

Socio-Emotional Behaviour and Social Problem Solving Skills of 6 – 8 Years Old Children

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KEYWORDS Aggression; behaviour; social problem; childhood

ABSTRACT One hundred sixty seven 6 to 8 years old children were assessed for interpersonal social problem-solving skills. Socio-emotional behaviour was rated on a Likert-type scale by their class teachers. Results revealed that aggression, emotionality and impatience were negatively and significantly correlated with total number of strategies suggested, total number of different strategies, total relevancy and flexibility scores. The results suggested that aggressive, emotional and impatient children were less likely to suggest greater number of strategies and different strategies in social problem solving situations with their peers. Also, these children were less likely to suggest more relevant and alternatives solutions to problems. Further, results revealed that aggressive, emotional and impatient children were more likely to suggest forceful strategies and less likely to suggest non-forceful strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Young children face a vast and increasing array of challenges as they attempt to develop interpersonal relations. During early childhood years, caregivers give high priority to enhancing young children's social development. Research indicates that unless children achieve minimum social competence by about the age of six years, they have a high probability of being at risk throughout their life. Peer relationships contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. The best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not IQ, school grades, or classroom behavior but, rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer group are "at risk" (Hartup, 1992).

The risks are many - poor mental health, dropping out of school, low achievement and other school difficulties, poor employment history, and so forth. Mental health and education professionals generally agree that it is essential to begin developing prosocial attitudes and behaviors in children at a very young age because aggression in young children that is not remedied early always leads to later acts of delinquency. Given the life-long consequences, social relationships should be given high priority.

Inter personal cognitive problem solving (ICPS) skills are significantly correlated with high-risk behaviours as measured from preschool through grade 6 in a longitudinal research (Spivack et al., 1976). It was found that high risk behaviour predicted more serious outcomes as violence, substance abuse, unwanted teen pregnancy, depression and some forms of psychopathology. These high-risk behaviours include physical and verbal aggression, inability to wait and cope with frustration, lack of empathy, social withdrawal and poor peer relations (Parker and Asher, 1987). About 40 per cent of adults with emotional disorders displayed adjustment problems as children (Rutter and Giller, 1983).

In the present study, relationship between socio-emotional behaviour and social problem solving skills of 6-8 years old children has been examined.

METHOD

Subjects

The present study was conducted in Sonapat city of Haryana State. A list of Government Primary Schools was prepared. From this list two schools were selected at random. From these schools, two separate lists of 6-8 years old children were prepared. In this age range, in School 1 there were 83 children (43 boys and 40 girls) and in School 2 there were 84 children (43 boys and 41 girls). All these children were assessed for social problem solving skills. Class teachers also participated in the present study.

Procedure

Socio-Emotional Behaviour: Socio-emotional behaviour of children in the school was assessed with the help of an inventory developed by Punia (2002). This inventory consisted of 15 behavioural items on a Likert type scale. Class teachers were requested to observe socio-emotional behaviour of children for a period of one week before filling up the inventory. In a classroom teachers were requested to rate the socio-emotional behaviour of twenty children after a gap of one month. Test-retest reliability for aggression, emotionality, and impatience components were 0.72, 0.68, and 0.76 respectively, $p < .05$.

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 ten problem situations in which a story character either wished to gain access to an object in another child's possession (five stories) or to become friendly with an unfamiliar child (five 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 age and sex of the children in the stories were the same as that of the child being tested. In each story the characters were given different names to maintain interest and variety.

The children's responses were scored in terms of their quantitative and qualitative features. The total number of different categories found in all ten stories was computed. The children's responses were also scored for the number of relevant categories produced per story and were computed to get total relevancy score. An index of response flexibility was also computed. Flexibility involved a comparison of the categories found in response 2 with those found in response 1 for any given story.

For object acquisition tasks, responses given by the children were also coded into specific categories. Children's responses could be categorised into non-forceful and forceful strategies.

All 167 protocols for the children were scored by two raters (aside from the researcher who scored all the protocols, an Associate Professor,

HDFS, COHS, CCS HAU, Hisar rated all the children's protocols). Inter-rater reliability, computed as the percentage of agreements was 98% for quantitative scores of Object Acquisition and Friendship Initiation tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed between teacher assessed children's socio-emotional behaviour (aggression, emotionality, and impatience) and children's total scores for number of categories suggested, number of different categories suggested, relevancy and within-story flexibility. Correlations were also computed between aggression, emotionality, and impatience behavioural components with social problem solving strategies. Separate analyses were run for the total sample; and for boys and girls. Magnitude of correlations ranged from low to high.

Correlations Socio-Emotional Behaviour and Social Problem Solving Scores: As presented in Table 1, aggression was marginally to moderately negatively significantly correlated with total number of categories, total number of different categories, total relevancy score and total flexibility scores. For boys, girls and total sample, r values ranged from -0.21 to -.56, $p < 0.05$.

Similarly, emotionality was marginally to highly negatively correlated with total number of categories produced, total number of different categories, total relevancy and total within story flexibility scores, r values ranged from -0.21 to -0.63, $p < 0.05$.

Similar correlations existed between impatience and total number of categories suggested, total relevancy and within story flexibility scores, with r values ranging from -0.22 to -0.65, $p < 0.05$. Although not significant, a negative trend was observed between impatience and total number of different categories produced.

It can be interpreted from these results that children who were perceived by teachers as aggressive, emotional or impatient were less likely to suggest greater number of categories and different categories in social problem solving tasks. Also, these children were less likely to suggest relevant and flexible alternatives in social problem solving tasks. These results get support from the research conducted by Punia (2002) with

preschool children. She reported that children who were perceived as impatient, emotional, and aggressive by their teachers were likely to suggest lesser number of strategies and lesser number of different strategies. These children were less likely to obtain suggest relevant strategies and were less likely to change the alternative after first response.

Correlations Socio-Emotional Behaviour and Social Problem Solving Strategies: As depicted in Table 2, aggression, emotionality, and impatience were marginally negatively correlated with non-forceful strategies. For boys, girls and total sample, r values ranged from -0.21 to -0.32, $p < 0.05$. Positive correlations existed between forceful strategies and aggression, emotionality, and impatience for boys, girls, and total sample

with r values ranging from 0.20 to 0.36, $p < 0.05$.

It can be interpreted from these results that aggressive, emotional, and impatient children are more likely to suggest forceful strategies and less likely to suggest non-forceful strategies in obtaining access to an object from their peers. Similar results have been reported by Punia (2002). She has conducted research with preschool urban and rural children. She has also found that aggressive, emotional, or impatient children suggested forceful strategies more often and non-forceful strategies less often as compared to average children.

In conclusion, aggressive, emotional, and impatient children are poor problem solvers. They suggest less relevant solutions to problems and they are also poor in alternative thinking. Further,

Table 1: Correlations between socio-emotional variables and SPS scores

SPS Scores		Aggression	Emotionality	Impatience
Total number of categories	Boys	-0.24*	-0.35*	-0.33*
	Girls	-0.38*	-0.44*	-0.31*
	Total	-0.31*	-0.39*	-0.32*
Total number of different categories	Boys	-0.24*	-0.21*	-0.22*
	Girls	-0.21*	-0.22*	-0.18
	Total	-0.25*	-0.28*	-0.16
Total Relevancy Score	Boys	-0.38*	-0.45*	-0.43*
	Girls	-0.43*	-0.50*	-0.42*
	Total	-0.40*	-0.47*	-0.42*
Total Flexibility Score	Boys	-0.55*	-0.62*	-0.61*
	Girls	-0.56*	-0.63*	-0.65*
	Total	-0.55*	-0.62*	-0.63*

Note: $n = 167$; Significant at $*p < .05$.

Table 1: Correlations between socio-emotional variables and SPS strategies

SPS Strategies		Aggression	Emotionality	Impatience
Non-forceful	Boys	-0.20*	-0.21*	-0.22*
	Girls	-0.31*	-0.30*	-0.26*
	Total	-0.22*	-0.21*	-0.20*
Forceful	Boys	0.22*	0.25*	0.24*
	Girls	0.36*	0.35*	0.29*
	Total	0.21*	0.21*	0.20*

Note: $n = 167$; Significant at $*p < .05$.

these children are more likely to suggest forceful and less likely to suggest non-forceful strategies in social problem solving tasks with their peers. Poor social problem solving skills could lead to maladaptive behaviour and peer rejection. Therefore, it is very important to identify such children during early childhood years so that preventive measures can be taken.

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