

Prosocial youth less likely to associate with deviant peers, engage in problem behaviors

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Prosocial behaviors, or actions intended to help others, remain an important area of focus for researchers interested in factors that reduce violence and other behavioral problems in youth. However, little is known regarding the connection between prosocial and antisocial behaviors. A new study by a University of Missouri human development expert found that prosocial behaviors can prevent youth from associating with deviant peers, thereby making the youth less likely to exhibit antisocial or problem behaviors, such as aggression and delinquency.

"This study reaffirms suspicions that youth who engage in some forms of prosocial behaviors, such as helping, volunteering and comforting others, are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviors such as aggression and affiliating with deviant peers," said Gustavo Carlo, the Millsap Professor of Diversity in the MU Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

Carlo and his colleagues surveyed more than 650 adolescent children in Valencia, Spain, about their prosocial behaviors, affiliations with deviant peers, and delinquent and aggressive tendencies.

Of the six forms of prosocial behaviors measured, Carlo found that only two forms, altruism and compliancy, significantly reduced the chances of adolescents' displaying [problem behaviors](#). Compliant prosocial behaviors are actions that often require some level of social conformity and respect for authority, while altruistic behaviors are actions done without concern for self-reward.

Carlo said identifying which forms of prosocial behaviors are related to antisocial behaviors has important implications for intervention programs designed to reduce problem behaviors and promote more constructive prosocial behaviors in adolescents.

"Developers of intervention programs could use these findings to create programs that teach youth the benefits of engaging in prosocial behaviors," Carlo said. "Such preventative efforts may be most effective in preventing [youth](#) from affiliating with deviant peers and from engaging in subsequent aggressive and delinquent behaviors."

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies is part of the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences. The study, "The protective role of prosocial behaviors on [antisocial behaviors](#): the mediating effects of deviant peer affiliation," will be published in the *Journal of Adolescence*. Carlo's co-authors included researchers from the Chicago School for Professional Psychology, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Valencia in Spain.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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