INTRODUCTION

• Prior studies indicate that sociomoral reasoning in infants and toddlers is guided by a number of principles including harm avoidance (individuals should minimize harm to others), fairness (individuals should act fairly), and in-group support (individuals should support members of their groups).

• Infants and toddlers use these principles to evaluate individuals’ actions and draw inferences about their moral characters. Thus, children judge actions that violate sociomoral principles as unacceptable and actions that adhere to the principles as acceptable.

• The principles interact in predictable ways. For example, mild unprovoked harm may be viewed as unacceptable when directed at ingroup individuals, but as unacceptable when directed at outgroup individuals.

QUESTIONS

• How do toddlers reason about moral character deficiencies? Do toddlers expect a deficiency in one principle (e.g. harm avoidance) to extend to another principle (e.g. fairness), resulting in a broadly deficient moral compass?

• In the present research, toddlers watched a puppet show in which a wrongdoer first harmed a victim. Next, the wrongdoer divided windfall resources either fairly or unfairly between two ingroup members.

• Two variables were manipulated in the harmful actions:
  1. **Group membership**: whether the wrongdoer harmed an outgroup individual (outgroup experiment) or an ingroup individual (ingroup experiment)
  2. **Harm severity**: whether the wrongdoer produced one harmful action (1-action condition) or three harmful actions (3-action condition)

• After seeing the wrongdoer produce harmful actions, would toddlers (a) still expect the wrongdoer to act fairly or (b) hold no expectation as to whether the wrongdoer would act fairly or unfairly?

PREDICTIONS

• Because mild negative actions towards the outgroup are not viewed as violations of the harm-avoidance principle, toddlers in the 1-action condition of the outgroup experiment might still expect the wrongdoer to act fairly.

• If toddlers expect a deficiency in one sociomoral principle to extend to other principles, then toddlers in all other conditions, who first saw violations of the harm-avoidance principle, might hold no expectations about whether the wrongdoer would act fairly or unfairly.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

• 79 toddlers, 32 males and 47 females

• Age range: 21 months, 18 days to 30 months, 16 days (M = 25 months, 2 days)

PROCEDURE

• **Violation-of-Expectation (VOE) paradigm** was used to assess toddlers’ expectations, by comparing their looking times at the two test events

  1 familiarization trial

  1 or 3 harm trial(s)

  2 test trials

REFERENCES


