

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILD RIGHTS AND PEER RELATIONS?

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The following study aims to determine the relationship between Child Rights Awareness and Peer Relations among 111 students (Boys = 47 Girls = 64) who were drawn from private schools in Bangalore urban district (mean age 12.11 years). Human Rights Temperature (Shiman and Palmer, 1999) and Index of Peer Relations (Hudson, 1993), were used to assess child rights awareness and peer relations among children respectively. The data obtained was statistically analyzed using Pearson Product Moment correlation method to examine the relationship between these two variables. Findings revealed that the score on peer relations is significantly inversely correlated with child rights awareness. From this, it can be inferred that children with higher awareness of child rights condition at school, have lesser relationship problems with peers.

*Keywords:* Child rights awareness, peer relations.

In today's world, the peer group has a strong influence on children. The peer group is an important arena for developing self-concept and building self-esteem and also helps them in cognitive ways. It helps children choose values to live by, offers emotional security and helps children learn how to get along in society (Perlmutter, Behrend, Kuo and Muller, 1989). Since, relationship with other children are vital to a child's happiness and healthy emotional development, children need to make friends. Children who are simply neglected or overlooked by their classmates or other peers may do better in a different class or school. But, children who are actively rejected by their peers are the ones who are at the maximum risk of developing emotional and behavioral difficulties in later life. (Olds and Papilia, 1994). It is seen that children who have social skills become better liked by the other children. (Bierman and Furman, 1984). The problems faced by children can be largely categorized under three areas – home, school and community as given by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2006). An awareness of child rights, is essential for the development of children at home, school and with peers. In 1989, the first legal binding international instrument, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to incorporate the full range

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of human rights-civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights was given. In 1992, India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The charter confers the following basic rights on all children across the world: the right to survival—to life, health, nutrition, name and nationality; The right to development—to education, care, leisure, recreation; the right to protection—from exploitation, abuse and neglect; and the right to participation—to expression, information, thought and religion (CRY, 2006). Most children are hardly aware of their rights. An awareness of child rights in terms of the child rights condition at school may influence their interaction with peers.

A study (Donohue, *et. al.*, 2003) showed that practices used by teachers in the classroom such as focusing on positive relationships in the classroom, encouragement of self-reliability in children and individual attention to children showed less peer rejection among children. Children showed less anger and more empathy toward a hypothetically disruptive peer.

Children's perception about themselves seems to influence them being liked or disliked. Children who expect to be liked actually are better liked. A study conducted (Rabiner and Coie, 1989) on young children, showed that children who got positive "feedback" about themselves were liked better by their peers than children who received no such message prior to the study. Furthermore, girls behaved more proficient in public, when they were rated positively by independent observers. It may be inferred that children who received no positive messages expecting not to be liked, did not exert themselves to others.

Training children on social skills can enhance their chances of being better liked by others. A study (Bierman and Furman, 1984) provided training on conversational skills, how to show interest in others, helping others, providing suggestions and advice. This also encouraged them to interact more with others. The children who underwent training showed lasting improvement, in terms of the skills imparted, influenced their peer acceptance and self-perception, than those children who did not receive any training and those who did not participate in the group.

A study conducted (Smetana, Kelly and Twentyman, 1984) showed that children differentiated between ethics and social principles and between different types of moral misdemeanors on criteria such as physical harm, psychological distress and unfair distribution of resources. The study included non-maltreated children along with children who were abused and neglected. Psychological distress was considered to be "universally wrong" for others by abused children. Unfair distribution of resources was considered to be "universally wrong" for themselves by neglected children. All children, except neglected children, were self-centered in their judgments for self than for others and judged all misdemeanors to deserve more punishment when committed by others rather than when committed by themselves.

Children who got an opportunity to exert their rights and were well assisted by parents performed better at school than those who have been denied their rights. It can be inferred that there is a significant relationship between child rights awareness and the students performance or education at school. A study conducted (Asiimwe, 2009) revealed that though most of the children in secondary schools knew their

rights, some others were not aware of either the rights or the responsibilities that come along with them. A lack of awareness of children's rights lead to a negative attitude from teachers towards implementation of rights and is articulated in terms of inability to guide students at school, lack of initiative to complete the syllabus and avoidance of conducting lessons.

Children who get an opportunity to exert their rights and who are well assisted by their parents perform better at school than those who have been denied their rights. It can be inferred that there is a significant relationship between child rights awareness and students' performance or education at school. A study conducted (Asiimwe, 2009) revealed that though most children were aware of their rights some other children were not aware either of their rights or the responsibilities that come along with them. Lack of child rights awareness of among teachers may lead to negative attitude, which is demonstrated in forms of inability to guide children at school, inefficiency in completing the syllabus and avoidance of completing the lessons in classroom. A strong need for awareness of child rights and responsibilities and the need to get students, parents and the school closer was seen in order to enhance performance of the students at school.

There is substantial existing literature to point out a significant relationship between child rights awareness and peer relations. The above mentioned studies conducted previously necessitate an exploration of the relationship between child rights awareness and peer relations. It may be interesting to investigate how the nature of peer relationships children have are related to child rights awareness. Therefore, the study is designed with the following objective.

## **METHODOLOGY**

*Objective:* To study the relationship between child rights awareness and peer relations among children.

*Sample:* The sample consisted of 111 school students (47 boys and 64 girls) drawn from private schools in Bangalore urban district. The sample was drawn using stratified sampling method, from Bangalore. The age of the sample ranged between 10-15 years with the mean age of 12.11 years [S.D. 1.22].

*Tools:* Socio-demographic details of the subjects were obtained and verified prior to the administration of the Human Rights Temperature and Children's Perceived Self Control questionnaires on the sample. The Human Rights Temperature short form tool used in the study was developed by Shiman and Palmer (1999) for evaluating the child rights awareness in the subjects aged 10 years and above. The questionnaire consists of 11 items measuring discrimination across race, sex, physical/intellectual capacities, friendship associations, age, culture, disability, social class/financial status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, life style choices, nationality, and living space. The total score obtained is indicative of the human rights temperature.

The Index of Peer Relations questionnaire developed by Hudson (1997) was used in the present study to measure problems with peers. The IPR is a 25-item instrument designed to measure the extent, severity, or magnitude of a problem the respondent has with peers. The IPR can be used as a global measure of relationship problems

with peers or one or more specific peer reference groups can be considered. Scores above a particular score nearly always indicate that clients are experiencing severe stress with a clear possibility that some type of violence could be considered or used to deal with problems.

## PROCEDURE

The above mentioned tools i.e., Human Rights Temperature and Index of Peer Relations were administered on the sample (N = 111). An informed consent was obtained from the school and the students, prior to their inclusion in the study. The data obtained was then subjected to statistical analyses. The statistical analyses were done using SPSS. The descriptive statistical methods were used to profile the sample and to assess the variables. The data was subjected to bivariate correlation statistical analysis to assess the relationship between child rights awareness and children's perceived self control.

## RESULTS

The descriptive statistics i.e., the mean score and SD on child rights awareness and peer relations are shown in Table 1. The maximum and minimum score obtained on each variable is also presented. The Human Rights Temperature was used to assess the child rights conditions within the school community. Higher scores indicate higher awareness of child rights conditions at school. The Index of Peer Relations was used to assess the extent, severity, or magnitude of a problem the respondent has with peers. The mean and SD of the child rights awareness and peer relations were 14.53 (SD 3.33) and 25.59 (18.12) respectively.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive statistics of Peer Relations and Child Rights Awareness.**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min/Max Obtainable</i>
Human Rights Temperature	14.53	3.33	0 -22
Index of Peer Relations	25.59	18.12	0 -175

Table 2 depicts the Pearson's product moment correlations between child rights awareness and the peer relations. There is an inversely significant relationship ( $r = -.27 < 0.01$ ) between peer relations and child rights awareness, indicating that higher the awareness of child rights conditions at school, the lower the relationship problems with peers.

**Table 2**  
**Inter Correlation Between Peer Relations and Child Rights Awareness**

	<i>Human Rights Temperature</i>	<i>Index of Peer Relations</i>
Human Rights Temperature	1	-.27**
Index of Peer Relations	-.27**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

## DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to determine the relationship between child rights awareness and peer relations. The mean score of the children on Index of Peer of

Relations, in the present study suggests the absence of clinically significant problems. The relationship problems in peer groups seem to reduce with an increase in awareness of child rights, thereby emphasizing the need to impart child rights awareness to all children across schools. The correlation result implies that child rights awareness and peer relations have a significantly inverse relationship. The results imply that the awareness of child rights, in terms of the general sense of school climate i.e, safety at school, indiscrimination/tolerance, desired behavior, growth and development, conflict resolution, non–violence, discipline, diversity, space and responsibility may influence peer interactions and expectations. Thus, it may inferred that children aware of these rights would indulge in non–violent, tolerant, disciplined, responsible desired behavior which enhances peers interactions thereby reducing relationship problems among peers.

Child rights awareness and peer relations have shown a statistically significant relationship in the present study. No substantial preceding studies have been conducted on child rights awareness and peer relations in children. This emphasizes the need for further research in this area. The relationship between the peer relations and child rights awareness may be explored in depth across different samples and with relation to other relevant psycho–social factors.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The results of this study can be used to understand how child rights awareness in terms of a general sense of school of climate influences peer relationships to reduce problems. Further, children’s perception of their school climate can help parents, teachers and counselors to understand them better. Their perception of the school climate may bear an influence on their perception of teachers and peers. This understanding can be used by parents at home and by the teachers, staff and administrators at school to modify the climate to enhance safety, development and positive behavior and reduce discrimination. An enhancement in positive climate in turn may influence the peer group interactions among children on the various dimensions to reduce relationship problems among children and enhance positive relationships. School psychologists and administrators at school need to emphasize the need for child rights awareness at school community to reduce discrimination and to enhance the quality of the school climate in light of the principles found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The results can also be used to reflect on the factors within the school that may bear an effect on the human rights climate. Suitable action plans can be drawn to enhance the human rights climate thereby enhancing child rights awareness. The study can be conducted to determine the child rights awareness and peer relationships across cultures and age groups. This can be helpful not only in the development of theory but also to modify the intervention strategies to suit various cultures and age groups.

The strength of this study is that it has addressed the need to assess the child rights awareness among children even in the urban population. The socio–economic and educational backgrounds of this sample are homogeneous in nature and the results can be generalized to a population of a similar kind in the age range of 10-15 years. The limitations of the study are: The data on child rights awareness and peer relations

questionnaires are self reported without using any objective measures to assess their observable behavior. The study excluded children studying in government schools. Hence the results of the study cannot be generalized to the population hailing from lower middle class families and rural settings.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

There is a need to understand the impact of child rights awareness on various other psycho-social factors influencing children. Such studies might be more informative about the level of impact child rights awareness has on the psychological and social functioning of children.

There is a need for program researches focusing on imparting and enhancing child rights awareness in children. These programs should include parents and teachers in both rural and urban settings. The maintenance of the desired outcome is a challenge in itself; therefore there exists a need for effective and meaningful programs to address these issues.

Often, the programs and studies focus on rural population to impart awareness than on urban population. While, the same programs can be modified to suit the urban children there is a need to focus exclusively on problems faced by the urban school children.

### **CONCLUSION**

The child rights awareness and peer relations are inversely significantly correlated. The results indicate that higher the child rights awareness in terms of a general sense school climate the lower the peer relationship problems among children.

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