Abstract

This study examined the cognitive and affective components of respect and their relation to prosocial behaviour in a sample of 5-, 7-, and 11-year-old children (N = 221). We employed a novel interview method to elicit children’s cognitive conception of the term respect, their affect evaluations (i.e., feelings) of respect toward hypothetical characters (not) performing prosocial acts (e.g., [not] sharing), and reasoning behind their affect evaluations. Children’s prosocial behaviour was measured via primary caregiver-reports. The results indicated that children most often referred to prosociality and fairness when describing and justifying respect. Eleven-year-olds referred to fairness significantly more than 5-year-olds in describing and justifying respect, and they also reported higher affect evaluations toward prosocial characters than 5-year-olds. Children’s conception of respect in terms of prosociality predicted primary caregiver-reported prosocial behaviour. In addition, 5-year-olds’ positive affect evaluations toward prosocial characters predicted primary caregiver-reported prosocial behaviour. Findings are discussed in relation to developmental theories on children’s respect, as well as integrative developmental approaches to the study of moral cognition, moral emotions, and prosocial behaviour.

Keywords: Respect, prosocial behaviour, moral cognition, moral emotions, childhood