

Critical Summary:  
Variation in Juvenile Dependence: Helping Behavior among Maya Children

Kramer, Karen L. (2002) Variation in Juvenile Dependence: Helping Behavior among Maya Children. *Human Nature*, 13(2): 299-325.

Karen Kramer currently is working as a professor of anthropology at the University of New York, Stony Brook. The research for this article centers around a small village called Xculoc in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.

In this study, Kramer used a cross section of a community that consisted of 19 households. These homes contained members within a family whose ages ranged from new born to 65. At the conclusion of the study, more than 20,000 observations had been made, equaling about 154 observations per person over a 10 month period of time. Kramer and her team studied the domestic and field activities of the people within these families. Between the ages of 6-8, children began doing domestic and field work alongside the rest of the household. The amount of work done by these children steadily increased until they reached 10 years of age. When they reached 10 their work efforts reached a plateau. According to this study, this plateau marked the close of a child's economic dependence on their families.

The people of Xculoc, Mexico are subsistence farmers, who grow and harvest corn. The families in this village have few economic resources. Occasionally men work out of the home for extra money, but the women and children never do. From a young age, the children are expected to help with the work. As young children, they have some opportunity to play in addition to helping pick corn. While they are young, there is constant supervision so that the children can play safely. The jungle that surrounds them can be very dangerous and this supervision is important for the physical well being of the children. As they grow they are expected to work more. They are considered economically independent when they produce more

than they take in. The young girls are expected to help look after the younger children. Women in the villages do most of the work, no matter what age they are. Females usually reach economical independence at age 12, and males reach economical independence at age 17.

(This paper was prepared from a summary written by Amanda Bartlett a student at USU)