



<https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/2025.v7n2.14>

Research Article

Sociometric Statuses of Children in Different Schooling Systems in Thane: A Thematic Analysis

Komal M. Kadam

Assistant Professor and Head

Kirti M. Doongursee College (Autonomous) Dadar (W), Mumbai

Disha Poojary

Department of Psychology,

Kirti M. Doongursee College (Autonomous) Dadar (W), Mumbai

kkadam822@gmail.com

Abstract

Childhood plays a critical role in shaping personality and lifestyle, with differing socio-metric statuses (Popular, Average, Controversial, Neglected, and Rejected) forming primarily during school years. Previous research shows that rejected and neglected children face challenges not only in school but also in future relationships and workplaces. This study aims to explore how family, friends, and the academic environment influence socio-metric status and later affect students' self-esteem, participation in activities, and societal views. Using an exploratory design, this study collected data of 40 students aged 5-14 years using open-ended interviews. Data was then analysed using ATLAS.ti software and thematic analysis was done. Many themes were identified that contributed to the development of the rejected/neglected socio-metric styles. Among students from Private school the family related problems are significant whereas among Government school children both the family and school environment factors seem to be significant. Private & Government school students show different patterns of impact on social behaviour. Overall the study identifies the need to have different plans to tackle the issues of being Neglected and Rejected differently according to children's unique environment. This study contributes to efforts of promoting the well-being of the student by highlighting the importance of the sociometric statuses and its effect on social development. The result of the study can be used by various educational institutes to revise the policies and provide a better environment for the students.

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Keywords: Socio-metric statuses, Students wellbeing, Private Schools, Government Schools, Social Development, Metro cities, Thane-Dombivali, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

Childhood plays a critical role in shaping personality and lifestyle. Socio-metric statuses have strong influence on the formation of personality primarily during school years. Sociometric status is an evaluation that reflects the extent to which the child is Accepted, Rejected, Neglected, or considered to be Popular, Average or Controversial by their peers as a group. Several studies have looked at sociometric status and its impact on adults. However, the measure is predominantly used with children and adolescents to gain more deeper insights about peer personality, relations and social performance.

Often, sociometric status is measured by asking peers to rate the status of an individual in the peer group. Many early researchers used various methods to study mainly two categories: Accepted and Rejected. However, this categorization was criticized by Coie, Dodge and Coppotelli (1982) who claimed that such grouping doesn't consider the true complexity of sociometric status. Hence, they proposed that children are classified into 5 groups:

1. Popular children: Children who are liked and admired by their peers.
2. Rejected children: Children who are excluded from the social groupings by their peers.
3. Neglected children: Children who are unnoticed and considered to be insignificant by their peers.
4. Average children: Children who are neutral among their peers.
5. Controversial children: Children who are mostly liked by a few children, at the same time disliked by quite a few other peers.

Various researchers have explored the Socio-Metric Statuses in children in varying contexts, showing the significant negative impact of being Rejected and Neglected on children. Many previous researches show that rejected and neglected children face challenges not only in school but also in future relationships and workplaces. The current research, using detailed interviews of children research, aims at exploring the experiences of students who are rejected or neglected by their peers while recognizing the causes of those Socio-Metric Statuses and their impact on children.

Literature Review

Thornton, 2007, while exploring the emotional and social challenges faced by children who lack friendships, recognized the feeling of rejection and loneliness in children, which they attributed to personality traits, social skills deficits, or environmental influences such as family dynamics and school culture. He also puts significant emphasis on the role of schools in implementing strategies fostering inclusivity and support for rejected children by creating programs that promote social skills, empathy, and peer relationships. Similarly, Jonson-Reid et

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al., 2013 provided detailed understanding of child neglect, particularly how it intersects with race and poverty. This research highlighted that neglect may take different forms in various societies and is a common form of maltreatment which is strongly linked to poverty, yet it is not a uniform issue. Black children are often reported for neglect at higher rates than their White counterparts, which the researchers attributed to socio-economic background. Interestingly, while giving ecological framework to the understanding of neglect, the study fails to take into consideration the unique neighbour and family aspects. The study also discussed how there exists an incongruity in theorizing the Neglect. Researchers apply the theories as per their understanding which leaves a huge gap in having a deeper level of understanding of Neglect.

Wentzel, K. R. et al., (1995) in their study tried to analyze how sociometric status influences academic performance. It finds that neglected children often have neutral or positive academic profiles, while rejected children face more academic difficulties due to behavioral challenges and peer conflicts. The study suggests that school-based social interventions can mitigate the negative effects of peer rejection on academic outcomes. Dodge, K. A. et al., (1982) tried to compare third- and fifth-grade children's behavioural patterns in terms of their differing sociometric statuses: rejected and neglected. They found that rejected children exhibit more aggressive and task-inappropriate behaviors, while neglected children tend to be withdrawn and initiate fewer social interactions. The study also highlights the need for an intervention system that promotes social skills and peer-acceptance among children.

Work done by van der Wilt F, van der Veen C. et al. (2018) examined how sociometric status correlates with oral communication skills in young children. Highlighting the display of lower levels of communicative competence, limiting their ability to form social bonds among rejected and neglected children. The result also directs our attention to the importance of intervention programs at early levels that enhance verbal expression and social interaction skills in children at risk of social isolation. In a subsequent study, van der Wilt F, van der Veen C. et al. (2019) tried to explore the factors contributing to peer rejection, namely- aggressive behavior, poor social skills, and negative peer perceptions. The study also highlights that the long-term and negative consequences are reflected not only in academic fields, but also in the level of self-esteem, and mental health status of children, which are specific to gender, differing contextual factors, socio-dynamic factors and anti-school culture among masses.

Children can also perceive and internalize peer rejection, which might influence their emotional well-being. Rejected children often develop negative self-perceptions and heightened emotional distress, while neglected children tend to experience loneliness but exhibit less emotional reactivity. Sandstrom, M.J. et al. (2003), hence, call for school-based psychological support systems to help children develop resilience against peer rejection.

Overall, the literature in the area of sociometric statuses underscores the complexity and interplay of popularity dynamics among school children, individual traits, gender, and the broader

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academic context (van der Wilt F, van der Veen C. et al., 2019). The studies also mention how being rejected or neglected can have a long term impact on children. The role of inclusion in schools, teachers, family and society become significantly important for the healthier development of children.

In India, especially in the Metro Cities, there is a huge gap between the socio-economic statuses of people living in a small geographical area (Subham Roy, Suranjan Majumder, Arghadeep Bose, Indrajit Roy Chowdhury, 2024). Huge discrepancies in various facilities like healthcare, transport, employment hubs and even educational institutions are found which are used by different socio-economic groups of people differently (Patwardhan, M. et al., 2023). Hence, people living in the same vicinity might attend different schools, Government or Private, depending on the background of the child. Recognizing the significant interplay of various factors affecting sociometric statuses, the current research tries to identify various factors related to private and government schooling affecting sociometric statuses and their differing impact on children.

Method:

Data Collection

The current study used thematic analysis with exploratory design, to investigate how the factors related to private and government schooling affect the formation of sociometric statuses and their impact on children. The researchers employed a convenient sampling strategy wherein 40 participants from the age group of 5 to 14 from Thane-Dombivali region were selected for the interviews.

Ethical Protocol

All participants (guardians) provided written informed consent. The researchers also briefly informed them that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time during study, should they wish to do so. Participants and their guardians consented to the recording of their interviews, which were subsequently transcribed. Interviews were saved on a password-protected (encrypted) system, which housed all data.

Interview Process

Participant interviews took place at their residence. Interviews followed a semi-structured format; a loose structure within which to explore various topics of interest. The central themes were: 1. Factors related to schools, teaching, peers, family and society in general that affect sociometric statuses. 2. The effects on academic performance, personality, societal approach etc. Wherever appropriate, the interviewer prompted participants to elaborate on relevant and interesting responses. No particular pattern of the interview was decided. The interviews followed the natural flow and covered the areas that were brought up by the participants.

Participants

The study used convenient sampling which is generally used by many researchers for quick and affordable data collection. To this end, only participants, aged 5-14, from Thane-Dombivali

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region were selected on the basis of convenience. Upon approaching children and their guardians at the residence, the researchers explained in brief the purpose of the study to the guardians and ensured harmless interaction with the children. After obtaining written informed consent from the guardians, the researchers scheduled interviews with children. The interviews were taken individually. 21 and 19 detailed interviews were conducted from children attending 3 private and 3 government schools respectively.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis. This required researchers to produce transcription of interview recordings and followed a few coding stages. To begin with, the authors read the transcripts in order to recognise potential themes. After reading it again the themes were refined and then were forwarded to the lead author. The second level of analysis consisted of both the first and second authors assigning codes to the data available in the form of transcription in the software- ATLAS ti. After assigning codes, the codings were grouped together under categories, sub-themes were generated. Memos were generated and later on the network of these codes was generated based on the coding done. At the third stage, the network of codings was generated which helped visualise the trend in data that was obtained. Next, the authors reviewed the found patterns prior to defining and naming them. Finally, once themes were finalized, by both the authors, the write-up of the report began.

Result

The data analysis produced codings for the following themes.

Family-related factors: Comparison of family related factors included codings of Positive Experiences like supportive (“I like being with my grandmother”). Negative experiences like abusive family (“They don't pay any kind of attention to me, all they do is shout at me. yeah they would pay attention if they get time from fighting”), neglecting family members (“he gets away with anything he dose and he gets all the attention and love from mom and dad also you know he goes to a better school than me”), Dissatisfaction with family members (“dad is not home most of the time i don't like my grandparents they like my brother more than me and my aunt makes me do most of the chores only if i had my mother with me i would have had all the freedom in the world”). This theme tried to compare the family dynamics of the children attending different schools.

Sibling Bond: This theme had two sub groups of codings- Positive Experiences like good bonds, supportive siblings like “it's nice she (sister) takes good care of me”, and negative experiences like conflicts like “My brother fights a lot with me and my sister makes me do her work”, sibling comparison like “i do most of my work on my own my dishes, folding my clothes ,and all other work not like my brother he is spoiled by parents”, and jealousy.

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Teachers: This theme covered coding for Positive Experiences like affection towards teacher, respect like “Yes i like my marathi teacher she teaches very well ”. Whereas the Negative Experiences like abuse by a teacher (“I don't like them, they are harsh with us there is this sir who hits us”), scolding (“no i get beatings and scoldings cause of studies ”), disrespectful behaviour, and non-enjoyable teaching style (“Yes.some teachers are good but most of them don't teach well shouting at everyone most of the time”). And the Neutral Experiences included no extreme views of the teachers (“no opinion”).

Friends at School: Positive Experiences with Friends at School included codes like good bonding, trust, and helping nature of the friends (“I have a lot of friends around 17 and all are close”, “For now, i have a lot of friends but from these 6 good friends”). Negative Experiences included lack of connection, refraining from friends and lack of trust like “I don't like making new friends as I don't want people who use bad words if my division changes next year there will be such people only, so I don't want to make new friends”, “as i said earlier it's hard to trust people now the 5 friends i have are my childhood friends that's why we are friends i have not made new friends from a really long time ”. Neutral coding involved no such extreme feelings towards classmates like “if that person likes playing video games i will befriend them”. Some children also showed a deeper level understanding of what friendship is like (“If I like I should talk to that person I will and if that person has something that will help me in future, I will surely talk to them and befriend them”, “I will talk to them about their interest and get to know them better ”), which was later given coding of Better Understanding of Friendship.

Socio-Economic Status: Students Socio-Economic Statuses were also coded under Low, Middle and Upper class based on their parents occupation and income level. Also, coding was assigned only to the responses that were relevant to the theme.

Societal View: Positive Societal View included codings like wanting to befriend people around them, doing good for the society etc. No child showed a significant Negative View about the society like dissatisfaction, rage etc. Neutral Views covered non-extreme views about society. Analytical View involved codings for having complicated understanding of the world, eg - “I don't like people who are to free to do whatever they want like people who smoke, drink alcohol and trouble others with their behavior also people who use bad words such people make me angry”, “I like such people who are not narrow minded like the old generation and have a better way of thinking like our new generation”. Some children also showed Morally Bounded Views about society where they displayed understanding of right and wrong behaviour in society: “I get angry when there is some innocent person being troubled by others and he or she not taking stand for themselves So, when I see something like this happening in front of me I don't go at that moment and help that person In Front of everyone because I got in some trouble for doing this in past so once everything is done, I go to the innocent person and tell them how they should face such problems” etc.

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Personality: Some children showed confidence in various areas like answering questions in class and being happy for being selected by the teacher to answer the question asked. “I feel good that madam chose me” etc. Some children expressed their general fear for being called out, and about society in general and disinterest in social interaction. “It's hard talking to people i need to much energy”, “I don't like it at all i am completely disinterested why do they want me to answer”

Compliments Reaction: Discomfort with complements involved codings for Discomfort like “I feel shy when someone compliments me”. Denial was coded for responses like - “If someone compliments, I will say no you don't need to say such good things about me”. And a Positive Acceptance was coded for the responses like: “Yeah, it feels good, and I accept that compliment by saying thanks”, “I feel happy when someone compliments me”.

Academics: Lack of Interest in studies were coded for the responses like “I don't like studying”. Interest in studies like “I like how I can experience what I am studying and feel like I also don't need to by heart everything I can understand this subject and write everything in my exams in my own words and I score good marks”, “I have liked math since childhood. I understand math properly, so it's fun solving problems makes me feel like I am playing a game”. And Neutral Academic Interest was assigned codes for the responses like “Sometimes, I study”. Table 1 elaborates the density of the codes (number of times the codes are repeated) in the private and government school children.

Conclusion

Impact of being Rejected/Neglected on children is moderated by various factors differently in Government and Private school settings. Among students from Private school the family related problems are significant whereas among Government school children both the family and school environment factors seem to be significant in the development of Rejected and Neglected Socio-Metric status.. Teaching Related factors also vary significantly in both schooling setups. Private & Government school students show different patterns of impact on social behaviour. Children also differed in terms of socio-economic status they came from where many children from government school came from middle and lower socio-economic backgrounds. While many children displayed neutral views about society in general, most students from private (and not from government) schooling had analytical and morally bound viewpoints. Many children from private schooling showed confidence in social/classroom interaction, whereas many children from government schools exhibited anxious patterns in social/classroom interactions. In the academic domain, children from private schooling showed more satisfaction with and interest in studies. These obtained patterns of themes show clear differences in various domains, pointing at the need to have different intervention strategies for dealing with the problems faced by different children with Rejected/Neglected children.

Discussion

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Limitations of the Study

Limited sample size: The sample size, the number of schools and the region covered is inadequate in generalizing the findings to the society at large.

Lack of predictive ability: The themes covered are limited. Many more themes like personality, Intelligence, Cultural differences can be covered in measuring the impact on socio-metric statuses. Similarly, complex interplay of these factors was not studied that could have potentially added to the understanding about the socio-metric factors as well as their effects on a child.

False Negative Picture of Government Schools: The current data trend can be falsely interpreted as the inadequacy of government schools to provide to children and inferior status of the students. However these factors alone may not accurately predict the status of these schools. The findings are not conclusive of the inferior status of government schools.

Interventions: Identifying contributing factors to the socio-metric statuses will help us strategize plans for improvements. Overall the study identifies the need to have different plans to tackle the issues of being Neglected and Rejected differently according to children's unique environment.

Solution 1. Private schools may work on developing programs that help strengthen bonds between the students. Counseling can be provided to the students with family problems.

Solution 2. The government schools may work upon improving the teacher-student relationships and improving teaching quality.

At both school levels, the students should be provided with a good environment, infrastructure to make studies more interesting. And more importantly, counseling should be provided to deal with family issues and to work on self-esteem in order to prevent and reverse the effects of being neglected/rejected.

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Table 1

Density of the codes used on the data

Themes	Group of codes	Density (Private)	Density (Govt.)
Family	Positive Experiences	3	2
	Negative Experiences	12	7
Sibling Bond	Positive Experiences (bonding)	09	11
	Negative Experiences (Conflicts, Comparison)	0	7
Teachers	Positive Experiences	9	6

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	Negative Experiences	1	10
	Neutral Experiences	4	3
Friends at School	Positive Experiences	9	8
	Negative Experiences	10	10
	Neutral Experiences	4	10
	Better Understanding of Friendship	20	3
Socio-Economic Status	Low	0	8
	Middle	0	10
	Upper	2	0
Societal View	Positive	1	5
	Negative	0	0
	Neutral	13	7
	Analytical	8	0
	Morally Bounded	11	0
Personality	Confident	12	3
	Nervousness/Avoidant	1	8
Compliments Reaction	Discomfort with Complements	0	3
	Denial	6	2

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		Acceptance	14	12
Academics	Lack of Interest		2	3
	Interest		16	6
	Neutral		1	5
