



# Correlates of sociometric status in Russian preschoolers: Aggression, victimization, and sociability☆

David A. Nelson\*, Kathryn C. Burner, Sarah M. Coyne, Craig H. Hart, Clyde C. Robinson

School of Family Life, Brigham Young University, United States



## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 21 August 2015

Received in revised form 29 January 2016

Accepted 31 January 2016

Available online 11 February 2016

### Keywords:

Preschool children

Sociometric status

Aggression

Victimization

Russia

## ABSTRACT

Few studies have assessed behavioral correlates of preschool children's peer sociometric status in cultures outside North America. This study focuses on 221 Russian preschoolers (108 boys, 113 girls). Correlates included physical and relational forms of aggression/victimization and sociable behavior. Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) established that study instruments originally developed with U.S. preschoolers worked well in Russia. Findings in regard to aggression, sociability, and victimization were generally consistent with previous research with American and Italian preschoolers, particularly in regard to controversial status children. Our findings further challenge the notion that controversial children are consistently savvy in their social interactions. They and rejected children were most likely to be physically and relationally victimized by their peers.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Sociometric assessments measure children's peer status. Sociometric status groups are constructed using two factors: (a) how much a child is liked/disliked by peers (*social preference*) and (b) how well known the child is in the peer group (*social impact*; Nelson, Robinson, & Hart, 2005). Children are categorized as popular (receiving many like nominations); rejected (many dislike nominations); controversial (many like and dislike nominations); neglected (few like or dislike nominations); and average (not meeting criteria for these other extreme groups). This taxometric approach has provided insight above and beyond consideration of the continuum of liking and disliking scores.

For example, researchers have long studied how sociometric status groups may uniquely differ in their social behaviors (Hymel, Vaillancourt, McDougall, & Renshaw, 2002). Such differences have been identified as early as preschool (Nelson et al., 2005; Nelson, Robinson, Hart, Albano, & Marshall, 2010) and help illuminate how children differentially navigate the demands of early peer interactions. Before sociometric status was considered, research studies generally found a significant positive correlation between aggression and peer rejection. Accordingly, aggression was universally considered as a risk

factor. The correlation was relatively modest, however, and obscured the fact that two types of children use high levels of aggression in their peer interactions: rejected and controversial status children. These children have different behavioral configurations and reputations.

In their meta-analytic review of sociometric status correlates, Newcomb, Bukowski, and Pattee (1993) found that sociometrically popular (universally liked) children tend to be sociable, cooperative, and engage in pleasurable peer interactions. Neglected children, in contrast, are withdrawn and unsociable. Rejected children are aggressive/disruptive, with few appropriate social overtures. Controversial children have a unique behavioral reputation. They are usually as sociable as sociometrically popular children yet equally or more aggressive than rejected children, particularly in regard to relational aggression (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; DeRosier & Thomas, 2003; Nelson et al., 2005). In short, controversial children have high social impact but polarize their peers in regard to social preference. This parallels findings of studies assessing the behavioral configurations of *peer-perceived popular* or *bistrategic* children in later developmental periods (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Hawley, 2003). In short, these terms all describe high-status children who deftly mix aggression and sociability to establish and maintain their status. Relational aggression is particularly important in this regard, as its frequently covert nature defies easy detection by parents and teachers.

Few studies have explored the correlates of sociometric status in preschool, particularly in cultures beyond North America. Nelson et al. (2010) considered the interplay of sociability and aggression (physical and relational) in predicting controversial status among Italian preschoolers. In addition, they assessed physical and relational subtypes of victimization, in order to determine whether controversial status

☆ This research was supported by grants from the Family Studies Center and the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences at Brigham Young University, and the Zina Young Williams Card Professorship awarded to Craig H. Hart.

\* Corresponding author at: School of Family Life, Brigham Young University, 2102C JFSB, Provo, UT 84602-6720, United States.

E-mail address: [david\\_nelson@byu.edu](mailto:david_nelson@byu.edu) (D.A. Nelson).

children faced retribution for their often provocative nature. Findings showed that sociometrically popular children had pronounced sociability and low levels of aggression and victimization. Rejected status children had the opposite pattern. Neglected status children were not distinguished from average children. Finally, controversial children were highly aggressive and sufficiently sociable, and they invited the highest levels of both physical and relational victimization. The difference between controversial and rejected children was that sociable behavior buffered controversial children against wholesale peer rejection.

The purpose of the current study is to assess, for the first time, these associations in Russian preschoolers. A key question driving such research is whether the behavioral reputation of the controversial child is unique to Western samples (U.S. and Italy). Russia borders East and West and may not be fully consistent with the individualism that predominates many Western cultures. In particular, Russia may be more collectivist, following generations of Soviet communism. For decades, Soviet pedagogy promoted the values consistent with citizenship in a totalitarian socialist society, such as conformity, group-mindedness, and unquestioning obedience to authority (Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-Choque, 1998). Can the controversial status child be successful in establishing individual dominance in a culture that has long accentuated the collective over the individual? The controversial child seeks to stand out, and this may be inconsistent with the social tenets inspired by decades of communism.

To undertake this investigation, we must first identify potential behavioral correlates of sociometric status. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1970) landmark study of Soviet childhood, physical and relational aggression are expected in Russian peer culture. Specifically, "... the children's collective became an agent of adult society and the major source of reward and punishment" (p. 50) in seeking to instill communist values and behaviors. A child could be punished by the peer group via public criticism and potential exclusion from the group going forward. Accordingly, Soviet children were encouraged to harness the power of relational manipulation, consistent with the basic premise of relational aggression. Prior studies have investigated physical and relational aggression and victimization in Russian preschoolers (e.g., Hart et al., 1998, Hart et al., 2000), but this is the first study to address the social status correlates of such. Although aggression may not hold the exact same meaning across individualistic and collectivist cultures, we nonetheless expected this Russian sample to provide patterns similar to what have been obtained in the U.S. and Italy. In a collectivist culture, the controversial child needs to display adequate sociability to distract peers from his/her engagement in aggression. Greater social impact should also place the controversial child at risk of retribution from the peer collective, however.

## 2. Study aims and hypotheses

This study considers aggression, victimization, and sociability as they differentiate Russian preschoolers in sociometric status groups. First, we hypothesized that we would successfully identify these status groups with existing analytical procedures (described below). Second, prior research (Hart et al., 1998, 2000) has shown that aggression, victimization, and sociability can be reliably assessed in Russian preschoolers, using traditional measures (e.g., Cronbach's alpha, principal component factor analysis). We supplement prior research by employing SEM confirmatory factor analysis as a more stringent test of measurement adequacy. We verify that the observed variables, originally developed with Western datasets, are related in expected fashion with the underlying latent constructs.

Third, we provide our hypotheses for how behavioral reputations will reflect the various sociometric status extreme groups. Neglected children should evidence low levels of sociability, aggression, and victimization, consistent with their social obscurity. Sociometrically popular preschoolers were expected to show pronounced sociable behavior and low aggression and victimization. The opposite patterns apply to

rejected children. The basic premise at work for popular and rejected children is that predominantly positive or negative behavior is related to peer social preference in expected ways. Finally, controversial status children should parallel rejected children in regard to levels of aggression and victimization, but differ by being sufficiently sociable.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants

Participants included 221 children (108 boys, 113 girls) and their teachers in fifteen classrooms (mean of 17.2 children per classroom, range = 10 to 29) in three nursery schools in Voronezh, Russia. These data are part of a larger study conducted in 1995, just after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. The sample was 100% ethnic Russian as Voronezh was a sensitive military technology site during the Soviet period and foreigners were not allowed access to the city. The mean age of participating children was 60.23 months ( $SD = 8.54$ ; range from 44 to 79 months). Consent rate for the overall sample was approximately 86% (221/258). Teachers completed the teacher ratings and conducted the peer behavior nomination/sociometric assessments with each participating child.

Russian nursery schools traditionally act in loco parentis (meaning that the school takes all responsibility for in-school activities), and parents therefore did not give formal written permission for child participation (Hart et al., 1998). Instead, preschool administrators helped arrange parent meetings. Parents were assured of confidentiality of all data collected. If parents were against their child's participation, they successfully withdrew their child at this time. Parents of these preschoolers were generally well educated (means of 14.92 ( $SD = 2.34$ ) and 14.5 ( $SD = 2.42$ ) years for mothers and fathers, respectively; 12 years is equivalent to a high-school education).

### 3.2. Measures

All items described in this study were forward- and back-translated by Russian linguists.

#### 3.2.1. Peer behavior nominations

Children were asked in individual interviews to identify classroom peers who are known for sociability and physical and relational aggression (time constraints imposed by preschool administrators did not allow for victimization data). We used a picture board nomination procedure (e.g., Asher & Hymel, 1981) in which each participating child's picture was placed on a board. Children then pointed to the pictures of children who fit each behavioral descriptor (up to six classroom peers for each nomination item; see Table 1 for representative items). The number of nominations each child received for each item was standardized (z-scores) within each classroom.

**Table 1**  
Standardized factor loadings for peer behavior nomination items.

| Factor                | Items                                                                                      | Loadings |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Relational aggression | Who says, "I'm not going to be your friend anymore" when they are mad or angry?            | .90      |
|                       | Who says, "don't play with that kid or you can't play with us" when they are mad or angry? | .70      |
| Physical aggression   | Who pushes or hits a lot?                                                                  | .89      |
|                       | Who grabs toys or things away from other children?                                         | .86      |
|                       | Who pushes other kids out of the way to get something they want?                           | .87      |
| Sociability           | Who starts fights with other children?                                                     | .86      |
|                       | Who has lots of friends?                                                                   | .70      |
|                       | Who takes turns and shares?                                                                | .58      |
|                       | Who plays wild and is fun to be with?                                                      | .96      |

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7250452>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7250452>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)