

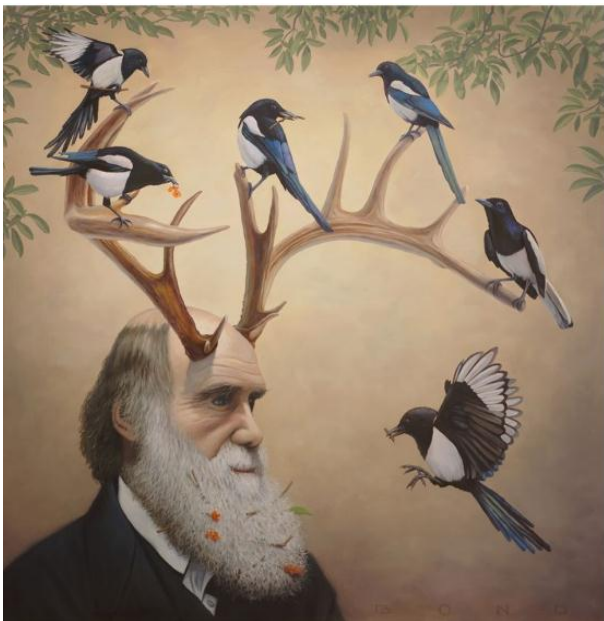
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Making a Better World from the Children's Perspective: How to Make Compassion Contagious

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Abstract

Compassion is recognized as one of the answers to create a better world, especially due to its role in reducing the suffering and burden of fellow human beings. Children have unique perspectives and ways to play a role in making a better world. The purpose of this study was to describe from the perspective of children, how compassion can be contagious in social life. A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen to understand the experience of 629 subjects aged 12 to 18 years (Mean=14.88 years; 396 girls; and 233 boys), which obtained by the convenience sampling technique. Data were processed using the thematic analysis method. The results of this study have illustrated that there are two major parts that are important to consider to make compassion contagious. The first part is things that need to be done, namely helping others, starting to be compassionate to others, loving others, caring more for others, respecting each other, building positive awareness and character of ourselves, improving our relationships with God, becoming example of compassion itself for other children, the willingness to give, forgive, and work together. The second part contains things that should not be done if you want compassion to be contagious and spread in life, that is, you should not discriminate others, stop being selfish, stop being hostile to others, and stop all types of bullying behavior and oppression. So, the spreading of compassion is a must to create a better world. To spread compassion, children possess an excellent way by helping people in suffering and be compassionate. Children have a genuine way; they do not demand and wait for the other party to start the compassionate action. They start it from themselves, with the simple thing they can do, and do it spontaneously as soon as it is needed.

Keywords: compassion, prosocial, helping, children, caring, better world.

Hacer un mundo mejor desde la perspectiva de los niños: cómo hacer que la compasión sea contagiosa

Resumen

La compasión es reconocida como una de las respuestas para crear un mundo mejor, especialmente debido a su papel en la reducción del sufrimiento y la carga de los demás seres humanos. Los niños tienen perspectivas y formas únicas de desempeñar un papel en hacer un mundo mejor. El propósito de este estudio fue describir desde la perspectiva de los niños, cómo la compasión puede ser contagiosa en la vida social. Se eligió un enfoque fenomenológico cualitativo para comprender la experiencia de 629 sujetos de 12 a 18 años (media = 14,88 años; 396 niñas y 233 niños), que se obtuvo mediante la técnica de muestreo de conveniencia. Los datos se procesaron utilizando el método de análisis temático. Los resultados de este estudio han ilustrado que hay dos partes principales que es importante considerar para hacer que la compasión sea contagiosa. La primera parte es cosas que deben hacerse, es decir, ayudar a los demás, comenzar a ser compasivos con los demás, amar a los demás, preocuparse más por los demás, respetarse mutuamente, crear conciencia y carácter positivos de nosotros mismos, mejorar nuestras relaciones con Dios, convertirse en ejemplo de compasión por otros niños, la disposición de dar, perdonar y trabajar juntos. La segunda parte contiene cosas que no deben hacerse si desea que la compasión sea contagiosa y se propague en la vida, es decir, no debe discriminar a los demás, dejar de ser egoísta, dejar de ser hostil a los demás y detener todo tipo de comportamiento de intimidación y opresión. Por lo tanto, la difusión de la compasión es imprescindible para crear un mundo mejor. Para difundir la compasión, los niños poseen una excelente manera de ayudar a las personas en el sufrimiento y ser compasivos. Los niños tienen una manera genuina; no exigen y esperan que la otra parte comience la acción compasiva. Lo comienzan desde ellos mismos, con lo simple que pueden hacer, y lo hacen espontáneamente tan pronto como sea necesario.

Palabras clave: compasión, prosocial, ayuda, niños, cariño, mundo mejor.

Introduction

Children live their life, learn, and grow through interaction with the social community starting from family, friends, school, institution, and society (Hadegaard, Aronsson, Hojholt, & Skjaerulvik, 2018). Hoffman (2000)

stated that empathetic responses and prosocial behaviors tend to increase during childhood since this is a transitional phase from self-concern to other-oriented concern. This is associated with the development of socio-cognitive skills such as distinguishing oneself from others and taking a perspective (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2017).

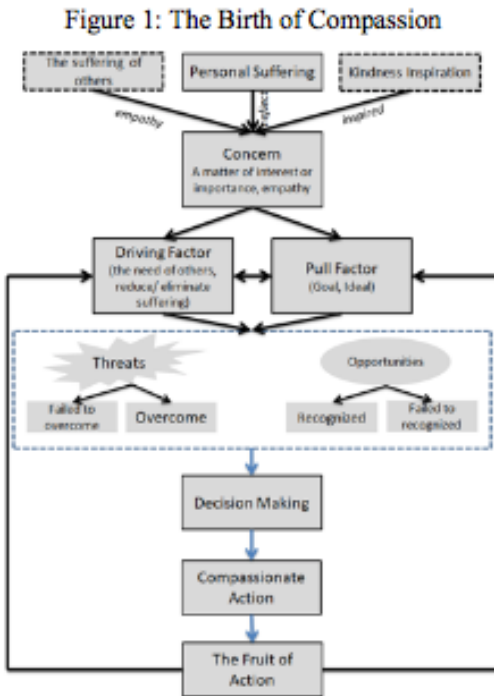
Studies on compassion involve child participants have been conducted; however, there have been no study on the children's perspective of compassion. Study on the children's perspective of compassion is very important, considering that children have their own challenges and solutions regarding their involvement to create a better world. Children can be an active agent and initiator in their way to spread compassion.

Compassion is known as one of the hopes to create a better world (Cavanagh, 1995; Rashedi, Plante, and Callister, 2015). This is supported by the study of Gilbert & Cohen (2003) that the compassion has a role in reducing mental problems such as reducing trauma, shyness, hatred, loneliness, depression, and fear (Gilbert, 2009, 2010, 2016, 2017), reducing suffering, improving prosocial behavior, and improving the inter-human relationship (Dalai Lama, 2001 in Jazaeri et al, 2012; Bengtsson, Söderström, & Terjestam, 2015), and holding critical roles of intergroup conflict reconciliation (Klimecki, 2019).

Compassion is always associated with suffering. There are two components of compassion. The first component is to feel and concern with others' suffering, and the second component is an encouragement to reduce that suffering (Greenberg & Turksma, 2016). The forms of human suffering are diverse. A study conducted by Sugianto, Abidin, Purwono, and Siregar (2019) reveals four forms of suffering, physical suffering (injuries, health problems, disability, uncomfortable condition, physical abuse, and unfavorable economic condition); psychological suffering (academic problem, guilty feeling, grief, loss, loneliness, neglect by others, fear, helplessness, shame, sad & depressed, and problems in self-respect); existential suffering (hollowness and unanswered questions regarding life existence); and relational suffering (relation with family, friends & colleagues, and social media). On children, suffering is expressed explicitly in physical pain and inconvenience, experience or be a witness of bullying, academic problems at school, family relation problems, and negative comments on social media.

For each suffering, compassion consoles. Compassion, in general, can be divided into two, namely, tangible and intangible action. Tangible compassionate action covers financial support, material goods, helping behavior,

and involved in social activities. While intangible compassionate action covers emotional support, companionship support, informational support, spiritual support, forgiveness, and serve others. Children hold their own manner to exhibit compassion, following their perception of suffering. Children' compassionate experience can be in the form of donating to disaster victims using their pocket money; sharing their packed lunch; lending their properties; helping friends to study or working in group; accompanying and consoling a sad friend; standing up bullying, directly or indirectly through social media (Sugianto, Abidin, Purwono, & Siregar, 2019). How to describe compassionate behavior? The following figure exhibits the birth of compassion.



(Sugianto, Abidin, Purwono, & Siregar, 2019)

From figure 1 above, it is known that there is a long process underlying an individual's decision to be compassionate. Experience of suffering (both personal suffering or others' suffering) and external inspiration (a model of compassion and inspiring story on compassion) are the seed of concern that can be strengthened by encouragement to be compassionate.

Opportunity and external threat also play a role in making a decision to be compassionate. When compassionate behavior is performed and leads to a good result, it boosts the encouragement to be compassionate. This figure explains why an individual compassionates. He tends to be willing to perform similar acts in other opportunities.

In this study, life course perspective is used to depict how children, with their personal characteristic, life experience, developmental age, and social environment, take a role in spreading compassion. In this approach, chronological age, life transitions, and social changes affect human behavior in the course of their life. Interaction between one's personal characteristic, environment, and life period is used to understand human behavior (Hutchison, 2003).

Although compassion is an individual's decision (see figure 1), it is proven that compassion is like other positive constructs, it can be contagious. With proper condition and manner, positive emotion (Barsade, Coutifaris, & Pillemer, 2018); generosity (Tsvetkova & Macy, 2014), and compassion (Cummings, 2018) can be contagious. The present study aims to explore how compassion is spread from children perspective, to create a better world.

Methods

Phenomenological qualitative approach was selected since this study require a strong philosophical foundation in depicting participant's experience on certain phenomena (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994, in Creswell, 2014). Specifically, participant responses were analyzed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) techniques which focused on identifying important components of unique phenomena (phenomenology); conduct interpretation activities to understand the 'world' as in the perspective of the participant (hermeneutic); and conduct in-depth analysis of individual cases to examine individual perspectives in their unique (idiographic) context (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee Padjadjaran University number: 57/UN6.KEP/EC/2018. All participants and their parents, caregivers or teachers gave consent to be involved in the study.

The data were obtained from life experience reflective form containing questions on "How to make compassion contagious?". This life experience reflective form was displayed in an online survey using Google form

in July-August 2018. The information regarding this study was presented through a short video shared through Youtube, Instagram, and Facebook. Criteria for being a participant are 12-18 years old, minimum education in elementary school, and living in Jakarta. 629 participants were selected using convenience sampling method (Cozby,2005; Acharya, Prakash, Saxeena, & Nigam,2013; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) following their interest and willingness to participate in the study.

Table 1: Participants

Age	Girls	%	Boys	%	Total	%
12-15	240	38.16	141	22.41	381	60.57
16-18	156	24.84	92	14.59	248	39.43
Total	396	63.00	233	37.00	629	100.00

As shown in table 1, participants of the study consisted of 396 females and 233 males, aged from 12-18 years old. The participants come from diverse backgrounds, some participants live with their parents, live in an orphanage, and some of them lived with HIV, who was accompanied by NGO. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with NVivo 12 Pro Edition. The license number was: NVT12-LZ000-AAK20-HGCTZ-Y99W1. In order to validate the data analysis, the coding was carried out by three research assistants, who is experienced in conducting qualitative studies. Coding was done in several steps, starting from reading the transcript of the survey result, creating themes and sub-themes, discussing themes and sub-themes, and making input using NVivo. Different codes were discussed until the agreement was reached.

Results

The result of the study describes that there were two approaches to make compassion contagious. The first approach is related to things that need to be done, while the second approach is related to things that should not be done.

Table 2: How To Make Compassion Contagious?

Things that need to be done		Things that not should be done	
Themes	Response	Themes	Response
Helping others	147	Selfish	19
Starting to be compassionate to others	72	Hostile to others	14
Loving others	60	Bullying & oppression	11
Caring more for others	55	Discrimination	9
Respecting each other & tolerance	51	Others	7
Self-awareness	46		
Spirituality	34		
Collaboration	32		
Giving & sharing	12		
Education	7		
Others	29		
Total	545	Total	60

Things That Need to Be Done

This study found that helping others emerges as a way to make compassion contagious. The forms of help can be varied, depending on the participant’s background.

“I love to give my packed lunch to the homeless people under the bridge, without my caregiver knowing it.”
(female, 16-18 years old, lived in orphanage)

“Become confidante and shoulder to cry on for my friend.”
(female, 12-15 years old, live with parents)

‘Helping others who face learning difficulties at school.’
(male, 12-15 years old, live with parents)

“I help to do home visit, accompany their study, and persuade them to take their ARV medicine orderly.”
(female, 16-18 years old, specifically accompanied by NGO for HIV)

For children who live in orphanages, the freedom to help friends is in more limited conditions compared to children who do not live in institutions.

They don't have pocket money. To help others by giving something, they rely on what they bring, such as lunch box. So if they provide lunch for someone else, then that afternoon they don't eat anything. This is a big sacrifice for a child. In other cases, children with HIV have a greater burden on health, than other children. They need to be disciplined in taking ARVs to maintain their condition. Making a home visit to make sure other children take their ARVs is a very valuable and life-saving aid. The results of this study prove, that children can be compassionate by giving the best help they can give of themselves.

Compassion can be spread from personal attempt to be compassionate.

“We need to show compassion to grow it.”

(Male, 16-18 years old, live with parents)

“Motivate and take the first action.”

(female, 12-15 years old, live with parents)

With such statements as mentioned earlier, the participants state that first action to show compassion should be taken to create a chain of compassion and spread it to many people. The results of this study prove that children take the initiative to start compassion from themselves. They do not demand that others begin to be compassionate, or wait for others to be compassionate to them.

Things that need to do to spread compassion is to love others; care more with others, respect and tolerate one another; increase self-awareness; develop spirituality and improve relation with God and gratitude; collaborate harmoniously with others; give and share; learn about compassion and implement it, among others. These things consist of becoming the model of compassionate behavior, willingness to forgive, being friendly, and believe each other. The followings are some of the participants' responses.

“Respect differences. Everyone is born unique. Let others be different. If you cannot support or be involved in a situation with differences, at least control yourself not to disturb or harm other people. Life should bring benefit to others.”

(female, 16-18 years old, live with parents)

“Help each other and interact. Hold activities involving collaboration and interaction between the elder and the youth.”

(female, 16-18 years old, lived in an orphanage)

Think before we act, follow your heart and do self-introspection.

(female, 16-18 years old, live with parents)

Furthermore, in line with several other studies, this study proves that children have developed social-cognitive skills (Carpendale & Lewis, 2006 in Mulvey, Hitti, & Killen, 2011), capable of making moral judgments (Malti, Bassler, & Buchmann, 2009;) and understand friendship and the principle of fair distribution (Dunn, Cutting, & Dementriou, 2000).

Things Should Not Be Done

Participants mentioned the things should not be done since they may hinder the spread of compassion. These are self-oriented (selfish); hostile to others; bullying; discrimination, and others, consisting negative thinking, disturbing others, being envy, and asking too much to others.

Some of the participants' statements on things that should not be done are:

“Tiny things like this compassion may be insignificant. But it can make a city, even a nation, become more comfortable and easy-to-breath place. Moreover, nowadays, bad behavior gains bigger attention from social media than good behavior does. This makes people think negatively, closing their heart to be compassionate.”

(female, 16-18 years old, live with parents)

“Do not differentiate, make friends with everyone.”

(Male, 12-15 years old, live with parents)

Beside the compassionate attempts, there was a participant who did not believe that compassion can be spread:

“Compassion is something too pure to have place in this complex world. Don't be naive.”

(Male, 16-18 years old, live with parents)

Discussion

From this study, it was found from the children's perspective, how compassion can be contagious. Therefore, compassion can be spread in daily life, and make the world a better place. The best way for children to spread compassion is by performing real action to help others in suffering, and by

initiating compassionate action.

Associated with the birth of compassion and life course perspective theory, the result of this study can be described using the difference of personal characteristic, developmental age and cohort studies, children's life experience, and children's social environment.

Personal characteristic plays a considerable role in various phase of the birth of compassion (see Figure 1). How an individual empathizes for others' suffering; reflecting personal suffering. In other words, it is meaningful for their own suffering experience; being inspired by others' kindness, meaning that possessing awareness and belief in kindness, is unique from one another. The present study found that not all children possess enthusiasm for compassion. Some children decide not to hope that pure and virtuous compassion can emerge in this imperfect world. Others' suffering that can be a trigger of compassion on some individuals may result in disbelief, pessimistic, and helpless on other's individual. This is interesting to see that each individual's concern is unique. Some children concern with their friends' academic problems. Some empathize on needs for friendship due to loneliness. Some children focus on equality for his bullied friends, both directly or through social media while other children are triggered by poverty. This uniqueness becomes the foundation for spreading compassion, making life more colorful.

According to Piaget (Santrock, 2013), from a cognitive development perspective, adolescents, in general, have reached the formal-operational stage. In this stage, they have been able to think abstract matters and are not limited to concrete matters. They begin to be able to reason and make hypotheses. These abilities are needed by children to solve problems, make a decision, and think critically. This explains why children are capable of detecting problems and suffering in bullying, for instance, and attempting to make a way-out for the problems. With this thinking ability, children can predict that others feel compassion as they do. This makes people also want to be compassionate to others. The first step of their compassionate action may make a chain of compassion.

From Erikson's psychosocial development (Papalia & Martorell, 2015) where the value of virtue an adolescent should possess the ability, the friendship, solidarity, and togetherness since they are considered important by adolescents. This situation makes the theme of compassion in this age refers to helping friends, listening to and consoling sad friends, and accompanying friends (presence). Identity crisis also explains why children in this stage consider recognition and reinforcement important (either

directly or positive feedback through social media). They may suffer when their social media status is negatively commented or is unfollowed by their friends in social media.

Cohort refers to a group of people who were born in the same time and have the same historical experience, and those who have specific social experience changes in a specific culture in the same sequence at the same age (Rosow, 1978; Ryder, 1965; Settersten & Mayer, 1997, in Hutchison, 2003). In the life course perspective, this concept can explain why a particular generation possesses a certain behavioral pattern that is different from its predecessor and successor. Participants of the present study were categorized into Generation Z; they were born and lived in the middle of technology advancement and rapid life rhythm. Social skill, concern, and compassion are often not considered as the strength of this generation. However, following the result of the study, worries, as mentioned above, are not proven. Compassion lives among their social interaction.

Events occur among the child's life, and social environment also becomes their basis for spreading compassion. Children who live at home with their family have a different experience from those who are living in an orphanage. Children who live with their family with relatively good health, possess different life experience compared to those who live with HIV. In the life course perspective, life events are known as affecting how an individual construe his life. Suffering due to separated from parents and live in orphanage, suffering due to losing parents because of HIV, may lead to different understanding of what suffering and life are. It also affects the implementation and attempts to spread compassion. Children who have suffered from famine may find it easier to understand other's suffering due to starvation. This awareness even encourages him to share his lunch, making her at risk of being hungry at school. Solidarity among orphans and children with HIV is understandable, not only from the context of fidelity in the psychosocial developmental stage but also due to the same experience and social environment. This explains why adolescents with HIV may spread compassion by teaching their friends to take their Antiretroviral (ARV) medicine orderly to slow down the growth of HIV.

Bullying emerges as one of the critical issues in children life, especially adolescents. The result of the study specifically found that bullying hinders the spread of compassion. With today's condition where mass shootings and revenge increase among adolescents, it is essential to study further the factors underlying an individual's compassion when he/she experiences and witnesses suffering due to bullying, and the factors underlying an

individual's decision to avenge when undergoing the same experiences. Suffering due to bullying is addressed differently; some children decide to be compassionate towards the victim, while others decide to avenge the bullying actors. If it is associated with the result of the present study, can compassion reduce bullying case and revenge against the bullying actors? Can the chain of bullying be cut using compassion?

The results of this study prove, that children can be compassionate by giving the best help they can give of themselves. Even from their condition, children already have the capacity to sacrifice, as it is also found in adults. And a new finding in this study, compared with the results of previous studies (Sugianto, Abidin, Purwono, & Siregar, 2018), this study prove that children take the initiative to start compassion from themselves. They don't demand that others begin to be compassionate, or wait for others to be compassionate to them. This is very different from adults which establishes many external conditions such as the presence of a character who becomes a model of compassion, supportive policies, or educational programs that promote compassion.

Conclusions

Spreading compassion is a must to create a better world. To spread compassion, children possess an excellent way by helping people in suffering and be compassionate. The first step should be taken when seeing suffering. For each suffering, compassion consoles. By compassionating, there will be an individual who 'experiences' the compassion itself. As an experience of being loved, concerned, and helped, an individual can be an active agent to continue spreading compassion towards others. Children have a genuine way; they do not demand and wait for the other party to start the compassionate action. They start it from themselves, with the simple things they can do, and do it spontaneously as soon as it is needed.

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