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# ABSTRACTS

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## CAN SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING STRATEGIES BE A PEER ACCEPTANCE PREDICTOR AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN?

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### Abstract

Peer-acceptance and the acquisition of social problem solving are the important accomplishments in the development of preschool children. However, studies on peer acceptance and social problem solving strategies among pre-school children in Indonesia have not been widely conducted by scholars yet. In reference to this, this research attempts to examine and explain the differences among the three types of social problem-solving strategies: prosocial, passive, and coercive which are commonly found in peer-acceptance. To obtain the objective, this research utilised a purposive sampling which voluntarily involved 162 children aged 4-6 years old as primary respondents. Those children were selected from intact family consisting of father, mother and children who lived together. Subjects numbered of 162 children. This study also voluntarily invited 212 children aged 4- 6 years old serving as peer-assessors. A technique of sociometry and hypothetical social situation dilemmas were utilized to gather data from the respondents. The data were then analyzed with the use of one way variance. With regard to the data analysis, the results reveal that there is no significant difference between the three types of social problem-solving strategies in a child's peer acceptance as performed by the value of a significance level which is less than 0.05 ( $F = 0.473, p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that any type of the social problem-solving strategies does not contribute to peer acceptance. It implies that parents and teachers are encouraged to design learning activities which could stimulate the character development to improve social skills as the part of pre-school children.



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**Keywords:** social problem solving strategy, peer acceptance, preschool children

### **A. Background**

In the development of child psychology, peer acceptance serves as one of the predictors to adjust the life-span development. Added to this, peer acceptance facilitates children to learn how to negotiate, to compromise, to cooperate and to explore any developing ideas (Hartup, 1992). This statement is supported by Sterry, Reiter-Putril, Garlstein, Gerhard, Vanatta and Noll (2010) who urge peer acceptance during childhood is a supporting factor for a healthy psychological development. Compared to children who are rejected by their peers, children who are accepted by peers is believed to be able to do with their adjustment to the environment. They perform the ability to well socialize, have no problem and difficulties in emotional and behavior, and have no academic problems (Rubin & Burgess, 2002; Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004).





Previous studies show that peer acceptance is influenced by various behaviors referred to children's social competency (Gresham, 1986; Putallaz & Sheppard, 1992; Vanatta, Gartstein, Zeller, & Noll, 2009). These behaviors indicate children's ability to balance their behaviors in order to achieve personal goals and to maintain good relationships with others (Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992; Stormshak & Welsh, 2005). Therefore, it is not only as a basis for social aspect development, socially acceptable behavior but also as a basis for academic function development (Bee & Boyd, 2007; Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk, & Wojslawowicz, 2005; Rubin, Coplan, Fox, & Calkins, 1995), children cognitive and emotional development (Calkins & Fox, 2002), and a fundamental stage for children to enter a more complex formal education.

In reference to socially accepted behavior, social problem solving strategies (as abbreviated SPSS) is a part of social behavior which becomes an important antecedent for peer acceptance (Walker, 2004). SPSS refers to a strategy used by the children to cope with problems arising from children's conflict (Berk, 2008; Green & Rechis, 2006; Mayeux & Cillessen, 2003). Shantz (1987) claims that conflict occurs if there is a conflict of interest and the discrepancy between children's need and reality. For children, conflict often occurs because of the intention to have or to use limited objects or friends' interference. SPSS is commonly used to resolve conflicts. It appears as the manifestation of the integration of children's cognitive, emotional and social development (Berk, 2012).

In terms of its types, there are three strategies of social problem solving which include prosocial, passive, and coercive (Izzaty, 2013). According to the previous studies, a prosocial SPSS provides effective solution while maintaining a good relationship with peer correlated with peer acceptance in socio-metric assessment. On the other hand, the agonistic or forceful behaviors that tend to hurt others negatively correlated with peer acceptance (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Mize & Ladd, 1988; Musun-Miller, 1993; Rubin & Daniels-Beirness, 1983; Rubin & Ross-Krasnor 1983). Aggressive children or likely to harm others is about 40% to 50% of the group of rejected children (Rubin et al, 2005). In the other words, prosocial tends to be peerly accepted.

When facing problems in social contexts, children who use passive strategies such as anxiety, fear and withdrawn tend to be reported as rejected. The group with these characters are 10% – 20% in a group of low peer acceptance. In addition, the relation between withdrawn attitude and low peer acceptance is getting stronger when children move to the end of childhood and early adolescence (Rubin et al, 2005). This statement is supported by the 19-years-longitudinal study as conducted by Asendorpf, Denissen and Aken (2008) years which reveals that children are likely to be aggressive and withdrawn in solving their social problem. Such behaviors still appear at the age of 23 years old.





In conclusion, SPSS affects individual adaptive functions (Chang, D'zurilla, & Sanna, 2004) from preschool to adolescence (Laundry, Smith, & Swank, 2009) even in early adulthood (Asendorf, Denissen, & Aken, 2008). Therefore, children need to be taught and familiarized with acceptable social strategies in daily basis. Social acceptable SPSS confer some advantages for children, namely having a lot of friends, doing work in a group more effectively, and minimising fight practices (Crick & Dodge, 1994) and responsively facing their social situation (Stormshak & Welsch, 2006). On the contrary, there is a relation among socially unaccepted SPSS and poor academic achievement, mental disorder, delinquency (Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995), and various psychopathology forms in the next level of development (Asendorf, Denissen, & Aken 2008; Fagot, 1998; Mayeux & Cillessen, 2003). Various social behaviors on children cannot be separated from how the children relate with their immediate environment, family, peer, and educator (Berk, 2012; Santrock, 2007).

In this research, theoretical basis referred to are Ecological System Theory of Bronfenbrenner (2005) and social information processing models of Kenneth Rubin (1986). In Ecological System Theory, the researcher emphasizes the importance of micro system layers and meso-system of 5 layers of ecology system. In the micro system layer, their immediate environment such as parents, teachers, and peers influences children development. Social problem solving strategies (SPSS) as one of the antecedents of peer acceptance in preschool is formed through learning experiences gained from their immediate environment. Related to the social aspect of development in children, Kostelnik, Whiren and Soderman (1988), and also De Hart, Sroufe and Cooper (2004) state that since their early age children are stimulated by their environment to establish the ability to acknowledge, to interpret and to respond to social situations in a certain way.

## **B. Research Methods**

This study takes a quantitative framework which is aimed at examining and explaining the differences among the three types of social problem-solving strategies: prosocial, passive, and coercive which are commonly found in peer-acceptance. To obtain the objective, this research utilised a purposive sampling which voluntarily involved 162 children aged 4-6 years old as primary respondents. Those children were selected from intact family consisting of father, mother and children who lived together. Subjects numbered of 162 children. This study also voluntarily invited 212 children aged 4- 6 years old serving as peer-assessors. Those respondents come from 6 kindergartens in Yogyakarta province.

There were two measurements employed in this study, namely **(1) Peer Acceptance** and **(2) Social problem solving strategy instrument**. The former employed a rating-scale socio-metric technique addressed to the subject in peer kindergarten. In order to measure the validity of peer





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acceptance, logical validity is used, while the reliability was tested by using test-retest ( $r = 0.735$ ).<sup>2</sup> The latter contained hypothetical social situation dilemma which dealt with 6 social situations: three situations about the existence of limited resources such as limited books, stationery and toys and the three other situations dealing with joining a group, maintaining a position with friends' disturbance and having a self-defense against to the provocation of mockery practices. SPSS measuring tools consisted of 4 parts (2 parts for girls interacting with girls and boys and 2 other parts for boys interconnecting with boys and opposite sex). Validity used to measure the content validity of SPSS was pilot-test. With regard to pilot-test result, a measure of SPSS can be said to be valid as it brings up answers in the form of SPSS with various categories of 90.4% of the total responses, while only 9.26% did not meet the objective response measured. The reliability on the measure used inter-rater reliability. Average inter-correlation ratio resulted in all combinations made ( $\bar{r}_{xx'}$ ) of 0.95 to 1. The reliability of the average made by raters was ( $r_{xx''}$ ) of 0.99 to 1.

### C. Research Findings

The gathered data were then analyzed with the use of one way variance of technical analysis. Variability variance with Levene's test was 1.774 with a probability of 0.173, which was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The test results performed the same variants on SPSS fulfilling assumptions to conduct Anova test. Furthermore, the results of the test showed Anova F value of 0.753 with a significance level of 0.473,  $p > 0.05$ . The conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no significant difference between the three types of social problem-solving strategies in a child's peer acceptance. In other words, it can be said that the social problem-solving strategies do not contribute to peer acceptance. It means, either prosocial strategies, passive or coercive on children when solving their problem do not affect the acceptance of their peers. These describe two explanations that SPSS does not play a significant role toward peer acceptance. However, these explanations remain within the scope of Ecological Systems Theory that emphasizes the role of peers on children and the intra-child relationships formed which lead to various situations that affect children development.

**First explanation.** Since the beginning, the study conducted used sociometric of Koch in 1933 (in Mpofu, Cartney, & Lambert, 2006), peer acceptance is always determined by the individual popularity within the group. It means that popular kids are the ones who are favored or chosen by their peers. The acceptance indicator is shown by the children who are able to adapt well using prosocial behaviors when resolving problems which occur as a result of interaction (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Uni-dimensional approach acknowledges that only children who have peer acceptable prosocial behaviors seem to be believed for some time. However, the reality is not always true. The reality shows there are more complex things in terms of peer acceptance. Not every popular



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child is a prosocial one (Cillessen & Rose, 2005). Rodkin and Hodge's research (2003) has shown that children who behave aggressively often demonstrate his dominance against small or weak ones. In this context, children who use aggressive behaviors are the ones who are popular.

In addition aggressive children, children who have manipulative skills are can be associated with the popularity, both boys and girls (de Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006). This situation is not considered beneficial for children who have passive SPSS and children who use coercive strategies, such as being aggressive and manipulative. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) state based on the research that the children who use passive SPSS cannot develop themselves freely, even tend to be affected to have coercive SPSS, the passive nature of children which follows their tendency can be a confirmation of internal coercive behavior. Passive children are acknowledged to be the target as a 'victim' of extortion or oppression by the children who have coercive behaviors. This certainly becomes a serious problem in the development of the children if there is no early intervention.

In line with the previous discussion, Lease, Kennedy, and Axelrod (2002) which examined children aged 4 to 6 years in the United States say that children are popular among their peers because they have good social skills as well as socially dominance. Domination is showed in children who have leadership, persuasion, and the ability to control. The results of comprehensive interviews with the subjects about the reasons why they choose favorable friends to play with; the result support the statement. Some of the reasons why choosing favorable friends to play with is because they have such good social competence, for example they are not irritating, peaceful, helpful, kind, amiable, talkative, and possessing the similarity in the selection of favorite games. These findings suggest that the popularity and peer acceptance are not only based on the concept of uniformity.

Related to the previous explanation, Cillessen and Bellmore (2011) state that the heterogeneity of the popularity of the preschool children can be seen from a broader perspective: there are two forms of social competence based on social information processing model which emphasizes the role of children social cognitive. The first form is the form of social competence of children's skills to be cooperative and pro'ssocial. This capability is supported by children cognitive skills to assess people and situations around by considering people's perspective and reading other's emotions. Thus, the ability to think positively, to perform interpersonal assessment accuracy, to take the perspective of others, to understand emotions will encourage prosocial behaviors, empathy, to understand, being supportive, and sensitivity to other children's expectations. These children will be favorable. These conditions do not drive children to behave aggressively or forcefully. The second form of social competence is demonstrated by children's ability to act effectively and to achieve ambitious goals in social situations, whether it is for their groups. This usually happens when children play something which require them to obey the rules. The behaviors displayed are imposing, being violent or



aggressive, and manipulating. This kind of child is usually in charge of being able to bring himself and his group to achieve their goals. Some other children look violent, aggressive, or untrustworthy, but on the other side it can be viewed as being intelligent, and powerful. Children who have those skills appear to be strong, authoritative, and become the center of attention in a group of friends although it is not always necessarily favorable. These kinds of children usually like the passive children or ones that have no power to overcome sorts of things.

**Second explanation.** Lemeriso and Arsenio (2000) state that the SPSS cannot solely play in describing the children's social competence. Social competence requires the coordination and integration of behaviors that show empathy and appropriate emotional responses. In this case, the children look to have prosocial behavior. It should be also indicated by the expression of empathy and appropriate emotions. According to the researcher's observation in the kindergarten, children are sometimes helpful but they are still not capable enough to express their emotions appropriately, both verbally and nonverbally. In one situation, there are children resolving conflicts when interacting using passive or coercive strategies, but in some other situations when a friend gets the displeasure, such as falling, having no toys or stationery, the child will help and show the expression of empathy. Things like this can also make the children popular or favored by the group.

#### **D. Conclusion and Recommendations**

With regard to the above result, there is no significant difference between the three types of social problem-solving strategies in a child's peer acceptance. This suggests that the social problem-solving strategies do not contribute to peer acceptance.

In reference to the conclusion, the following presents some recommendations.

##### **1. For parents and educators**

It is noteworthy that there is no result that social problem solving strategy contributes on peer acceptance. Although it is expected that there are other studies to prove the dominance in early childhood group, parents and educators need to cautiously continue to observe the social behavior of children at home and kindergartens. This is intended to act preventively as well as curatively as early as possible if a child shows behavioral changes in the negative sense.

Various objectives of interaction in children as the reason why they use a particular strategy can be put as instructional materials to establish children's social behavior. It is not only to understand what the children's perception in a situation of conflict is, programs and learning activities can be designed to use the situation to practice the expected social behaviors. Repetition and practice is predicted to form a prosocial internalization in children.





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**2. Future studies**

a. As stated in the conclusion, this study describes a relatively new phenomenon in popularity and peer acceptance. It is an open question whether this fact has been recognized by educators in preschool or not. To get the ideas on the matters, further research on the educators' understanding on the subjects need to be conducted. The awareness of the phenomenon can lead the guidance to the children as soon as possible, for example to lead to practical implications in the implementation of learning programs in preschool institutions.

b. Assessing how coercive strategies children influence those who tend to use passive SPSS. The alternative theoretical perspective that can be used is the Social Learning Theory of Bandura. According to Dereli (2009), in this theory can be seen how the imitation and observation inter-child social behavior can affect the change of previous strategies in children. Furthermore, Dereli also states that peer is an effective model to children whose high capability shapes other friends' behaviors.

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