RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER SOCIAL STATUS AND SELF CONCEPT OF PRE ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between self concept and peer social status. The participants were 300 children (equal percentage of girls and boys). The Self concept scale (Ahluwalia, 2003) was used to measure the self concept. A sociometry technique measuring the social status through peer nomination, and an 5-item scale for peer description were administered to children in year 10, 11 and year 12. Children were categorized into rejected and accepted social status. Findings supported the hypothesis that, different social status was related to different levels of self concept. The acceptee group stood out with the highest percentage of self concept and the rejectee group had the lowest value on total self concept.

INTRODUCTION

The study of self concept has awakened growing interest in psychological research of recent years. Despite the profusion of studies devoted to it, it is difficult to find a unanimous, accepted definition of the term self concept, given that it has been approached from different theoretical perspectives. Self concept is derived from the perceptions people hold regarding their personal attributes and the roles they fulfill in life (Meggert, 2004). Taylor *et al.* (2007), defined self concept is "the cognitive representation an individual has of him- or herself, Children's perceptions of their abilities affect their values, self regard, and beliefs about their competence to achieve personal and academic goals (Self efficacy: Bandura, 1986). Self concept, as a component of human personality development, has its own nature and peculiarity. Several authors have tried to specify the nature of the term self concept. Some define *self concept* as what we think and feel about ourselves. It is our self-evaluation and our sense of self-worth. Sometimes the terms *self-concept* and *self-esteem* are used interchangeably. Some researchers have written that self-concept includes the qualities, capabilities, and ways of thinking that define a person. Self-esteem is sometimes defined as a part of self-concept that comprises self evaluations. For example, a child may say, "I am a good reader" or "I am a slow runner." The self is developing throughout life and it starts to form, as remarked above, already in early childhood. As the child acquires new cognitive abilities these make it possible for the self to become more complex and unique (Harter, 2012).

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While younger children typically describe themselves quite simply and often by means of observable characteristics such as physical skills, older children display a greater cognitive capacity which allow them to describe themselves more carefully and nuanced and in distinct domains . The selves of older children are distinguished and integrated by comparisons to others. Discovering similarities and differences can have negative effects on the self in case one comes to the conclusion that one is not on the same level as others. These cognitive abilities are further consolidated as the child reaches adolescence and early adulthood. Children with low self concept are usually described as being hesitant to take risks or move out of their comfort zone. They often talk and think negatively about themselves. In contrast, children with very high self concept may be described as cocky, boastful, or arrogant. Persons with extremely high self concept are often perceived as threatening and aggressive. Having healthy self concept is a balance between being too guarded and too egotistical; it is also a balance between thinking too negatively or too positively about oneself.

Self concept is related to a number of life factors. Healthy self concept is related to experiencing school success, acceptance from peer group, friendship ties, feeling happy and satisfied, making healthy lifestyle choices, having rewarding relationships, and demonstrating effective coping skills. During a day, most people are part of several different groups. These different group constellations bring out varying traits and qualities in different people. Why do some people gain high status and some people low status? And what are the effects of being perceived as a highly likeable person versus not likeable at all? As implied by the title of Moreno's (1934) classic work

on peer social status, *Who shall survive*?, the pursuit of acceptance and status can be a harsh power struggle in which people have to take part whether they want to or not. Considering the multifaceted social situations, both benign and malevolent, that can arise in children's peer groups, it is interesting to investigate in what ways these have an effect on the individual. It seems that the social surrounding is a critical area having an outstanding impact on the creation of the self (Harter, 2012). By operationally defining and measuring a self concept and acceptance & rejection by peer group it is possible to expand the understanding of how these two variables are related. Social status, as measured by sociometric methods, reflects levels of acceptance and rejection within a peer group, and self concept is a stable and enduring evaluation of how an individual appraises herself. The purpose of the present paper is to explore any possible association between social peer status and self among early adolescents with the age range of 10-12 years studying in 5th, 6th and 7th grades of both urban and rural locality. The intention is to broaden the understanding of how children's social worlds and self concept are intertwined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Children studying in5th, 6th and 7th grades of Government, Aided and Unaided schools were formed the population. The participants were 300 primary school children (50% boys, 50% girls) from urban and rural areas of Dharwad Taluk, Karnataka. A structured schedule was used to collect the information

regarding age, gender, family composition, perceived health status, friendship ties and parenting styles, family living standard, school change, and academic achievement while friendship ties were the self ratings as "liked by many friends" or "liked by only few friends". As well as "having many friends" or only few friends. Self concept scale developed by Ahluwalia (2003) was employed. It is a self administered rating scale. It consists of 80 items, where in 14 items are filler items which are not considered for scoring. The six subscales include behavior with 16 items, intellectual &school status with 18 items, physical appearance &attributes with 12 items, anxiety with 12 items, popularity with 12 items and happiness & satisfaction with 10 items. It is a 2 point scale having alternatives 'Yes' or 'No'. One score is awarded if the answer tallies with the scoring key. The total score ranges with a minimum of 0 and maximum of 80 score because some of the items has been repeated in some components. Based on the total score, the children were classified into three categories as high (44-80), average (27-43) and low (0-26) self concept. Sociometric status can only be fully captured by peers, not by teachers. Children have an unique insight into the peer group, and research has shown differences in information gathered from peers and teachers (Cillessen, 2009). Reports from peers are commonly used to outline the social relationships of groups. Peer nomination is the most frequently used method where children are asked to nominate peers they like and peers they dislike (Terry, 2000). For example, the child nominates three peers who he or she wants to play with, and three peers who he or she does not want to play with. The social impact
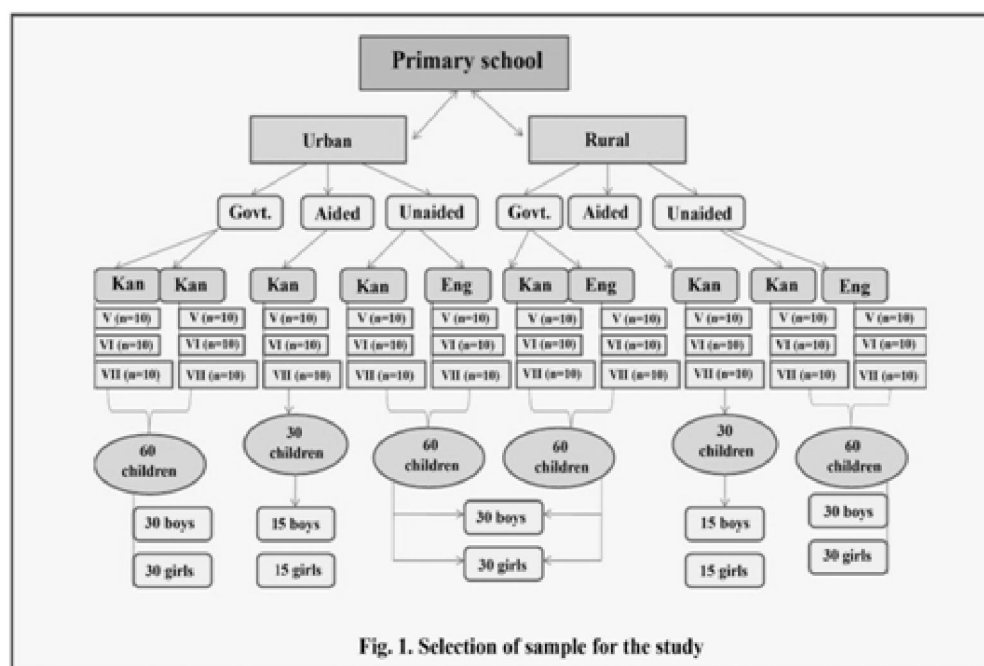

Fig. 1. Selection of sample for the study

Table 1. Self concept of Peer Accepted and Rejected children

N=300

Peer Acceptance/Rejection	Self concept			Total (%)	Mean±SD	Modified χ²	't' value
	Low	Average	High				
Acceptee	-	4 (2.7)	146 (97.3%)	150 (100)	62.02± 9.42	7.714**	4.24***
Rejectee	-	16 (10.7%)	134 (89.3%)	150 (100)	57.71± 8.11		
Total (%)	-	20 (6.7)	280 (93.3)	300 (100)			

** Significant at 0.01 percent level of probability ***Significant at 0.001 per cent level of probability Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage.

score is the total number of positive and negative nominations, and the social preference score is the sum of positive nominations subtracted by negative nominations. Based on total score children were categorized as 'Acceptee' and 'Rejectee'.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants were categorized by the sociometric classification procedure into two status categories: Acceptee ($n = 150$) and rejectee ($n = 150$). After the categorization procedure the data was explored and outliers were detected. Table 1 displays the comparison on self concept with respect to the acceptee and rejectee categories. Mean values and standard deviation for the total scale of self concept are presented in relation to these groups. There was a statistically significant difference in total level of self-esteem between these two different groups. The acceptee group had higher mean scores (M=62.02±9.42) than other status group (M=57.71±8.11). A Modified Chi square Test was used to investigate the associationship between two groups. The test revealed asignificant association close to statistical significance in self-esteem of the popular group ($Md = 96$, $n = 25$) and the neglectee children and self concept. This result was in agreement with view point of Mead (1976), the construction of the self is built upon how others view and evaluate that person. That is, interactions with others make up the basis for the self. Conversations of gestures are not necessarily verbal, but an indication of actions to which others respond. Research has shown that a good deal of support from parents and significant others tend to be related to high levels of self-esteem, while little support is related to low levels of self-esteem (Harter, 1999). When caregivers show love and support for those attributes of the individual, which he or she finds is the core of the true self, the child experiences authenticity (Harter, 2012). However, since the self is to a large extent dependent upon opinions of others, there is a risk of creating false selves.

Figure 2. Association of Perceived friendship ties and Self concept

The association between self rated self concept and perceived friendship ties among children were investigated and displayed in Figure 2. Relation with friends as perceived by the child was considered. The number of friends (quantity as having many/

less friends) and quality was categorized as liked by many and not liked by many. Those children who perceived as having many friends (94.6%) and they are liked by many friends (94.1) were having high self concept than the other children who perceived themselves with less friends and not liked by many. Research has shown that the strongest predictor of happiness is social relationships, and that other factors such as, money, health, and a place to stay only weakly correlate with happiness (Myers, 2000). According to Moreno (1934), individuals are "social atoms" surrounding themselves with other individuals, and these individuals express a mutual wish to be associated with one another. Attraction and repulsion, or acceptance and rejection, are processes which make up the basis for an individual's perception of others, and moreover, of other individuals' perception of the individual's self.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study investigated the relationship between peer social status and self-concept among primary school students/ pre adolescents, and found that, the two variables are related. Social status was related to overall level of selfconcept and the acceptee category received the highest scores and the rejected group the lowest. The acceptance and rejection contribute to an individual's perception of herself, and could explain differences in self-esteem for the different status groups. According to Moreno (1934) acceptance and rejection do not only make up the basis for how an individual perceives herself, but also for how other people come to perceive that individual. The result showed that participants' perceptions of their peers were related to individuals' perceptions of their own self.

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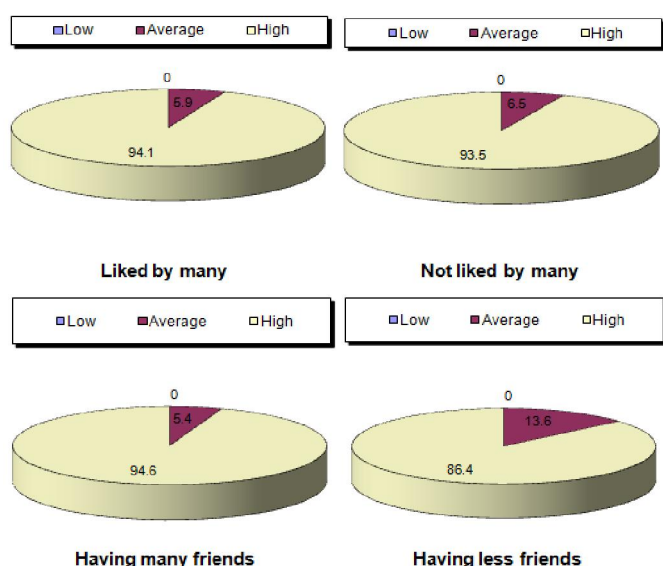
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