other variables mentioned in this paper remained constant over all three times of measurement (dynamic equilibrium; Lord, 1963).

Authors' Notes

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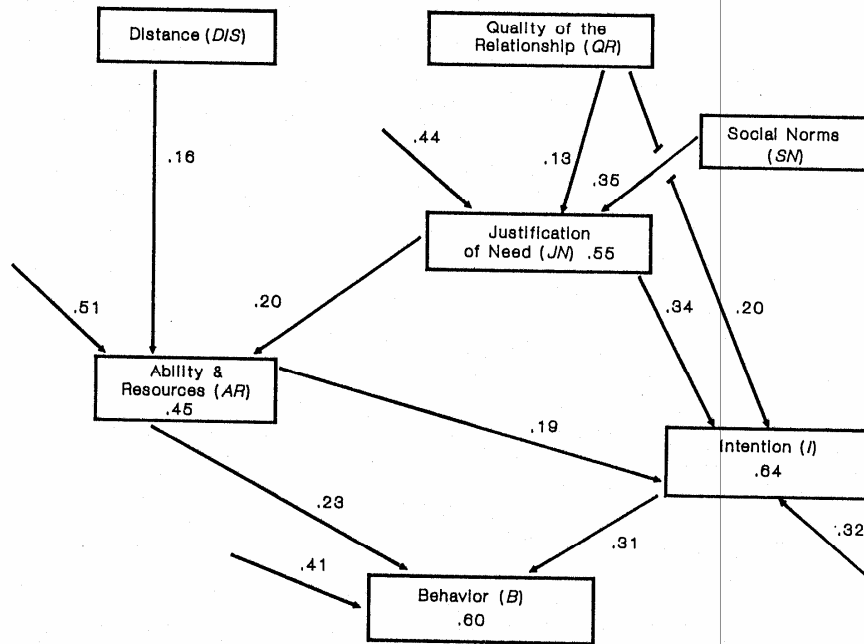


Figure 1

Path diagram of adult daughters' prosocial behavior (results of the third wave with 9-months delay; path coefficients are standardized partial regression coefficients, the unlabeled arrows symbolize autoregressive effects, the numbers under the labels are the explained variances R^2).

Table 1

Multiple regression from Behavior (B) on the autoregressor and other variables measured earlier ($264 \leq N \leq 288$)

Predictor variables	R^2	r	b	$\frac{\Delta}{b}$	F	df	p	beta
(1) Accepted model for B3 with 9-months delay								
B2	.45	.67	.41	.05	74.5	1/263	<.01	.41
I3	.57	.65	.39	.06	39.8	"	"	.31
AR3	.60	.55	.27	.06	24.4	"	"	.23
Intercept			(.05)					
(2) Tested model for B2 with 9-months delay								
B1	.38	.61	.33	.05	43.1	1/284	<.01	.32
I2	.53	.66	.44	.06	65.4	"	"	.40
AR2	.56	.50	.24	.05	20.8	"	"	.20
Intercept			(.19)					
(3) Tested model for B3 with 18-months delay								
B1	.35	.60	.31	.04	52.1	1/260	<.01	.31
I3	.59	.68	.53	.06	92.0	"	"	.43
AR3	.63	.60	.29	.05	28.5	"	"	.25
Intercept			(-.03)					

Note. All variables ranging from 1 to 6; I = Intention; AR = Ability & Resources; numbers behind the abbreviated variable names denote their time of measurement.

Table 2

Multiple regression from Ability and Resources (AR) on the autoregressor
and other variables measured earlier ($275 \leq N \leq 308$)

Predictor variable	R^2	r	b	$\frac{\Delta G}{b}$	F	df	p	beta
(1) Accepted model for AR3 with 9-months delay								
AR2	.40	.63	.51	.05	105.1	1/271	<.01	.51
JN3	.43	.39	.19	.05	16.8	"	"	.20
DIS3	.45	.33	.06	.02	12.1	"	"	.16
Intercept			(.40)					
(2) Tested model for AR2 with 9-months delay								
AR1	.28	.52	.44	.05	66.6	1/304	<.01	.42
DIS2	.31	.31	.07	.02	16.6	"	"	.20
JN2	.33	.31	.14	.04	10.2	"	"	.16
Intercept			(.74)					
(3) Tested model for AR3 with 18-months delay								
AR1	.28	.53	.39	.05	62.0	1/274	<.01	.40
JN3	.34	.37	.25	.05	30.6	"	"	.27
DIS3	.39	.35	.08	.02	25.1	"	"	.24
Intercept			(.42)					

Note. All variables except DIS ranging from 1 to 6; DIS ranging from 1 to 7;
JN = Justification of Need; DIS = Distance; numbers behind the abbreviated
variable names denote their time of measurement.

Table 3

Multiple regression from Intention (I) on the autoregressor and other variables measured earlier ($269 \leq N \leq 294$)

Predictor variable	R^2	r	b	$\hat{\sigma}_b$	F	df	p	beta
(1) Accepted model for I3 with 9-months delay								
I2	.46	.68	.30	.05	43.5	1/266	< .01	.32
JN3	.58	.68	.31	.04	48.5	"	"	.34
QR3	.61	.50	.14	.03	22.2	"	"	.20
AR3	.64	.48	.18	.04	21.3	"	"	.19
Intercept			(.11)					
(2) Tested model for I2 with 9-months delay								
I1	.42	.65	.28	.04	49.0	1/289	< .01	.28
JN2	.67	.77	.50	.04	175.8	"	"	.52
AR2	.70	.44	.21	.04	32.9	"	"	.19
QR2	.71	.49	.08	.03	5.8		< .05	.09
Intercept			(-.17)					
(3) Tested model for I3 with 18-months delay								
I1	.20	.45	.12	.05	6.7	1/264	< .05	.12
JN3	.42	.62	.36	.05	53.6	"	< .01	.36
QR3	.50	.53	.21	.03	36.8	"	"	.28
AR3	.55	.48	.26	.05	30.3	"	"	.25
Intercept			(.13)					

Note. All variables ranging from 1 to 6; JN = Justification of Need; QR = Quality of the Relationship; AR = Ability & Resources; numbers behind the abbreviated variable names denote their time of measurement.

Table 4

Multiple regression from Justification of Need (JN) on the autoregressor and other variables measured earlier ($271 \leq N \leq 296$)

Predictor variable	R^2	r	b	\hat{G}_b	F	df	p	beta
(1) Accepted model for JN3 with 9-months delay								
JN2	.44	.66	.42	.05	78.7	1/271	<.01	.44
SN3	.54	.61	.34	.05	50.7	"	"	.35
QR3	.55	.39	.10	.03	8.1	"	"	.13
Intercept			(.38)					
(2) Tested model for JN2 with 9-months delay								
JN1	.34	.58	.30	.05	34.8	1/292	<.01	.28
SN2	.53	.67	.48	.05	107.7	"	"	.48
QR2	.55	.45	.13	.04	10.6	"	"	.15
Intercept			(.34)					
(3) Tested model for JN3 with 18-months delay								
JN1	.26	.51	.26	.05	27.6	1/267	<.01	.28
SN3	.40	.56	.39	.05	57.0	"	"	.39
QR3	.43	.39	.14	.04	13.0	"	"	.18
Intercept			(.56)					

Note. All variables ranging from 1 to 6; SN = Social Norms; QR = Quality of the Relationship; numbers behind the abbreviated variable names denote their time of measurement.

Table 5

Direct effects (DE) and indirect effects (IE) on adult daughters' prosocial behavior (B) under three conditions (standardized coefficients)

Predictor variables	B3		B2		B3	
	(9-months delay)		(9-months delay)		(18-months delay)	
	DE	IE	DE	IE	DE	IE
Former Behavior (B)	.41	-	.32	-	.31	-
Intention (I)	.31	-	.40	-	.43	-
Ability & Resources (AR)	.23	.06	.20	.08	.25	.11
Justification of Need (JN)	-	.06	-	.25	-	.25
Social Norms (SN)	-	.06	-	.12	-	.10
Distance (DIS)	-	.05	-	.06	-	.09
Quality of the Relationship (QR)	-	.08	-	.07	-	.17

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