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Conceptualizing and distinguishing nonphysical aggression in preschool children

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Since about two decades, researchers focus on the study of nonphysical forms of aggression. Conceptualizing these forms of aggression, however, is not an easy matter. Nonphysical aggression is less visible than physical aggression and often it is hidden or indirect. In young children, nonphysical aggression may be even more difficult to identify, as it is strongly interwoven with physical aggression. The difficulties at the conceptual level become clear when one looks at the varying categories researchers use to typify nonphysical aggression: verbal, social, relational, indirect and passive aggression. Further, difficulties at the conceptual level may hinder the construction of measures, particularly in young children. In this paper, we start by giving a summary of the main conceptual and measurement difficulties we faced when studying nonphysical aggression in preschool children. Next, we focus on a self-developed aggression scale for teachers in preschools. We present how items have been selected and formulated, using a bottom-up approach, and report on the factor structure of the scale, based on data from a sample of 533 4-to-8-year old preschoolers.

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