

Peer Ratings and Social Problem-Solving Skills of 8-9 Year Old Children

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KEY WORDS Peer ratings; social interpersonal problem-solving skills; peer acceptance; peer rejection.

ABSTRACT One hundred 8 to 9 year old children (50 male and 50 female) were assessed for peer acceptance and rejection, and interpersonal social problem-solving skills. Results of this study clearly predict relationship between peer acceptance and rejection, and interpersonal social problem-solving skills. Positively rated children suggested more number of relevant and alternative strategies than their less accepted counter parts. Also positively rated children were more likely to suggest prosocial strategies for obtaining access to an object in another child's possession and for initiating friendship with an unfamiliar child, while reverse was true for negatively rated children.

INTRODUCTION

Peers play a significant role in the social development of children. Peers enjoy equal status in their interpersonal interactions. For social approval they need to value each other's opinions and learn to compromise in social interactions. They also learn give and take and negotiation skills to achieve desired goals. The development of negotiation skills expedites this learning process and promotes social competence. Peers have great impact on children's behaviour because peers can alter behaviour of the child by their acceptance or rejection.

Children who have poor relationships with their peers are "at risk" for later developmental problems (Parker and Asher, 1987). Research has shown that children's sociometric status is related to their social problem-solving skills. Positive associations between children's abilities to produce a large number of relevant, flexible and prosocial strategies and their peer acceptance has been observed in Western studies (Rubin & Daniels-Beirness, 1983). In India, more recently in a study with rural 5 to 6 year-old children, Balda and her associates (Balda, 2001; Balda et al., 2001) have found that prosocial strategies of social interaction predicted peer acceptance, whereas agonistic strategies predicted peer re-

jection. Also social problem-solving scores were correlated with social acceptance and rejection.

The present study was conducted in Hisar city with 8 to 9 year old children. It was hypothesized that greater number of relevant and flexible strategies and prosocial strategies would be positively correlated with peer acceptance, whereas, use of agonistic strategies would be negatively correlated with peer acceptance of children.

METHOD

Sample: One hundred 8 to 9 year old children (50 girls and 50 boys) from Hisar city participated in the present study.

Measures: The children were administered two measures: a sociometric peer rating scale and a social problem-solving test.

Peer Ratings: To assess sociometric status of children, the peer rating scale developed by Asher et al. (1979) was used. Each child was individually presented with colour polaroid photographs of target children. They were shown the photographs, one by one, and were requested to assign pictures of target children to one of the three boxes on which were drawn either a happy face ("children you like a lot"), a neutral face ("children you kind of like"), or a sad face ("children you don't like"). Children thus received a number of positive, neutral and negative ratings. The positive rating received by the child were given a score of 3, neutral a score of 2, and negative ratings a score of 1. Same-sex sociometric scores were computed for each child.

Social Problem-solving Skills. The Social Problem Solving Test-Revised developed by Rubin (1988) was used to assess children's social problem-solving skills in hypothetical situations with their peers. Each child was presented individually with eight problem situations in which a story character either wished to gain access to an object in another child's possession (four stories) or to become friendly with an unfamiliar child (four stories). The child being tested

was then asked what the story character could do or say in each situation to achieve the desired goal. Two such responses were requested for each situation. Picture cards were used to depict the stories.

The children's responses were scored in terms of their quantitative and qualitative features. The total number of different strategies in stories of object acquisition and friendship initiation were computed. The children's responses were also scored for the number of relevant categories produced per story and were computed to get object acquisition relevancy score and friendship initiation relevancy score. Scores of response flexibility for both object acquisition and friendship initiation were also computed. Flexibility involved a comparison of the categories found in response 2 with those found in response 1 for any given story.

In addition, each response was coded as to its quality. The proportions of responses falling in to each of the categories were computed as described by Rubin (1988). For object acquisition children's responses could be categorised as "prosocial" (e.g. "Please can I have it?"), "agonistic" (e.g. "Give it to me."), "adult intervention" (e.g. "I'll tell teacher to make him share."), "trade-bribe" (e.g. "I'll let you read my book if you give me yours."), and "affect-manipulation" (e.g. "I'll be happy if you give it to me."). For friendship initiation also the strategies were categorised according to the system used by Rubin (1988). Different categories were "conversation openers" (e.g. "What's your name?"), "indirect initiation" (e.g. "Will you be my friend?"), "direct initiation" (e.g. "Let's play together."), "prosocial and complimentary" (e.g. "I would like to play with you."), "invitation" (e.g. "Do you want to play with me?"), "adult intervention" (e.g. "I will ask her mother if she can play with me?"), "non-normative" (e.g. "I will shake his hand.").

All 100 protocols for the children were scored by two raters. Inter-rater reliability, computed as the percentage of agreements was 100% for quantitative scores and qualitative features of Object Acquisition and Friendship Initiation tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed between sociometric peer rating scores and social problem-solving scores and strategies. Magnitude of correlations ranged from low to

moderate.

Correlations between Peer Rating Scores and Social Problem-solving Scores. As shown in table 1, the positive rating score was significantly positively correlated with number of strategies suggested, relevancy and flexibility scores of object acquisition and friendship initiation tasks.

Negative correlations were obtained between neutral ratings received and the number of strategies suggested, relevancy and flexibility scores of friendship initiation tasks, as well as for flexibility score of object acquisition tasks. Negative correlations were also found between negative ratings score and the number of strategies suggested, and flexibility scores of object acquisition and friendship initiation tasks; and relevancy score of friendship initiation tasks.

The results of the present study clearly indicate relationship between peer acceptance or rejection and quantitative features of social problem-solving. Positively rated children suggested more number of relevant and alternative strategies than those who received neutral or negative ratings. It can be interpreted from these results that peer accepted children are more socially competent. These results get support from previous research conducted by Rubin and his associates (Chen and Rubin, 1992; Rubin and Daniels-Beirmess, 1983) and with those of Spivack and Shure (1974). More recently Balda and her associates also examined sociometric status and social interaction of rural children and correlates of sociometric status in five to six year old rural children (Balda, 2001; Balda et al., 2001). The authors reported clear predictions between sociometric status and social problem solving scores.

Correlations between Sociometric Scores and Social Problem-solving Strategies. As presented in table 1, the number of positive ratings received were significantly positively correlated with the prosocial strategies for object acquisition, and prosocial and opening conversation for initiating friendship. The negative correlations were evidenced between the positive ratings received and the agonistic strategies for object acquisition.

Neutral ratings received were negatively correlated with the prosocial and agonistic strategies for object acquisition, and opening conversation for initiating friendship. The number of negative ratings received was positively associated with agonistic object acquisition strategies. Negative correlations were also obtained between negative ratings received and prosocial

Table 1: Correlations between peer rating scores and social problem-solving scores and strategies

Social Problem-	Positive- Ratings	Natural Ratings	Negative Ratings
Social Problem-Solving Scores			
Object Acquisition Scores			
Number of strategies	.30**	ns	-.25*
Relevancy score	.38**	ns	ns
Flexibility score	.34**	-.20*	-.35**
Friendship Initiation Scores			
Number of strategies	.19*	-.22*	-.32**
Relevancy score	.29**	-.26*	-.20*
Flexibility score	.35**	-.32**	-.21*
Social Problem-Solving Strategies			
Object Acquisition Strategies			
Prosocial	.43**	-.28**	-.30**
Agonistic	-.29**	-.24*	.39**
Friendship Initiation Strategies			
Prosocial	.31**	ns	-.22*
Conversation	.19*	-.36**	ns

Note: n = 100; significant at *p < .05, **p < .01.

strategies for obtaining access to an object and prosocial strategies for initiating friendship with an unfamiliar child.

The results of the present study clearly predict relationship between sociometric status and qualitative features of social problem-solving skills. For object acquisition, positively rated children were more likely to suggest prosocial and less likely to suggest agonistic strategies, while reverse was true for negatively rated children. For initiating friendship, positively rated children were more likely to suggest prosocial and conversation opening strategies, whereas neutrally rated children were less likely to initiate friendship by opening conversation. Negatively rated children were less likely to suggest prosocial strategies to initiate friendship with an unfamiliar child.

The present research support the findings of Richard and Dodge (1982), and Rubin and Daniels-Beirness (1983) that prosocial strategies predict peer acceptance, whereas negative strategies predict peer rejection. For initiating friendship, results of the present study are in line with findings of Asher and Renshaw (1981) that responses of unpopular children are less effective and less relationship initiating. Balda and her colleagues (Balda, 2001; Balda et al., 2001) have also reported association between sociometric

status and social problem solving strategies of rural children. The authors reported that prosocial strategies of social interaction predict peer acceptance, whereas agonistic strategies predict peer rejection.

A few limitations in the research reported herein are apparent. First, the social problem-solving skills of children were assessed in hypothetical situations. Second, because of correlational nature of the present data these findings need to be interpreted with caution.

In summary, this research has made a contribution to increased understanding of correlates of peer acceptance and rejection. Children's social interpersonal problem-solving skills are the predictors of peer acceptance and rejection.

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