

# Domain Differences in Early Prohibitive Interactions

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## Introduction

- Children distinguish between moral, conventional, and prudential norms by the time they are 2 – 3 years old (Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana & Braeges, 1990; Tisak, 1993)
- A widespread view is that children acquire this understanding through different social interactions associated with different norms (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983; 2006).
- Yet, research on domain differences in social interactions prior to the third year is limited (Smetana, 1989; Zahn-Waxler & Chapman, 1982).
- The second year may be a particularly important period for learning about norms, as motor abilities improve yet language abilities are limited (Dahl & Campos, in press).

## Main Questions

- Are domain differences in social interactions present already in the beginning of the second year, after the onset of walking?
- Are domain differences limited to verbal justifications provided in response to transgressions, or are such differences also evident in other aspects of prohibitive interactions?
  - Response to non-compliance
  - Child-directed language
  - Compromising

## Methods

### Participants:

25 families with target child at 14 months of age (10 girls, 15 boys). Families are currently being followed up 5 and 10 months later.

### Procedure:

Each family is observed for 2.5 hours. All instances where the mother is negatively evaluating or trying to stop the child's behavior are logged and coded.

### Coding:

Situations classified as **interpersonal harm**, **prudential** (safety related), and **pragmatic** (practical consequences). Within each situation, mother and child actions are coded action by action.

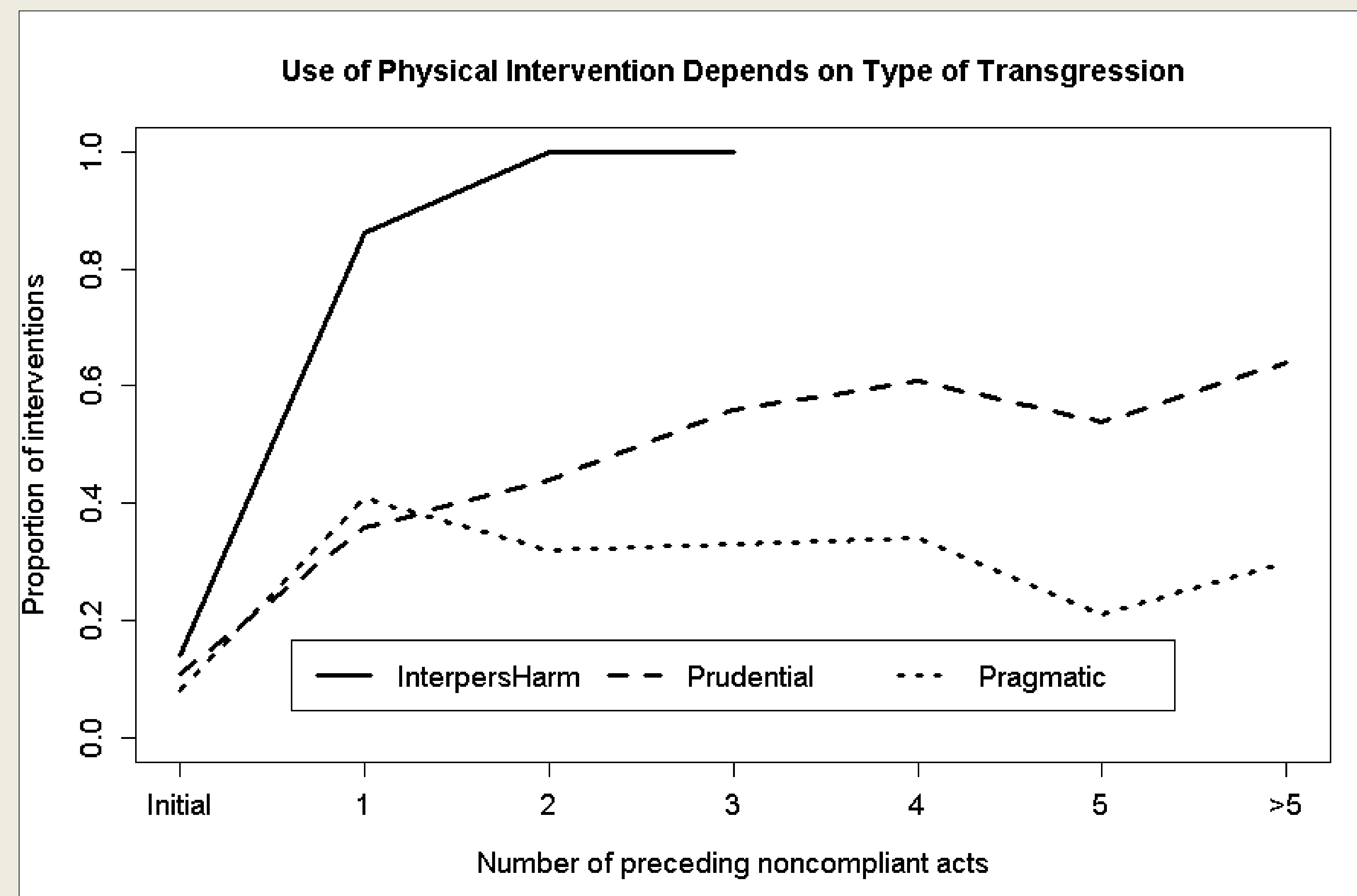


Figure 1: The use of physical interventions in response to non-compliance became increasingly differentiated by domain. The graph shows mean values.

## Results

- The initial intervention depended on domain**  
Mothers initially respond with more corrective (as opposed to prohibitive) statements in response to prudential and interpersonal transgressions, more explanations in response to interpersonal harm transgressions, and more softening (comforting, distracting, compromising) statements in response to pragmatic transgressions,  $\chi^2(10) = 22.52, p = .013$ .
- Explanations were adapted to the domain of the transgression**,  $\chi^2(20) = 158.57, p < .001$ .
- Use of child-directed language also differed between events**  
More simplified language in response to interpersonal harm transgressions, more use of child name to draw attention to subsequent statement in prudential and interpersonal harm transgressions,  $\chi^2(2) = 6.51, p = .038$ .
- Mothers response to prolonged non-compliance depended on domain**  
Mothers typically used physical interventions the most quickly in response to interpersonal harm situations. They were also quicker to do so in prudential situations than in pragmatic situations,  $\chi^2(4) = 14.91, p = .005$  (Figure 1).
- Compromising and relenting depended on domain of transgression**  
Mothers typically used physical interventions the most quickly in response to interpersonal harm situations. They were also quicker to do so in prudential situations than in pragmatic situations,  $\chi^2(4) = 11.33, p = .023$  (Figure 2).

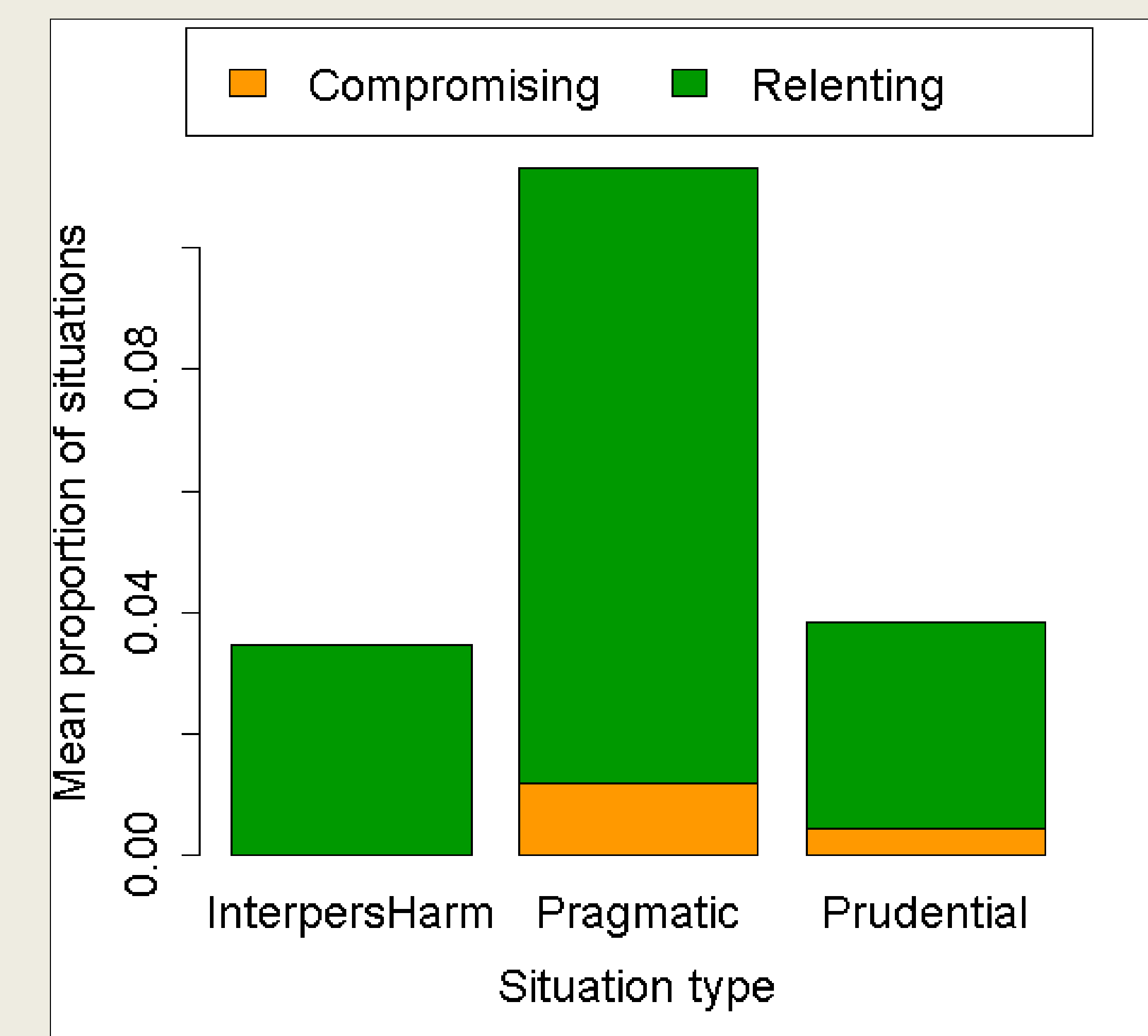


Figure 2: Likelihood of compromising or relenting greater for pragmatic events than for interpersonal harm and prudential events.

## Discussion

- Moral, prudential, and pragmatic transgressions elicit different reactions from early in the second year**  
Interactions surrounding the three types of norms elicited different verbal and behavioral reactions.
- Moral and prudential norms are given priority**  
Mothers overall seemed to be more insistent on moral norms, and to some extent prudential norms, than on pragmatic norms. This is consistent with past findings that mothers start enforcing moral and prudential norms earlier than pragmatic and conventional norms (Gralinski & Kopp, 1993; Smetana et al., 2000).
- Early norm-related experiences may contribute to later understanding of differences between norm domains**  
Insofar as parents are more insistent on moral norms, early prohibitive interactions may contribute to the emergence of the understanding that moral norms are more generalizable, and that their violation is typically more serious, than e.g. conventional norms (Smetana & Braeges, 1990; Smetana et al., 2012).
- Issues for future research**  
More research is needed on other forms of norm communication (e.g. emotional communication), as well as on how children make use of the experiences they have in early norm related interactions.