Vašina, Lubomír; Bargel, Miroslav

# Social intelligence as a predictor of pro-social and asocial behaviour: ways of affecting it through psychotherapy and social and pedagogical programmes

LUBOMÍR VAŠINA, MIROSLAV BARGEL

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**Abstract**

This article presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of a research project directed at the analysis of the components of pro-social and asocial behaviour and the relationship between pro-social behaviour, social intelligence, emotional intelligence and personality characteristics that are involved in the context of pro-social behaviour. The article also stresses the aspect of development. The research focuses on adolescents, adults and senior citizens serving terms of imprisonment. The control group is constituted by people from assisting professions with a high level of pro-social behaviour.

The research is being carried out by the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies in Brno and the Institute of Psychology at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno. The main field of instruction at the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies is social pedagogy. Its research activities focus mainly on the study of social intelligence and the practical outcomes in the form of standards of social competencies for various age and social groups.

Because psycho-social and economic problems give rise to asocial behaviour in the case of a certain percentage of the population, they present a challenge for the theoretical research base of psychology and social pedagogy on the one hand and for applied research on the other. The results of the applied research will help to formulate specific psycho-therapeutic programmes of intervention and socially pedagogical programmes of resocialization in order to deal with the above-mentioned problems (including the reduction of the frequency of asocial behaviour of people with behaviour that presents a risk to themselves and others), with the ultimate aim of improving mental health and quality of life of people in society. Since psycho-social issues and issues related to asocial behaviour have a trans-disciplinary nature, it is important to research them in cooperation with the disciplines of psychology, law and social pedagogy. Asocial behaviour cannot be studied without delimiting it against pro-social behaviour, which requires a good knowledge of the nature of pro-social behaviour. This concerns mainly the structure of social intelligence, emotional intelligence and those protective factors in the personality structure that are applied in the context of pro-social behaviour.

The object of research are adolescents, adults and seniors who grew up in broken homes (i.e., as children of drug addicts, children of alcoholics, children of parents with

disharmony personality structure, bullied children, sexually and physically abused children, children growing up without love and threatened with suicide risks, children of divorcing parents, etc.) and who tended to show risk behaviour since their childhood. As adolescents, adults and seniors with asocial behaviour, they would break the law; currently, they are serving terms of imprisonment. The research also aims to map the developmental aspect of asocial behaviour, which is not only limited to the context of the family tradition and its life philosophy, but as well as the cultural and ethical context of the society and the related intervening variables that affect the psycho-social development of the people and their quality of life. An irreplaceable role is also played by the ratio between the protective and risk components in the structure of personality of those people who have been manifesting various degrees of problematic behaviour since their childhood.

The actual research project has three basic aims:

**The first aim** is, on the basis of the current scientific findings, to conceive an unequivocal structure of SQ and characterize the interconnectedness of its components with the EQ and IQ components, the link with pro-social personal characteristics, resilience and coping strategies as they occur in real social relations in the process of accommodating to the conditions of the possibilities of the society in which a particular individual finds him/herself. This topic will also be analyzed from the developmental perspective.

**The second aim** of the partial research is to verify the optimal extent of social intelligence and its interconnectedness with the other above-mentioned and clearly defined mental phenomena necessary for people to successfully adapt in society and thus manifest pro-social behaviour. And, conversely, to identify which significant components of pro-social phenomena that are not sufficiently developed or even lacking, mean that an individual manifests mal-adaptive patterns of behaviour within society and thus his or her behaviour is considered as asocial and/or criminal by society.

**The third aim** is, on the basis of the above-mentioned research procedures, to propose such/particular psycho-therapeutic programmes of intervention and socially pedagogic procedures of resocialization that are not only targeted at specific age groups as wholes but also psychologically respect the possibilities and limits of the resocialization of specific individuals, be they adolescents, adults or senior citizens.

The increasing social problems in society result in an increase in the percentage of people of all generations suffering from psycho-social problems (taking into account the specific problems of minors, adolescents, people in the productive age and seniors). This has an impact on the mental health of the population and, indirectly, on the economic situation of the country. Because psycho-social and economic problems cause asocial behaviour with a certain percentage of the population, they represent a challenge both for the theoretical research base in psychology and social pedagogy on the one hand and applied research on the other. The results of applied research can help to formulate specific psycho-therapeutic programmes of intervention and socially pedagogical programmes of resocialization for dealing with the above-mentioned problems (including the reduction in the frequency of asocial behaviour of people whose behaviour presents a risk to themselves and others) in the social context, with the aim of improving

mental health and quality of life of the entire society. Since psycho-social issues and issues related to asocial behaviour have a trans-disciplinary nature, it is important to approach it in close cooperation with the disciplines of psychology, law and social pedagogy.

The support and care of mental health constitutes one of the priorities of not only the WHO but also the EU (more specifically, the European Commission), whose programme includes this fact. In January 2005, there was a conference of health ministers in Helsinki, which resulted in the Declaration and Action Plan on Mental Health. The prevention and prophylaxis of mental illnesses has enjoyed a tradition stretching back at least 50 years. This was done under the names of mental hygiene, psychosomatics, behavioural medicine or psychology of health (in the last decade), with the latter striving to integrate parts of the programmes and methods of psychosomatics and behavioural medicine. Unfortunately, there is a lack of consistency and systematicity regarding both what should be included within the subject of psychology of health and what target objects of care should be prioritized, what programmes to offer and what forms of offer to choose. It also remains to be seen what direction this research will take, because everything that could be researched using the available psycho-diagnostic methods and other means has already been researched/explored.

Who are the target objects of programmes of prevention, programmes of psycho-prophylaxis, and EU programmes for the support of mental health with the aim of inspiring people to change their lifestyle and quality of life? On the one hand, the target are children who where raised in broken homes and who grew up in such an environment (children of drug addicts, children of alcoholics, children of parents with disharmony personality structure, bullied children, sexually and physically abused children, children growing up without love and threatened with suicide risks, children of divorcing parents, etc.). On the other, it is also adolescents and adults with asocial behaviour who, after having violated the law and serving a term of imprisonment, return to everyday life in society. These programmes also target senior citizens (often with psychiatric diagnoses) who return from prisons and stand a minimal chance of resocialization.

The programmes for the support of health take various forms and shapes. Be they programmes of social psychology, resocialization, social pedagogy, rehabilitation, legal advisory, employment or specific programmes for the encouragement of a healthy lifestyle among adolescents and adults in society. The aim is to stimulate the development of their creative abilities, social and communicative skills, as well as inspire them to develop the mental aspect of human existence so that they are able, on the basis of their own internal resources, to experience respect for life, the world around them and values transcending the individual – and thus also experience respect for oneself. The optimal outcome should be pro-social behaviour.

Pro-social behaviour in the broadest sense of the word (including social standpoints, the feeling and experience of social competence, social and communicative skills, and reciprocal support and assistance to others), as well as its more

specific variations such as altruistic behaviour (i.e., doing good for the benefit of others without expecting anything in return) and affiliative behaviour (i.e., forming and maintaining positive long-term relations within society) are preconditioned not only by the existence of social intelligence but also emotional intelligence, a good level of general intelligence and personality characteristics. The high level of general intellectual abilities, for instance, enables an individual to master several varieties of social skills, to detect in a quick and effective manner any breaches of social rules, norms of co-existence, and to identify in time other people's lies, tricks and manipulations. By contrast, a high level of general intellectual ability (accompanied by low levels of social and emotional intelligence) can enable an individual suffering from asocial behaviour to achieve success while behaving in a fraudulent manner within society. It unequivocally follows from the above-mentioned forms of behaviour that pro-social and asocial behaviour are significantly affected by personality characteristics and character traits of individual people.

Emotional intelligence is understood to be, above all, empathy, sympathy, sharing, ability to understand one's own emotions, ability to decode the meaning of emotions in the expression and posture of others, and the ability to distinguish what others experience from what is experienced by oneself. Emotional intelligence also allows for the effective use of one's own emotions, making it possible to manifest them through altruistic behaviour and affiliative behaviour, i.e., for the benefit of others and eventually for one's own benefit, without repressing them neurotically. The aim is to preserve one's emotional stability and ability to decide reasonably even in emotionally demanding situations.

The quality of pro-social behaviour also reflects the extent to which social skills are developed, the feeling of social competence, social status, the fidelity supportive of cooperation and willingness to sacrifice in relationships (fidelity means being able to react in a constructive rather than destructive way, to engage in activities that go beyond one's own interests; it launches cognitive activities directed at maintaining social relations, etc.) etc. Pro-social behaviour is also affected by situational factors. There are certain dispositions for pro-social behaviour. Pro-social behaviour develops in the context of the development and maturing of one's personality, the development of morality and arrangement of the hierarchical human value system.

However, what comes to the foreground in this context is also the effect of negative educational styles in the family and the variables of the 'broken home' type, which negatively affect the developing human emotionality. They can lay ground to such human emotions as envy, hatred, jealousy, hostility, neurotic anxiety, neurotic guilt, depressive feelings, anxiety and various forms of fear. In the case of positive development factors, conversely, it is possible to develop such emotions as kindness, empathy, sympathy, love and friendship. It is also possible to develop pro-social personality characteristics such as being conscientious, pleasant, willing to help, socially responsible, optimistic (looking into the future), open, experienced, etc., which act as brakes to reactions of anxiety, fear, disap-

pointment, anger, etc. as well as possible asocial feelings and behaviour resulting from psycho-social stress.

The inability of people with asocial behaviour to cope with psycho-social stress in any other way than through crisis arises from the fact that they did not acquire any adaptive coping strategies. The degree to which one is adaptively able to cope with stress also depends on one's resilience. Then, one has to take into account such factors as hardiness, sense of coherence, self-efficacy, LOC (locus of control), social support, etc.

It follows from the above-mentioned, that research projects oriented to pro-social and asocial behaviour cannot do without a deeper analysis of the relations and connections between the developing components of social intelligence (SQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), general intellectual ability (IQ), resilience, coping strategies, educational styles and other developmental factors. However, the most important goal is to define and set clear criteria for what SQ, EQ, IQ, pro-social personality characteristics and resilience are. No less important is the clear specification of what can actually be considered as pro-social behaviour (a highly adaptive form of behaviour in a society) and what already constitutes a transition from pro-social behaviour to maladjustment and from maladjustment to asocial behaviour. We assume that the outcome of the above-mentioned research into select mental phenomena will be the understanding of the rules of the development of asocial behaviour and the greater possibility of a person's correction through targeted programmes of resocialization.

As stated above, it is necessary, in order to understand asocial behaviour of adults during research into such behaviour, to pay increased attention to its causes and also the further development of specific individuals. This concerns a number of elements: the context of the family tradition and its life philosophy, the cultural and ethical context of the society and the related intervening variables that affect the psychosocial development of the relevant individual and the quality of his or her life. In addition, crucial is also the proportion between protective and risk components of the personality structures of those people who manifest various degrees of risk behaviour in their childhood and who eventually go on to develop asocial behaviour.

Various studies have pointed out that the critical period that accelerates the increase of various forms of problem behaviour in the population of school children is puberty, mainly the period between the ages of eleven to thirteen (cf. Sobotková, V., Blatný, M. et al. 2009), which concerns mostly boys. In their case, pre-asocial behaviour is considered to be the violation of norms in micro-societies, the violation of generally accepted rules of behaviour among peers, and bullying (violent behaviour and physical attacks towards weaker fellow students). In relation to adults, this includes a lack of discipline, lying, the first experience with alcohol and addictive substances, causing damage to other people's property, etc.

The second critical period that sees an increase in asocial behaviour among some adolescents is approximately between the ages of seventeen and eighteen. In this case, this already includes serious refusal of norms of co-existence in

society, offences against property, violent offences/acts, fighting, drug sale and use, etc.

The third critical period for the development of asocial behaviour is the period of transition from adolescence to young adulthood (i.e., approximately between the ages of twenty and twenty one). This period is critical for the development of permanent (life-long) asocial behaviour. People with a high level of asocial behaviour (physical violence, fraud, theft, risky sexual behaviour, sexual violence connected with false imprisonment, the possession, production, sale and use of drugs, etc.) thus manifest the consequences of their low level of social intelligence, which does not enable them to develop the self-realization process in society (they lack pro-social attitudes, pro-social skills, a feeling of social competence enhanced by communication problems, adaptive strategies for coping with psycho-social stress, etc.). The low level of social intelligence is accompanied by a low level of emotional intelligence, regardless of how low or high the level of general intellectual abilities. Last but not least, an important role is played in this respect by the proportion between protective and risk personality characteristics and character traits (such as a lack of self-control, impulsivity, etc.).

An important finding is that children showing a low level of risk (pre-asocial behaviour) in puberty, went on behaving in such a way only exceptionally during the second critical period and almost not at all during the third critical period. On the other hand, while some children showed a low level of risk behaviour during the second critical period, they manifested pro-social behaviour during the third critical period. By contrast, children with a high level of asocial behaviour during the first and second periods did not change their behaviour in adulthood; such behaviour was only extended. For more information on serious forms of asocial behaviour of adolescents, see, for instance, the works of Blatný et al., 2006, Bonin et al., 2005, Smart el al., 2004 and others.

So far, the scarce information on social intelligence indicates that the paradigm of describing its mental attributes (the necessary characteristics) and the subsequent research projects are problematic. What is also lacking is a sufficient overview of the entry components of the composite of social intelligence. Debatable is the fact that current models of social intelligence are too virtual and do not correspond to the real mental phenomenon of social intelligence that needs to be understood in inter-functional relations and connections with other phenomena of human mentality as a whole. Given such a paradigm of thinking about social intelligence, it is quite evident what the relation is between social intelligence, general intelligence, emotional intelligence, and the personality with what constitutes its core, namely "oneself". The key problem consists in the fact that there exists neither a fitting definition of social intelligence nor any model or theory that would – from the perspective of psychology – incorporate those parts of social intelligence that are genetically given and inseparable from those parts of social intelligence that are acquired in the process of socialization.

In connection with the relation between social intelligence and personality characteristics, there arises another question: whether the higher level of social

intelligence unequivocally signals only pro-social behaviour or whether it can also mean that a given individual will, on the one hand, find it quick and easy to move within the social environment but, on the other, perhaps misuse or live at the expense of others due to the interface between the high level of social intelligence and some personality characteristics that may, for instance, indicate social disharmony in one's personality structure.

This research clearly indicates the fundamental goals that are to be implemented as in research carried out by the Prison Service section of the Ministry of Justice. The research itself will be implemented by the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies in Brno in cooperation with the Institute of Psychology at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno.

**The fundamental aims of the partial research task:**

**The first aim** is to formulate, on the basis of current scientific knowledge, a clear structure of SQ, and the connection of its components with the components of EQ and IQ and the pro-social personality characteristics, resilience and coping strategies as they apply in actual social relations in the process of adapting to the conditions and possibilities of the society in which a particular individual lives. The research topic will also be addressed as regards to its development.

**The second aim** of the partial research is to identify what level of social intelligence and its interconnectedness with all the other above-mentioned and clearly defined mental phenomena is optimal for a human being to successfully adapt in a society and thus manifest pro-social behaviour. And, similarly, what insufficiently developed or missing components of pro-social phenomena mean to an individual in a society that manifests mal-adaptive patterns of behaviour and considers his or her behaviour as asocial and criminal.

**The third aim** is to use the findings from the above-mentioned research procedures to formulate such methods of resocialization that are directed not only to address specific age groups as a whole but also respect the possibilities and limits of resocialization of specific individuals, such as adolescents, adults, and seniors.

With view to the above-mentioned, we expect to form three groups of people serving terms of imprisonments (i.e., individuals with clearly asocial behaviour): adolescents, adults and seniors. Those will be the research groups. Then, three groups of people who are successful in society will be formed (again consisting of adolescents, adults, and seniors). These will be people who have clearly pro-social behaviour. Using a test battery and the method of a half-structured interview, it will be established as to what leads people in research groups to behave in an asocial way and whether their mentality contains such/particular/specific protective factors that could help them through programmes of resocialization and to eliminate their asocial tendencies. The control groups will be used to establish what the real bases are in their mentalities that enable them to behave in pro-social ways and resist possible risk factors in their intra-mental and external environment.

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