

# Social Impact of Empathy in Childhood —Based on a Survey

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## ABSTRACT

Social skills are extremely important in today's society, and the study of it is one of the most famous subject in psychology. However, because the lack of knowledge in early age of human, there are only few papers discuss the social skills in childhood time. Therefore, this survey is set up. Among all of the variates that can affect the social skills, the author predicts that empathy is one of the main reason. So this survey is going to discover the influence of the empathy to affect the social skills in childhood time. This survey uses questionnaire to gather data from the testees. The survey contains 24 question, 20 of them is the empathy test, 2 of them is age and sex, the last two one is related to the social skills. The questionnaire results show three main conclusions. The first one is that the influence power of empathy to the social skills in childhood is does exist. Next, the more scores the empathy test a person has, the more scores on the social ability he or she has. The last conclusion is that age and sex are capable to affect the empathy level, although not all of them is related to the social skills.

**Keywords:** *Empathy, social skills, childhood, psychology*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the scientific view, every action the small kid has is an embodiment of shaping the structure of the child's mind. So in order to give good advice to the kids for their better development in the future, the author believes that scientists should use scientific methods to analyze the patterns of childhood behavior.

In the childhood times, the author himself found that the empathy is capable to influence the sociability. In the kindergarten, the children with more empathy will gain more attention and more friends. While the kid who appears to be lack of empathy will have less friend and attention. Also, in the modern psychology opinions, empathy is an important research content in the field of positive psychology as well as the basis of building good interpersonal relationships [1]. In this case, the author believes that the children who have better ability on empathy than other kids will have better sociability than the kids who is lack of empathy. This research is based on this hypothesis [4].

As the author mentioned before, the modern psychology study is lack of survey on childhood empathy. The reason for this strange phenomenon may be related to the uncertainty of this subject itself. According to psychologist Eleanor's opinion, the psychological subject and every model the psychology contains is very weak and vulnerable [2]. Even if every experimental parameter can be guaranteed as the same, two identical experiments may show completely different results. Every small data of experiments is capable to change the conclusion of a tests. So, in order to solve this question, the author reminds the experience when he was young, and brings new discovery to the positive

psychology in the childhood times. The author decides to do a survey towards his friends and family members.

## 2. CONCEPT ANALYSIS

### 2.1 Definition of Empathy

In the 1873, the German philosopher Robert Vischer first proposed the definition of Empathy, he use the word "Einfühlung" to represent the phenomenon in which people actively project their true spiritual feelings onto what they see. Thirty two years later, another psychologist Edward Titchener created the word "empathy" to replace the "Einfühlung", and changed the definition of this words into "A process of humanizing an object, of feeling ourselves inside something else" [3]. In today's psychologists' opinion, the empathy is been divided into two different group: one is the cognitive empathy; the other one is affective empathy. According the the creator of this theory, the cognitive represents the cognitively taking on another person's point of view and stepping into another person's role, while using the affective empathy to show that you react to another person with the same emotion.

### 2.2 Definition of Childhood

In the modern society, the age between 6 to 12 are usually defined as the child times. Because at this ages,

the child's brain and nervous system have basically reached a point where they have the ability to socialize. So this kind of human is begin to form basic social patterns that is very close to the real world. Also, according to some papers [4], in the childhood times, the data analysis of psychology began to show regularity and stabilization, which increases the correctness of the study among the childhood, and can make the author's idea be applied in other situations.

On the contrary, the childhood times is also the bonding between the infants and teenager. So it is between the development of brain or matter and the development of real social mind, or in other words, the most special part of the human's mind development. Because at this time, the development of brain is began to slow down, and the mind still remain in the small ages, and children is began to touch the outside world and create their own values and worldviews independently. So every small influence to the child at this age can change their after life for many years, which makes this part of human development become a good example for research.

**2.3 Definition of Social skills and importance**

In the last thirty years, as the development of high technologies like internet, the methods and frequency of communication is increased to a very high position. Considering the effect of globalization to the modern world, modern psychologist began to separate the social skills into two different parts [5]: the offline part and online part, which suggests that the social skills is crucial important in the modern society.

As the author mentioned before, the modern psychology is dividing the social skills into two parts. For most children, they only use the offline social skills, which includes conversations, emoticons and so on. Many psychological phenomena are capable to influence these skills, and empathy is one of them. Therefore, the social skills that the author discusses now can be concluded as the sum of the

**3.2 Questionnaire**

Gender	male					female
Age						
1. My friends' moods don't affect me much						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
2. You often feel sad after spending time with a depressed friend						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
3. I can feel my friend's joy when he or she does well and gets good grades						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
4. I feel scared when I see some scenes in horror movies						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
5. I'm susceptible to other people's emotions						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
6. I can hardly tell when my friends are frightened						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
7. I don't feel bad when I see someone crying						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree

ability for the human to communicate with other people and work together.

**2.4 The connection between Empathy and Social Skills**

The empathy is one of the key members among all of the subject that can influence the social skills. The power it contains is related to the understanding of the feelings of others, which means that if a kid is lack of empathy in he or she's mind, the actual ability for him or her to understand others' emotion and gives right response. In this case, the ability for these kids to communicate with others will decrease to a very low position. Therefore, the author speculates that the degrees of empathy can cause strong influence force on the social skills of a children. The stronger the empathy is, the more powerful the social ability is.

**3. RESEARCH PROGRESS**

**3.1 Process of research**

In the beginning of this research, the author decides to do a survey in the students club, the survey includes 24 question. Apart from the first two and last two questions, all other questions are based on a scale on the internet, alone with two special questions that the author puts inside in order to make the survey more close to the suitable one.

After the scale is completed, the author sends those files to his classmate and his teacher, and requests them to spread it out in order to get more details. By the time is finished, there are 121 valid questionnaires that have been received, including 55 male and 66 female.

8. Other people's emotions don't bother me at all						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
9. I can usually tell when someone is feeling down						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
10. I can usually tell when a friend is scared						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
11. When I see a sad scene on TV or in a movie, I often become sentimental						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
12. I can usually detect people's emotions before they tell me what they are feeling						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
13. When I see someone else being provoked, my mood doesn't change						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
14. I can usually tell when someone is happy						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
15. When my friends are scared, I'm scared						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
16. I can quickly tell when my friend is angry						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
17. I often get involved in the emotions of my friends						
Totally disagree	1	2	3	4	5	totally agree
18. Does my friend's depression affect me						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
19. I am often unaware of my friends' emotional feelings						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
20. When my friends are happy, I can hardly tell						
Totally disagree	5	4	3	2	1	totally agree
21. Did you have many friends when you were young?(Between the ages of 6 and 12)						
Very little	1	2	3	4	5	very much
22. Do you still keep company with your childhood friends?						
Only a little	1	2	3	4	5	lots of

**3.3 Result**

The data obtained in this survey show very obvious regularity: for the person who is lack of empathy scores,

their friends in the childhood times is much less than the kids who have better scores in the questionnaire.

**Table 1 Scores in empathy survey**

Scores in the empathy questionnaire	0-20	20-40	40-60	60-80	80-100
Number of people in each segment	5	19	22	45	30
Social ability in high- medium grade	0	3	13	42	30

In the sum of high social ability person, the number of female is more than male. However, the scores of question 22 shows different way: although the male testes have less friends in the childhood times, most of their friends remained contact even when they already

in high school. According to a paper [2], this incident is caused by the different ideas of male and female to the friendship: the male are likely to form big union and last for many years, while female prefer small group and hard to continue.

**Table 2 Average scores in different sex**

Question number	21	22	0-20
average score of male in question	2.27	4.21	71
average score of female in question	3.56	3.13	83

In this survey of empathy, the age of testee has been divided into two groups: the age between 14 to 16, and the age above the first group. According to this questionnaire, the first group had better scores in both question 22 and 0-20. The author speculates this

incident is caused by the memory lost and time effect to the friendship, and it should be limited connection to the empathy. However, it does inform us that older people will become less empathetic to other people, but their social ability seems unchanged for a while.

**Table 3 Average score in different group**

Question number	21	22	0-20
Average score of first group	4.36	3.79	79
Average score of second group	4.13	1.85	66

**3.4 Data analysis**

This paper is based on the questionnaire, containing three different data, which are the age, scores of empathy, and the sex. Those data give three main information as the results. But there are still some disadvantages in the survey. First, the age seems useless for the entire paper, but the author still selects it as a part of the result. Secondly, the time the author prepared for the survey to follow is not very enough, as the original plan for the survey was at least 150 valid data. But in the end of the survey, only 121 valid data is gathered.

**4. CONCLUSION**

This survey shows that the influence power of empathy to the social skills in the childhood indeed exists. The more scores the empathy test a person has, the more scores on the social ability he or she has. This proves the author’s theory of empathy that the empathy is one of the major variate of the social skills in the childhood. In addition, age and sex are capable to affect the empathy level, although not all of them are related to the social skills. This research also provides some further discussion for the psychology study. For example, the psychologists can study the empathy power in teenagers and adult times, or study the other effects of the social skills. Those ways of research will benefit the modern psychology and the society.

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