



National Center for **Research** on
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Rural Education Research Digest

Carlo, G., Crockett, L. J., Randall, B. A., & Roesch, S. C. (2007). Parent and peer correlates of prosocial development in rural adolescents: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 17, 301-324.

Researchers have begun to explore how to address the negative stereotypes of adolescents by examining prosocial behaviors in adolescence. Prosocial behaviors are behaviors which benefit others. Prosocial behaviors have been associated with key traits of adolescent development, such as moral reasoning, empathy, negotiating relationships, and volunteerism, but the relationships have been inconsistent when examining age-related changes. This study examined the age-related changes in the frequency of prosocial behavior and how they relate to gender and the quality of parent and peer relationships.

In a 5-year longitudinal study of rural adolescents in the Eastern U.S. (n = 456), Carlo and colleagues found that the frequency of self-reported prosocial behaviors decreased throughout junior high to 11th grade, but began to increase marginally in 12th grade. The quality of parent and peer relationships increased slightly from junior high to 12th grade. Gender was not a significant predictor of the quality of relationships with peers or parents, but did relate to differences in the expression of prosocial behaviors. When all factors (prosocial behaviors, quality of peer and parent relationships, and gender) were examined together, gender-related differences appeared in the relations between quality of peer and parent relationships and the frequency of prosocial behaviors. Overall, boys' prosocial behaviors declined more than girls. Furthermore, an increase in the quality of peer relationships among girls was related to a decrease in prosocial behavior, but not for boys. The results also supported the idea that prosocial behaviors may be a relatively stable trait during adolescence, as indicated by consistent individual differences in prosocial behaviors over time.

This study contributes to the research literature on prosocial behaviors among rural adolescents. The authors suggest that the decrease in prosocial behaviors over time may be related to the demographic make-up (i.e. lower income, fewer social opportunities, etc.) of the rural community. Overall, whether prosocial behaviors affect parent and peer relationships or vice versa is unclear, but this study shows that the connection between prosocial behaviors and parent and peer relationships is worth further investigation, as well as how gender may moderate these relationships.