Considerations for Moral Education and Altruistic Behavior Particularities in Roma Adolescents

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Abstract	
Keywords: Roma adolescents; moral education; care; fairness; altruistic behavior.	The present study aims at depicting the perspectives on moral education for Roma adolescents related to altruistic behavior. Data were drawn from a sample of sixty-six Roma students studying in rural and urban middle schools and high schools. Participants aged between 13 and 18 years old (M=15.91, SD=1.44) were asked to fill out self-administered questionnaires, assisted by the researcher. This study determined the influence of five moral foundations, such as care, fairness, loyalty, respect, and purity on altruistic behavior. The results showed the importance of care and fairness moral foundations as predictors of altruistic behavior. These results provide some insight into the moral values that may influence altruistic behavior in Roma adolescents. Further, implications for moral education are discussed.

Zusammenfasung	
Schlüsselworte: Roma-Jugendliche; moralische Erziehung; Pflege; Gerechtigkeit; altruistisches Verhalten.	Die vorliegende Studie zielt darauf ab, die Perspektiven der Moralerziehung für Roma-Jugendliche in Bezug auf altruistisches Verhalten darzustellen. Die Daten wurden einer Stichprobe von 66 Roma-Schülern entnommen, die ländliche und städtische Hauptschulen und Gymnasiums besuchen. Die Teilnehmer im Alter zwischen 13 und 18 Jahren (M = 15,91, SD = 1,44) wurden gebeten, selbst verwaltete Fragebögen mit Unterstützung des Forschers auszufüllen. Diese Studie ermittelte den Einfluss von fünf moralischen Grundlagen wie Fürsorge, Gerechtigkeit, Loyalität, Respekt und Reinheit auf altruistisches Verhalten. Die Ergebnisse zeigten die Bedeutung der moralischen Grundlagen von Fürsorge und Gerechtigkeit als Prädiktoren für altruistisches Verhalten. Diese Ergebnisse geben einen Einblick in die moralischen Werte, die das altruistische Verhalten von Roma-Jugendlichen beeinflussen können. Weiter, werden Implikationen für die moralische Bildung diskutiert.

1. Introduction

For a long time, the negative stereotype towards Roma people lead to stigmatization and stereotypes about Roma stand as the sole source of knowledge that connects Roma people with the social environment. This ethnic group must deal with social exclusion and poverty (Grigore & Sarău, 2012). An evaluation report on national programs funded by the European Union for Roma inclusion (2014), referring to Roma living in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, and Spain, identified several common elements among the individuals living in these countries: low level of education, precarious employment conditions (unstable or underpaid) and unsanitary living conditions. There is a lack of a long-term perspective on regular income and access to the social security system. The absence of adequate health insurance and health care maintains a vicious circle of poverty and poor health. In many European countries, the Roma continue to earn their income from traditional occupations: handicrafts, horse trade and small business, but also in agriculture and construction. These occupations are often dangerous, exhausting and provide a low level of income (Ionescu & Stănescu, 2014).

1.1. Integration of Roma in the mainstream educational system

The Government implemented various integration strategies to create a link between schools and Roma communities. Consequently, the position of school mediator was introduced, and the number of employed school mediators has doubled in the last 20 years. Other programs such as Second Chance were designed to prevent school dropout. Although the program was accessed by many individuals, its application suffered from a pronounced inequity, most Roma included in the program were urban residents, while the rural environment was underrepresented (Anghel, 2012).

Research shows that often the level of education among the Roma people is significantly lower than in the general population. Specifically, four times lower during preschool, one quarter lower during primary school, increasing up to 40% lower at the high school level. Further, University studies are considered exceptional situations among the Roma people (Micu, 2009). Politics of recognition emphasize the assumptions of neutrality and claims that equal dignity and liberalism are collectively elaborated and not by the individuals themselves (Lash & Featherstone, 2002). A healthy democracy depends on the qualities and attitudes of citizens and institutions. All individuals must develop their sense of identity, either national, regional, ethnic, or religious. Moreover, people should be tolerant of existing differences and collaborate. If most community members would commit to a sense of justice and a fair distribution of resources, everyone benefits (Kymlicka & Norman, 2003). In contrast, this ideal is distant in Romania with the disparities between the ethnic Roma people and the majority culture. But things have started to improve, and the Roma people benefit from the minority rights support. The European Union policies combating discrimination encouraged them to ask for more rights in the last decade than they have throughout history (Zamfir, 2018).

1.2. Moral education and altruistic behavior in Roma children

The specifics of the moral education of the child in the traditional Roma community are represented by the Romanian, a code of laws transmitted orally and sometimes highlighted in works on the Roma ethnic groups (Grigore & Sarău, 2012). The community values of traditional Roma culture are based on the opposition pure-impure. Roma have an obligation to follow the rules of purity, otherwise, they may be excluded from the community. The traditional education of the Roma child is based on building fraternity, mutual help, and responsibility values. The initiative and empowerment of children, as well as their ability to manage their lives independently from a relatively young age, are appreciated within the Roma family and community (Grigore & Sarău, 2012).

From this brief exposition of the specifics of moral education in the Roma family, it can be concluded that the Roma possess a scale of basic moral values identical to those of other communities. Next, we present these moral foundations that we aim to explore

as predictors for altruistic behavior. The moral virtues considered in this study are those proposed by Moral Foundations Theory. This theory was created to understand the reasons for which morality varies so much across cultures yet still shows so many similarities and recurrent themes. It proposes that several innate and universally available psychological systems are the foundations of "intuitive ethics" (Graham et al., 2011). Each culture then constructs virtues, stories, and institutions on these foundations. So are created the moralities around the world. The five moral foundations are c*are/harm* which relates to the ability to feel the pain of others. *Care* underlies virtues of kindness, nurturance, protectiveness, and compassion; *fairness/reciprocity* generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy; *in-group/loyalty* underlies the virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group; *authority/respect* is shapes virtues of leadership, respect for legitimate authority, and traditions; *purity/sanctity* is shaped by the psychology of disgust and contamination. It underlies religious notions of striving to live more nobly, not solely linked to religious traditions (Graham et al., 2011). Further, the research shows an interest in investigating the affiliative behavior of individuals, and the factors contributing to altruistic behavior because it can offer useful insight into future generations' behavior (Marcu & Bucuță, 2016). Rushton (1982) defined altruism as a universal value in any society and promoted the idea of an altruistic personality type. Later, research showed that altruism is not a general personality factor (Rushton, 2008); instead, personality traits add to altruistic behavior. Moreover, moral foundations are linked to the commitment to different types of altruistic behavior mainly since altruistic behavior develops mainly during adolescence, its maturation is associated with moral foundations development (Lai, Siu & Shek, 2015).

1.3. The present study

Research shows that in Roma communities, children are encouraged to show initiative and independence at an early age. They learn by observing adult verbal and non-verbal behavior and by participating in the activities of the communities. In contrast, the confined space of mainstream education, the classroom education, rarely enables them to initiate or to create their own learning experiences. But the increasing demands of industrialized societies make literacy critical for Roma people (Smith, 1997). However, education systems are at present failing to meet the needs of Roma children. There are still many

structural inequalities such as poverty and racism that continue to maintain the low participation rates of Roma children in formal education programs. Poverty, racism, and a lack of access to essential services are considerable barriers to equitable participation in formal education. Also, as Smith (1997) emphasizes, the highly structured nature of mainstream education fails to comply with traditional Roma child socialization and education processes. Even if previous research showed that many Roma parents consider mainstream education impractical, unessential, or unnecessary for their children (Smith, 1997), more recent findings show that some Roma parents explicitly demand the school's positive moral-ethical education and influence on their children (Lukács, 2008; Bereményi, 2011).

Thus, the present research represents an opportunity to study an underrepresented population in moral education studies. Our focus on moral foundations and altruistic behavior is related to their positive impact on community life and socialization. Moreover, given that in the Roma population the level of education is significantly lower than that of the general population, our study aims to identify the moral foundations that contribute most to the development of altruistic behavior in Roma pupils.

Our goal is to improve the understanding of moral foundations' role in altruistic behavior and explore its cultural relevance in a sample of Roma pupils. The first aim was to explore the relationship between the five moral foundations (e.g., harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and, purity/sanctity) and altruistic behavior. The second aim was to explore the link between the five moral foundations and identify the most significant foundations related to altruistic behavior.

Considering the research framework, we formulated the following research hypothesis: the five moral foundations, alone or in combination, predict altruistic behavior in Roma adolescents.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study participants were selected from five urban and rural schools situated in the northeast part of Romania. We gained access to participants by inviting the school administration to participate in the study. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The research group consisted of 66 students who studied in middle school or high school. Out of the total, 42.4% were girls (*N*=28) and 57.6% boys (*N*=38), belonging to the age group 13-18 years (*M*=15.91, *SD*=1.44). Students from rural schools comprised 78.8% of the sample, 21.2% studied in urban schools. The table below (Table 1) reports more details regarding participants' characteristics.

Table 1. Participants' characteristics

Characteristics	*n*	%	M	SD
Age			15.92	1.47
Gender				
Girls	28	42.4		
Boys	38	57.6		
School location				
Rural	52	78.8		
Urban	14	21.2		
School grade				
8th grade	13	19.7		
9th grade	16	24.2		
10th grade	9	13.6		
11th grade	18	27.3		
12th grade	10	15.2		

2.2. Procedure

Written information regarding the scope and procedures of the study was disseminated to five institutions situated in the urban and rural areas from the northeastern region. The school principals connected the researcher with the parents and, participants. The headmaster of each school facilitated communication with the parents of the participants. Their main role was to disseminate the information and ask for parents' consent to the participation of their children in the study. Parents who agreed that their children would participate in the study signed an informed consent form. The researcher provided information regarding data privacy, voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The data was gathered during September and October of the previous year. The administration of the questionnaires was paper-and-pencil. The researcher participated in this process and offered support regarding the questions included in the form to avoid missing data on the measured variables. Filling out the questionnaire took approximately thirty minutes. This study was approved and followed the recommendations of the Code of Ethics of the University.

2.3. Instruments

The Romanian-validated version of the self-report altruism scale distinguished by the recipient (SRAS-DR-RO) was used to assess altruistic behavior (Marcu & Bucuță, 2016). Furthermore, on the official Internet page of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaires/) the forward-backward translated version of the moral foundations' measure is made available for researchers.

Altruistic behavior

The self-report altruism scale distinguished by the recipient (SRAS-DR-RO) validated on Romanian population was used (Marcu & Bucuță, 2016). The measure was formulated following the latest developments in altruism research. It examines the rates of altruistic behaviors towards various receivers ranging from family members and friends to strangers in everyday life (Oda et al., 2013). The scale consists of 21 items rated on a five-point Likert scale from never (1) to very often (5). Some items included: *I helped a family member get things from places that were too high* or, *I helped some elderly people carry their heavy luggage.* Cronbach's alpha value of this measure is .85.

Moral foundations

The moral foundations were measured using the designated sub-scales from the short-form of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-S) (Graham et al., 2011). The backward-translated version of this measure is available at www.moralfoundations.org. The five foundations assessed are: care/harm (related to the ability to feel and dislike the pain of others); fairness/reciprocity (related to ideas of justice, equality, and autonomy); in-group/loyalty (it emphasizes the virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group); authority/respect (it underlies leadership virtues, including respect to legitimate authority and traditions) and sanctity/purity (referring to religious notions of striving to live in an elevated, more noble way) (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Each of the described moral foundations includes three items that assess the perceived relevance of moral concerns and other three items that assess agreement with moral judgments. Participants responded to the relevance items on a Likert scale ranging from not at all relevant (0) to extremely relevant (5) and to the judgment items on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (5). Example items for each dimension

included: *Whether or not someone suffered emotionally* (care/harm item relevance item); *Whether or not some people were treated differently than others* (fairness/reciprocity relevance item); *I am proud of my country's history* (in-group/loyalty judgment item); *Respect for authority is something all children need to learn* (respect/authority judgment item) and *Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency* (purity/sanctity relevance item). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ranged from .65 (fairness/reciprocity), .67 (care/harm), .61 (in-group/loyalty), .62 (respect/authority) and .63 (purity/sanctity).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, means and standard deviations related to the variables studied. Altruistic behavior showed significant correlations with the moral foundations in the investigated directions. Therefore, altruistic behavior is positively associated with care (r = .50, p < .01), fairness (r = .55, p < .01), loyalty (r = .55, p < .01), respect (r = .47, p < .01), and sanctity (r = .56, p < .01). Further, we explored the relationship between the five moral foundations and altruistic behavior to identify the significance of each foundation.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, and Pearson Correlations Coefficients

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Moral foundations						
Care/harm	*.67*					
Fairness/ reciprocity	.55**	*.65*				
In-group/ loyalty	.55**	.59**	*.61*			
Authority/ respect	.47**	.67**	.61**	*.62*		
Sanctity/ purity	.56**	.46**	.44**	.38**	*.63*	
Altruistic behavior	.50**	.48**	.39**	.47**	.36**	*.85*
Mean	14.74	16.13	14.00	12.28	14.18	68.43
SD	5.30	4.81	4.36	4.32	4.84	14.69

Note: **p ≤ .01 (two-tailed)
Alpha Cronbach's coefficients are shown on the diagonal

To test whether moral foundations would predict altruistic behavior in Roma adolescents, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. The five moral foundations were introduced in order, in the model. In the following, we will present the results of each predictive model.

As shown in the table below (Table 3), the first step of hierarchical regression that introduced harm/care moral foundation was found to positively influence altruistic behavior (beta = .50, $p< 0.01$). The results of the regression indicated that the harm/care predictors explained one quarter of the variance (F $(1,64)$ =21.88, p<.001, R^2=.25). In the second step, harm/care moral foundation (beta = .34; $p< 0.01$) and fairness/reciprocity moral foundation (beta = 0.29, p < 0.05) were entered in the regression, and the results show a positive influence on altruistic behavior, improving the previous model. There was a significant increase in the variance (ΔR^2= 0.05) of the variables and the result was unlikely to have arisen from error (F $(1,63)$ = 5.44, p < 0.05). The last three steps of hierarchical regression revealed that loyalty (beta = 0.04, $p > 0.01$), respect (beta = 0.22, $p > 0.01$), and sanctity (beta = 0.04, $p > 0.01$), did not influence altruistic behavior.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression of altruistic behavior on moral foundations factors

Predictor	*Beta*	*p*-value
Step 1 ($R^2 = 0.25$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.25$; $F(1,64) = 21.88$; Sig. = 0.000)		
Care/harm	.50	.000
Step 2 ($R^2 = 0.31$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.059$; $F(1,63) = 5.44$; Sig. = 0.023)		
Care/harm	.34	.009
Fairness/reciprocity	.293	.023
Step 3 ($R^2 = 0.31$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.001$; $F(1,62) = .120$; Sig. = 0.731)		
Care/harm	.32	.019
Fairness/reciprocity	.27	.053
In-group/loyalty	.04	.731
Step 4 ($R^2 = 0.33$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.023$; $F(1,61) = 2.11$; Sig. = 0.151)		
Care/harm	.31	.021
Fairness/reciprocity	.16	.281
In-group/loyalty	-.02	.891
Authority/respect	.22	.151
Step 5 ($R^2 = 0.340$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.001$; $F(1,60) = .129$; Sig. = 0.720)		
Care/harm	.29	.044
Fairness/reciprocity	.16	.311
In-group/loyalty	-.02	.865
Authority/respect	.22	.155
Sanctity/purity	.04	.720

4. Discussions

A recent European report presents the extent and implications of Roma children's exclusion from education. The data show that exclusion begins as early as preschool. Consequently, failure to attend preschool dramatically decreases students' chances to complete formal education programs later. Poverty affects children's education, and they are more likely to study in ethnically segregated classrooms, indicating that any intervention in education needs to consider a broad spectrum of factors and needs to be part of a broader development and inclusion agenda (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

Moral education plays an important role in character development, specifically in building altruistic motivations. Moral education is concerned with the promotion of good actions as it is with the maintenance of rules for social conduct. The goal of moral education consists largely in getting individuals used with moral values and principles so that they can use them independently (Peters, 2015). Hence, moral development and education in minority groups would provide some benefits in the socialization process. Achieving this requires greater attention to the instructional formats for enhancing the prosocial and moral development of students. The most advocated teaching instruction strategy for moral education is the problem-based approach where students work in pairs or groups. This approach provides students with enough space for dialogue and interaction, essential for their moral and prosocial development (Schuitema, Ten Dam & Veugelers, 2008).

Moral education is important from two perspectives. First, it contributes to individual development and well-being, preparing them for adulthood and stimulating their identity development. Second, enhancing the prosocial and moral development of students increases the welfare of society. The focus of this perspective is to develop engagement with a democratic society and active participation. Engagement and participation can vary from voting behavior or altruistic behavior to willingness to protest injustice (Torney-Purta, 2004). This study shows which values should deliberate teaching refer to in the case of Roma children to stimulate their moral development and altruistic behavior (Schuitema, Ten Dam & Veugelers, 2008).

In other words, to develop altruistic behavior in Roma ethnic children, moral education should address the development of care and fairness moral foundations. Regarding the care moral foundation, pedagogical approaches should aim at developing empathy, will and motivation to protect others. To develop a moral foundation of fairness, teachers should develop students' values and motivations related to the ideas of equality, equity, and social justice. By including in their teaching process, real-life situations that allow the initiation of authentic dialogue and debates should support children's moral development process.

Moral education should consider the multicultural nature of society and this focus needs to be integrated

into the teaching-learning process in the classroom. A requirement for meaningful learning refers to reflection on the social positions that influence students' way of developing their relationship with moral issues (Ten Dam et al., 2004). Moral education should consider the learning content, its cultural meanings, and how it refers to students' social identities (structured by race, gender, and class). The development of social identity is implicit in the learning process. Consequently, social differences reflect in students' attitudes towards school, school subjects, moral practices, and the way their relationship with moral education develops. When moral development and moral education are the purposes of an educational program every teacher must reflect on how the knowledge, skills, and identities that the student must acquire, relate, or conflict with their social identities and social position (Schuitema, Ten Dam & Veugelers, 2008).

Several limitations related to the present study should be noted. This research focused only on investigating the impact of moral foundations on altruistic behavior in Roma children. One limitation is that no other forms of civic engagement were considered. Therefore, future studies should investigate the role of moral foundations, values, and attitudes having as outcome various forms of civic engagement. Moreover, other variables that could act as a predictor, such as personality traits, empathy levels, or community sense should also be included in future research to fully grasp the particularities of moral development in predicting social behavior in Roma children. Another limitation refers to the small size of the research sample. Mainly due to the difficulties in gaining access to Roma communities. Also, the low levels of Roma children enrolled in educational programs influenced the sample size. This aspect limits the generalization of the present results. Therefore, future research should consider larger samples that include balanced ratios of girls and boys. Finally, the exploratory nature of the study does not allow for the formulation of causal relationships. Nonetheless, our results emphasize the role of care and fairness foundations in developing altruistic behavior in Roma adolescents. These relationships were not the subject of investigation in previous research. Overall, the present study complements the existing literature by providing some insights regarding the relationship between moral foundations and altruistic behavior of Roma adolescents.

Authors note:

Georgel Arhip is Associate Teaching Assistant in Teaching Staff Training Department of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi. He has a doctoral degree in psychology and is interested in educational field. His domains of interest are computer-assisted instruction, students' digital competences and the psychology of education. Increasing the share of critical thinking and the concept of mindful learning in education is an important concern as well. A special interest is the integration of the Roma into the general community. Another area of interest is psychotherapy, especially the psychosomatic approach. He is a psychotherapist certified by the Romanian College of Psychologists.

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