

Transmitting the environmental norm from parents to children: 3 years longitudinal survey

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Introduction

The present study explored the processes by which children acquire their environmental norms and behaviors, using a three-year longitudinal study. Understanding the process of internalizing these social norms is important. However studies on children's environmental behavior are few, compared to adults' behaviors.

According to Social Learning Theory proposed by Bandura (1977), children acquire new behaviors through observational learning. For environmental behaviors which are performed at home, parental influences would be expected to be significant. We thus focused on the influence from parents, especially the effect of their own behaviors.

We predicted that parents' own behaviors would influence children's environmental behaviors, but as norms become internalized and the direct effect of parental behavior would be diminish as children grow older.

Method

We distributed questionnaires at elementary schools in Nagoya, Japan through 2007 to 2009. Teachers handed the questionnaires to children in classrooms and, while one of the parents independently completed a questionnaire at home. In 2007, children of 3rd and 4th grade received the questionnaires. In 2008, 4th and 5th grade children received the questionnaires, and 5th and 6th grade children received the questionnaires in 2009.

The number of valid answers was: 214 pairs in 2007, 222 pairs in 2008, 225 pairs in 2009.

As behavioral outcome measure, we asked participants to report on the frequency with which they separated out paper for recycling. Personal norm, subjective norm, perceived

behavioral control, communication and direct sanction from parents were measured as independent variables.

Results

We conducted a regression analysis to find out the determinants of children's environmental behaviors and parents' environmental behaviors for each year. Parents' behavior affected children's subjective norms, which was the strongest determinant of children's behavior. Direct sanctions from parents did not have a significant impact on children's cognitive variables. This pattern was consistent throughout the three years, but influence of parents' behavior became reduced as children grew older.

For parents' behavior, perceived behavioral control, personal norm and subjective norm affected the behavior, but the effect of subjective norm was smaller, compared to children's model.

Discussion

The result confirmed that the observational learning has strong effects on children's behavior of the surveyed age group. The results also suggested that behavior can be maintained by subjective norm as the role of observational learning reduces.

The effect of subjective norm was stronger for children than parents' behavioral modeling, suggesting that the children are more sensitive to the expectations of significant others.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977) *Social Learning Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.