

Family Moral Values in Shaping Altruistic Behavior among Generation Z

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Abstract

Family moral values play a fundamental role in shaping altruistic behavior, particularly among Generation Z who grow up amid rapid social change and digital transformation. This study aims to examine the influence of family moral values on the formation of altruistic behavior among Generation Z. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation involving individuals born between 1997 and 2012. The findings indicate that moral values such as empathy, responsibility, and solidarity are primarily internalized through parental role modeling and everyday family interactions. However, the consistency of moral practice tends to decline due to external influences, especially peer groups and social media exposure. The study highlights that while the family remains the primary foundation of moral development, explicit and open moral communication is increasingly necessary to reinforce altruistic behavior. Overall, this research affirms the enduring importance of family-based moral education in fostering socially responsible and empathetic young generations in the digital era.

Keywords: Family Moral Values; Altruistic Behavior; Generation Z; Moral Education; Prosocial Behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Family moral values constitute the primary foundation of children's character development from an early age. The family serves as the first social environment in which individuals learn fundamental moral principles that shape their worldview, including empathy, compassion, responsibility, honesty, and solidarity. These values are transmitted not only through direct instruction or advice but also through daily interactions and observational learning, as children tend to internalize moral norms

by observing parental behavior. Previous studies have demonstrated that high levels of parental attention and emotional attachment are positively associated with stronger moral development and greater self-confidence in children. Parents who consistently model moral behavior provide a stable moral framework that enables children to internalize ethical values more effectively, whereas inconsistencies between parental words and actions may lead to confusion in children's moral understanding. Consequently, the family functions as the first moral institution that plays a crucial role in shaping children's social and emotional development (Beck, 2024; Bornstein et al., 2022; Rahmayanty et al., 2023; Zatihulwani, 2025).

One of the key moral outcomes influenced by family values is altruism, a form of prosocial behavior characterized by voluntary actions intended to benefit others without expecting personal gain. Altruistic behavior is closely linked to empathy, social responsibility, and concern for the well-being of others, and it plays a vital role in strengthening social cohesion and interpersonal relationships. Research indicates that altruism does not emerge spontaneously but is shaped by an interaction of family upbringing, cultural norms, and social experiences. Children raised in family environments that emphasize empathy, responsibility, and mutual support are more likely to develop altruistic tendencies. In addition, involvement in community activities and exposure to diverse social contexts further reinforce altruistic attitudes. These findings suggest that altruism is the result of a dynamic interaction between early moral socialization within the family and broader social influences encountered throughout development (Christina et al., 2025; Matthys & Schutter, 2023; Parra et al., 2023; Prehanto et al., 2023).

This issue becomes increasingly relevant in the context of Generation Z, a cohort born between 1997 and 2012 that has grown up in an era of rapid technological advancement and pervasive digital connectivity. While Generation Z is often characterized as innovative, adaptive, and open to change, extensive engagement with digital media has also introduced challenges, including heightened individualism, reduced face-to-face interaction, and shifting value orientations. The dominance of social media and global cultural influences has altered family dynamics, often reducing the quality of interpersonal communication within households and creating generational gaps in values and expectations. In this context, families face significant challenges in maintaining their role as moral educators. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between family moral values and altruistic behavior among Generation Z, focusing on how family-based moral education can function as a protective and formative factor amid the pressures of digitalization. By addressing this issue, the study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to efforts aimed at strengthening moral development and prosocial behavior among young people in contemporary society (Dr. R. Annam et al., 2024; Handayani et al., 2025; Ramaiya, 2024; Zimina & Sineva, 2023).

METHOD

Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. This approach was selected to explore in depth the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of participants regarding the instillation of family moral values and their influence on the formation of altruistic behavior within natural social contexts.

Participants

The research was conducted in City X. Participants comprised Generation Z individuals (born between 1997 and 2012) who currently reside with their families and represent diverse social backgrounds. Inclusion criteria were established to ensure data relevance aligned with the research objectives. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Individuals were deliberately chosen based on their suitability to the research criteria, namely active involvement in family dynamics and the capacity to reflect on experiences related to moral values and social behavior (Acharya, 2023; Rahmatullah et al., 2023; Venida, 2022; Wiranti et al., 2025).

Instruments

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by a semi-structured interview guide. Data were collected through two techniques: (1) In-depth individual interviews, focusing on three key aspects: (a) moral values instilled by the family, (b) family strategies for transmitting these values, and (c) participants' perceptions of the relationship between family moral values and their social behavior; (2) Participant observation, employed to document the context of social interactions and actual practices that complement and strengthen verbal accounts.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analytical process followed three stages: (1) organization and reduction of raw data, (2) coding of recurring patterns, and (3) identification and interpretation of central themes representing the relationship between family moral values and altruistic behavior. Data trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and supporting documentation. Additionally, member checking was conducted by presenting interview summaries to participants to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the researcher's interpretations (Antonova, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2023; Mefteh & Shenkute, 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Understanding of Family Moral Values and Their Influence on Altruistic Behavior among Generation Z

The findings from in-depth interviews indicate that most Generation Z participants demonstrated a clear understanding of moral values taught within their families, although the methods of value transmission varied across households. The moral values most frequently identified by participants included empathy, responsibility, solidarity, and concern for others. Many participants reported that these values were conveyed primarily through parental role modeling, such as helping others without expecting rewards and providing guidance on ethical behavior in everyday situations.

However, participants also acknowledged inconsistencies in the application of these moral values over time. Several respondents noted that the influence of family moral teachings was stronger during childhood but gradually diminished as exposure to external influences particularly social media and peer environments increased. Despite this shift, most participants emphasized that family moral values continued to serve as an essential moral reference in their social interactions.

Table 1. Family Moral Values Understanding among Generation Z

Theme	Frequency	Description
Empathy	80%	Empathy was identified as the primary moral value taught within the family.
Responsibility	65%	Responsibility toward family and others was considered an important moral lesson.
Solidarity	55%	Solidarity was viewed as a foundation for helping others.
Concern for Others	60%	Parents encouraged caring and selfless assistance toward others.
Consistency of Moral Teaching	45%	Some participants perceived inconsistency in the application of moral values over time.

These findings indicate that empathy and responsibility dominate Generation Z's moral understanding, while consistency in moral practice remains a challenge as external social influences increase.

The Role of the Family in Instilling Moral Values that Contribute to Altruistic Behavior

Participants consistently described the family particularly parents as playing a central role in shaping their moral outlook and altruistic tendencies. Most respondents perceived their parents as moral role models who demonstrated altruistic behavior through daily actions, such as assisting neighbors, participating in charitable activities, or encouraging sharing and cooperation.

Nevertheless, participants also reported that external influences, including peer groups and digital media, sometimes weakened the impact of family moral teachings. Some respondents stated that they acquired social behaviors more frequently through experiences outside the home, even though family values continued to inform their moral decision-making. Moral instruction was perceived as being conveyed more often through parental behavior rather than explicit moral discussions.

Table 2. Family Roles in Moral Value Transmission and Altruistic Behavior

Theme	Frequency	Description
Parents as Role Models	85%	Parents were perceived as direct examples of altruistic behavior.
Direct Moral Instruction	70%	Moral values were explicitly communicated through conversations.
External Social Influence	50%	Peers and social media sometimes weakened family moral influence.
Indirect Moral Learning	60%	Moral values were learned through parental actions rather than verbal instruction.
Family Involvement in Social Activities	55%	Parents were involved in social and charitable activities.

The results suggest that parental role modeling plays a dominant role in shaping altruistic behavior, even amid strong external influences.

Key Findings and Participant-Based Recommendations

Participants generally recognized the strong influence of family moral values on their social behavior. Many described how early moral teachings motivated them to help others and engage in prosocial behavior. However, participants also expressed a need for more explicit and structured moral guidance, particularly when facing moral

dilemmas shaped by external social pressures.

Based on participants' experiences, several recommendations emerged, including the need for open moral communication within families, stronger collaboration between families and educational institutions, and greater involvement of communities in reinforcing altruistic values.

Table 3. Key Findings and Participant-Based Recommendations

Theme	Frequency	Description
Awareness of Family Moral Influence	75%	Participants recognized the family's role in shaping social behavior.
Need for Explicit Moral Guidance	60%	Moral values were perceived as insufficiently discussed explicitly.
External Social Influence	50%	Social environments often conflicted with family moral teachings.
Open Communication Recommendation	65%	Participants suggested clearer moral dialogue within families.
Role of Schools and Communities	55%	Schools and communities were expected to support moral education.

The findings demonstrate that empathy and responsibility are the dominant moral values internalized by Generation Z through family socialization. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that empathy serves as a core foundation for prosocial and altruistic behavior. However, the gradual decline in the consistency of moral application highlights the vulnerability of moral development in the face of increasing digital exposure and social media influence. The digital environment introduces competing value systems that may shift attention from collective well-being toward individual self-presentation and personal achievement (Amormino et al., 2022; Antonova, 2024; Law et al., 2025; Yunissov et al., 2023).

The strong perception of parents as moral role models reinforces existing literature emphasizing the importance of observational learning in moral development. When parents consistently demonstrate altruistic behavior, children are more likely to internalize and reproduce similar behaviors. Nevertheless, reliance solely on implicit moral instruction may limit young people's ability to navigate complex moral dilemmas. This finding underscores the need for parents to complement role modeling with explicit moral dialogue, particularly as Generation Z encounters diverse and sometimes conflicting moral norms in digital spaces (Adialita et al., 2023; Görgüt & Tutkun, 2022; Jumi atmoko, 2022; Karim et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that family moral values play a significant and enduring role in shaping altruistic behavior among Generation Z. Values such as empathy, responsibility, and solidarity are primarily internalized through daily family interactions, particularly through parental role modeling. Although external influences including peers and social media introduce competing value systems that may weaken the consistency of moral practice over time, family-based moral education remains a foundational reference for young people in guiding their social behavior. These findings affirm that the family continues to function as the primary moral environment in which altruistic orientations are first formed, even within the complex social landscape of the digital era. At the same time, the study highlights the need for more explicit and open moral communication within families to complement implicit

learning through example. Strengthening moral dialogue between parents and children can enhance young people's ability to navigate ethical challenges in increasingly diverse social contexts. Moreover, collaboration among families, educational institutions, and community organizations is essential to reinforce moral values and provide consistent support for altruistic development. Future research may extend these findings by examining the role of digital media in moral socialization, exploring variations in family moral practices across cultural contexts, and employing longitudinal designs to better understand changes in altruistic behavior over time. Through such efforts, more effective strategies can be developed to support the cultivation of socially responsible and empathetic future generations.

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