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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Children's Social Vulnerability Questionnaire (CSVQ): Validation, relationship with psychosocial functioning, and age-related differences

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### KEYWORDS

Social vulnerability;  
Psychosocial  
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**Abstract** *Background/Objective:* Social vulnerability refers to difficulties detecting potentially harmful interpersonal situations. Although it is an important predictor of psychosocial and interpersonal difficulties in clinical samples, research investigating this construct is scarce. We aimed to (a) develop a brief measure for assessing social vulnerability in typically developing children, the Children's Social Vulnerability Questionnaire (CSVQ) (b) examine the relationship between social vulnerability and psychosocial functioning, (c) explore age-related differences, and (d) explore levels of social vulnerability amongst children with clinical needs. *Method:* Data were gathered on two samples. Participants were parents ( $n = 790$ ) of elementary school-aged children (3-12 years), and parents and teachers of a second sample ( $n = 96$ ). *Results:* Results provide strong reliability and validity evidence. Social vulnerability showed moderate relationships with emotional and behavioural problems, and only a weak relationship with social skills. Parents perceived greater social vulnerability in younger than older children, and amongst children with clinical needs. Parents' and teachers' scores were correlated. *Conclusions:* Social vulnerability is not simply a lack of social skill; rather, it is a valuable construct for understanding psychosocial risk, especially for young and clinical samples of children.

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**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Vulnerabilidad social;  
ajuste psicossocial;  
niños;  
estudio instrumental

**Children's Social Vulnerability Questionnaire (CSVQ): validación, relación con el funcionamiento psicossocial y diferencias relacionadas con la edad**

**Resumen** *Antecedentes/Objetivo:* La vulnerabilidad social alude a dificultades para detectar situaciones interpersonales potencialmente dañinas. Aunque es un predictor importante de las dificultades, la investigación es escasa. Por tanto, se plantea (a) describir las propiedades psicométricas del Children's Social Vulnerability Questionnaire (CSVQ), (b) examinar la relación entre vulnerabilidad social y funcionamiento psicossocial, (c) explorar las diferencias relacionadas con la edad, y (d) explorar los niveles de vulnerabilidad social en niños con necesidades clínicas. *Método:* Los datos se recogieron en dos muestras. Los participantes fueron padres (n = 790) de niños de Educación Primaria, y padres y profesores de una segunda muestra (n = 96). *Resultados:* Se proporciona evidencia sólida acerca de la fiabilidad y validez. La vulnerabilidad social mostró relaciones moderadas con problemas emocionales y de comportamiento, y sólo una relación débil con las habilidades sociales. Los padres percibieron una mayor vulnerabilidad social en los niños más jóvenes que en los mayores, y entre niños con necesidades clínicas. Los informes de padres y profesores estaban correlacionados. *Conclusiones:* La vulnerabilidad social no es equivalente a las habilidades sociales, pero es un valioso constructo para la comprensión del riesgo psicossocial, especialmente en muestras clínicas y en niños de menor edad.

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Effective functioning in the social world requires the ability to identify situations where involvement may lead to negative consequences (Greenspan, Loughlin, & Black, 2001). Even though a tendency to trust others is generally considered to be an adaptive attribute (Betts & Rotenberg, 2008), difficulties understanding situations that involve deception may leave an individual open to being deceived, misled, or cheated (Greenspan et al., 2001). This impaired ability to detect or avoid potentially harmful interpersonal interactions is referred to as social vulnerability (Pinsker, Stone, Pachana, & Greenspan, 2006). Theoretically, two constructs are believed to underlie social vulnerability: credulity (a tendency to believe something that is highly questionable despite limited evidence) and gullibility (a vulnerability to being tricked or manipulated) (Greenspan et al., 2001). These two constructs are thought to be closely related in that the presence of credulity invariably leads to a gullible outcome (Greenspan et al., 2001). As a result, being socially vulnerable can diminish a person's capacity to interact in social situations and contribute to negative interpersonal experiences, such as victimisation and exploitation.

Studies have indicated that individuals at social-cognitive risk display increased levels of social vulnerability. For example, older adults with a neurological condition (Pinsker, McFarland, & Stone, 2011; Pinsker et al., 2006) and children with Asperger's syndrome (Sofronoff, Dark, & Stone, 2011) are more socially vulnerable than their healthy/typically developing peers. Importantly, social vulnerability has also been linked with an increased risk of negative interpersonal outcomes. In older adolescents and adults with developmental disabilities, Fisher, Moskowitz and Hodapp (2012, 2013) identified specific facets of 'social vulnerability' (e. g., a decreased ability to detect risk, being perceived by others as being physically vulnerable, and having low

social protection from peers) associated with each disorder that place individuals at risk for victimisation. Moreover, in children with Asperger's syndrome, social vulnerability was associated with social interaction difficulties and emotional/behavioural problems, and was a unique predictor of peer victimisation. Together, these studies demonstrate that social vulnerability is elevated in those who experience social-cognitive difficulties, and is an important predictor of psychosocial and interpersonal difficulties.

Young children who are developing typically may also be at risk for being deceived and misled in social situations. In the elementary school years, children go through a process of substantial cognitive and social development (Anderson et al., 2001). During this time, they may be socially vulnerable to interactions that are intended to harm (Greenspan, 2009; Greenspan et al., 2001). Considering social vulnerability in typically developing children may help us to understand this aspect of children's social interactions, which is not captured in current measures of social interactions, such as social skills (e. g., showing empathy for others, helping out, being kind) or social problems (e. g., aggression, bullying, being victimised). Despite the potential for social vulnerability to inform us on children who are at risk for being taken advantage of or misled in social situations, and/or victimised, there has been limited empirical research in this population. This paucity of research may, in part, be due to the lack of an appropriate measure for this population.

Existing measures of social vulnerability have been developed specifically for at-risk populations. For example, Pinsker et al. (2006) developed an informant-rated scale to measure older adults' susceptibility to exploitation in financial situations – The Social Vulnerability Scale for Older Adults. Consistent with Greenspan et al.'s (2001) theory, Pinsker et al. (2011) found a two-factor structure: credulity

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