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The Role of Friendships in Children's Happiness and Wellbeing

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Abstract

Several studies have shown that the presence of a best friend, but not a child's popularity, is a significant predictor of positive mental health. This study was designed to examine whether 'best friendship' and 'popularity' have differential effects on the happiness and wellbeing of primary school children in New Zealand. Children (23 males and 35 females aged approximately 9-10 years old) listed three classroom friends, including their best friend for whom they completed a Friendship Intimacy Scale of common friendship activities (such as sharing secrets). Children also completed three measures of happiness and wellbeing. Each child was assessed as high or low in popularity on the basis of the number of friendship nominations received. Each child was also assessed as either having a best friend or not according to whether their best-friend nomination was reciprocated or not *and* whether or not the pair engaged in a high level of common friendship activities. This created four types of friendship patterns: 'high popular/best friend', 'high popular/no best friend', 'low popular/best friend' and 'low popular/no best friend'. Scores on the measures of happiness and wellbeing were examined as a function of the four friendship types. Unlike previous research, no significant differences in happiness and wellbeing were found between the four groups. These results are discussed in terms of the limitations of the study and the opportunities for further research.

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