

Reciprocity and Children’s Rights: A Literature Review on Peer and Intergenerational Relationships

Isabella Grajczyk, BA & Mónica Ruiz-Casares, PhD

In Collaboration with the International & Canadian Child Rights Partnership



Table 1: Characteristics of Retained Sources

| Source | Year | Location Focus | Participants | | Reciprocity | |
|------------------------|------|--------------------|--------------|--------|----------------|-------------------|
| | | | Children | Adults | Among Children | Intergenerational |
| Wihstutz | 2016 | Not Specified | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| Aldridge | 2017 | Not Specified | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| Cortes & Dweck | 2014 | United States | • | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| Berndt | 1977 | United States | • | • | ◦ | • |
| del Solar et al. | 2020 | Chile | • | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| del Solar et al. | 2024 | Chile | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| Elden | 2016 | Sweden | • | ◦ | • | • |
| Horgan et al. | 2017 | Ireland | • | • | ◦ | ◦ |
| Horgan et al. | 2020 | Ireland | • | • | ◦ | • |
| Martin et al. | 2018 | Ireland | • | • | ◦ | ◦ |
| Samuel & Hertrich | 2019 | Sub Saharan Africa | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ |
| Sloth-Nielsen & Mezmur | 2008 | Africa | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| Tsai & Dzorgbo | 2012 | Ghana | ◦ | ◦ | ◦ | • |
| Wihstutz | 2011 | United Kingdom | ◦ | ◦ | • | • |
| Twum-Danso | 2009 | Ghana | • | • | ◦ | • |
| Twum-Danso Imoh | 2022 | Ghana | • | • | ◦ | • |

Reciprocity Between Children and Adults

Thirteen studies highlight reciprocity as central to parent-child relationships, emphasizing care, trust, and agency (Horgan et al., 2020).

- Reciprocity evolves through daily interactions, fostering mutual respect and empowering children’s participation and responsibility (Horgan et al., 2017; del Solar et al., 2020).
- Cultural and socio-economic contexts shape these dynamics, with trust and decision-making autonomy empowering children in some settings, while cultural norms restrict agency in others (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2022).

Child Agency and Participation

- Theme present across studies: decision-making participation contributes to confidence, autonomy, and social change (Wihstutz, 2016; Horgan et al., 2017).
- Participation is developmental, evolving with age and capacity, while intergenerational support fosters reciprocity, responsibility, and cultural knowledge transmission (Sloth-Nielsen & Mezmur, 2008; Samuel & Hertrich, 2019).

Cultural Context

- Cultural norms shape reciprocity and participation. E.g., studies from:
 - Europe - focus on respecting children’s voices (Horgan et al., 2017).
 - Africa - emphasize extended family dynamics and communal responsibility (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2022).
 - Chile - highlight maternal roles in resource-limited settings; children’s reciprocity supports family resilience (del Solar et al., 2024).

Review Questions

How does reciprocity, both among young people and between adults and young people, contribute to the promotion of children’s rights?

How do cultural, societal, and gender factors influence the role of reciprocity in promoting children’s rights?

Method

Inclusion Criteria

- Peer-reviewed articles and book chapters in English, on reciprocity, agency, participation, and child rights involving children (0–17 years). No geography, date, or discipline restrictions. Excluded studies on adult children, non-peer-reviewed sources, and non-English publications.

Search Strategy

- Keyword search in the Web of Science Core Collection from 25 September to 9 October, 2024. The most effective search strategy was informed by McGill librarians.
- Keywords used:
 - reciprocity OR agency OR participation (Topic)
 - AND child* OR teen* OR youth OR young people OR adolescent* (Topic)
 - AND adult* OR parent* OR family OR families (Topic)
 - AND children's rights (Topic)

Source Selection

- Initial search identified 440 results. After screening titles, 138 sources were reviewed via abstracts, and 15 highly relevant articles were retained for full extraction (Table 1). One additional source was identified prior to the review.

Data Extraction

- Information systematically extracted into an Excel database, documenting study details, key findings, and factors like cultural context and gender. Recurring themes and patterns identified.

Reciprocity Among Children

Two studies examine reciprocity among children, highlighting the role of caregiving in peer relationships (Elden, 2016; Wihstutz, 2011).

- Children often take on caregiving roles within peer groups, such as providing emotional support, sharing responsibilities, and assisting with practical tasks.
- These interactions foster mutual reliance, respect, and a foundation for reciprocal exchanges (Elden, 2016; Wihstutz, 2011).

Gender Dynamics

- Feminist perspectives highlight how girls disproportionately undertake caregiving, often reflecting undervalued care work (Elden, 2016).
- Boys also contribute to peer caregiving but in ways shaped by different societal expectations, which remain less recognized (Wihstutz, 2011).

Discussion

Key Points

- Reciprocity involves trust, shared responsibility, and respect, fostering children’s agency and empowerment through daily interactions (Wihstutz, 2016; del Solar et al., 2020).
- Shared decision-making and communication are crucial for creating environments where children feel valued (Horgan et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2018).
- Progressive child rights contexts prioritize children’s autonomy and participation (Wihstutz, 2011; Horgan et al., 2017).
- Reciprocity promotes intergenerational collaboration and equitable relationships, but cultural and societal contexts are critical in shaping its impact.

Call for Further Research

- The limited number of studies on reciprocity among children highlights the need for further research to understand peer reciprocity across different socio-cultural contexts and age groups.

References

