

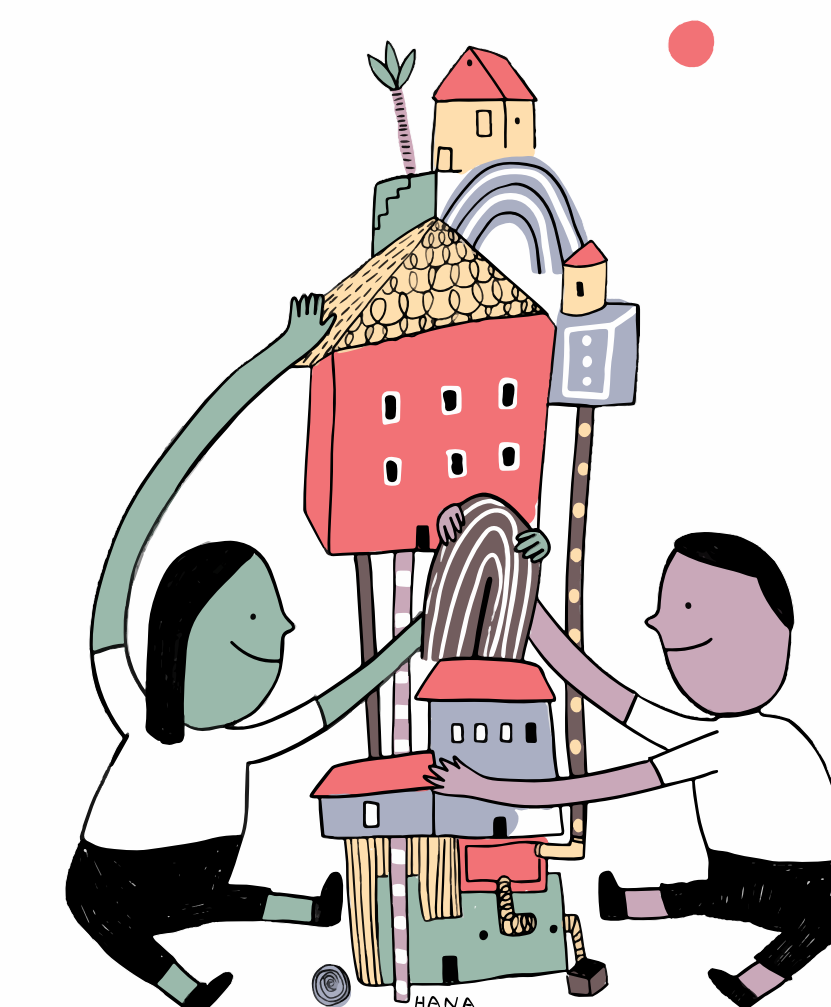
The role of perceived social norms and personal norm on attitudes towards refugee peers

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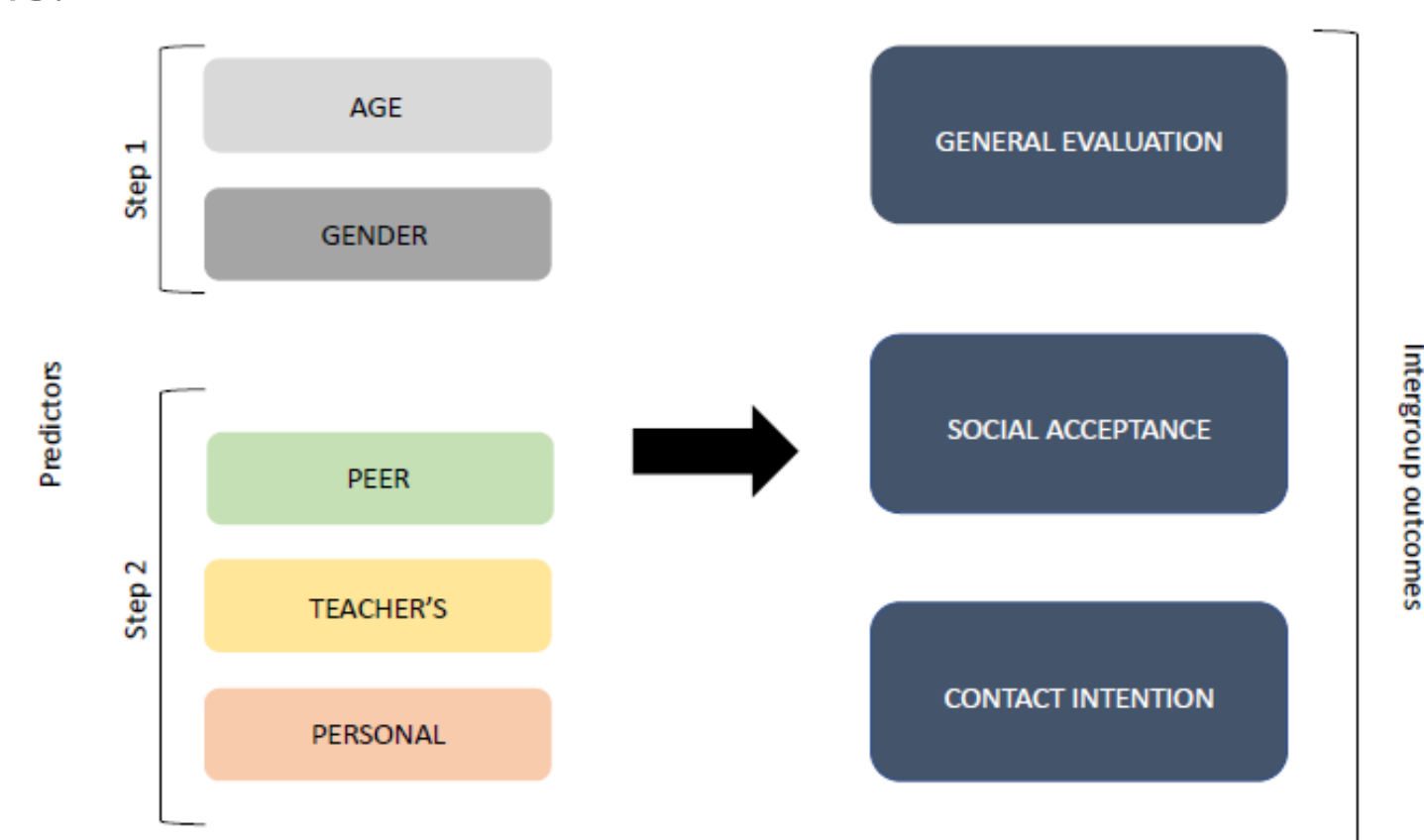


Introduction

Refugees just recently started attending schools in Croatia. Aside from the opportunity for regular intergroup contact, schools provide an environment where children observe the behaviours of their peers and teachers, adopting norms concerning social relations. Norms have been shown to predict a variety of intergroup outcomes among children. However, only recently have researchers started to analyse perceived social norms and their relative contributions to intergroup outcomes (McKeown & Taylor, 2018; Pehar et al., 2020; Tropp et al., 2016). Perceived social norms may influence attitudes by providing a sense of what is socially acceptable or unacceptable, while personal norms shape attitudes based on an individual's moral principles and values. Furthermore, when multiple norms are present in a context, the most salient norm will define the behaviour (Stok & de Ridder, 2019).

Aim

The study aim was to explore the predictive power of social norms related to the school context and personal norm of exclusion for three intergroup outcomes related to refugee children in the context of limited opportunity for intergroup contact. Therefore, we explored to what extent perceived social, i. e., teachers and peer norms and personal norms of the majority, are predictive for three types of attitudes towards refugee children - general evaluation, social acceptance and contact intentions.



Method

In autumn 2021, we conducted a survey in 52 classes across 17 primary schools in four cities in Croatia. The survey included 761 host-community children from 2nd to 8th grade who were attending classes with refugee children. The questionnaire assessed norms and attitudes toward refugees. The age of the participants ranged from 8 to 15 years ($M = 10.1$, $SD = 1.9$), with a gender-balanced sample of 48% girls.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for outcome and predictor variables

Variables	Scale	Items	Reliability	Range	M	SD	N
Outcomes	General evaluation	1	–	0-10	7.6	2.2	727
	Social acceptance	5	.686	0-1	–	–	722
	Contact intention	3	.890	1-5	3.3	1.3	734
Predictors	Peer norm	3	.866	1-5	10.1	1.9	749
	Teachers' norm	3	.760	1-5	–	–	761
	Personal norm	3	.840	1-5	3.7	1.1	737

Table 2. Correlations of all measured variables

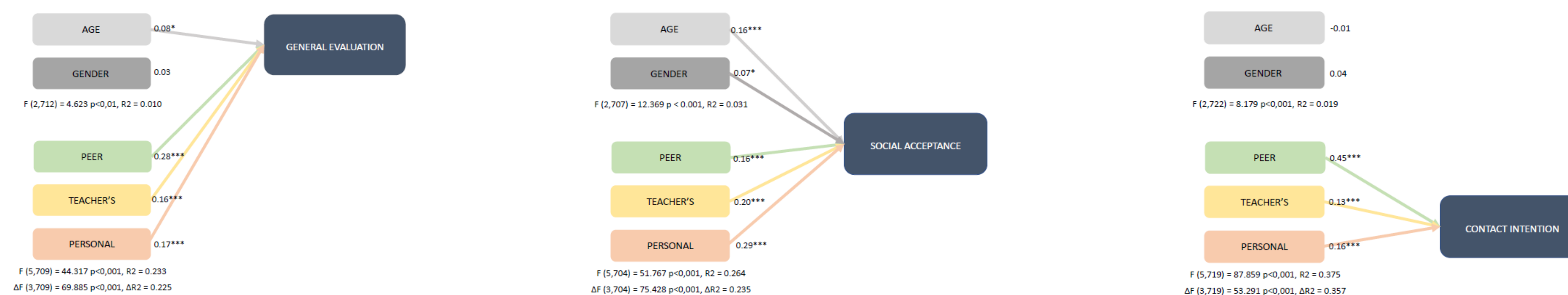
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. General evaluation	–	.39**	.44**	.03	-.10**	.42**	.36**	.34*
2. Social acceptance		–	.42**	.12**	.12**	.33**	.35**	.41*
3. Contact intention			–	-.08*	.13**	.58**	.40**	.38*
4. Age				–	-.06	-.16**	.01	.01
5. Gender ^a					–	.11**	.08*	.16*
6. Peer norm						–	.50**	.39*
7. Teachers' norm							–	.31*
8. Personal norm								–

Note. a Male = 1, Female = 2.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Results and discussion

The average values on all outcome and predictor variables in our sample are above the theoretical midpoint of the scale, showing that pupils generally positively evaluate refugee peers, accept social relations with them and are willing to engage in contact with them in the future. Children also perceive their social environment as supportive towards refugee peers and have a positive personal norm relating to refugee children (Table 1). Furthermore, we conducted three separate two-step hierarchical regression analyses, one for each outcome. We simultaneously regressed all three outcome variables onto all predictor variables in Step 2 to examine the unique contribution of each while controlling for age and gender in Step 1. For better insight, only significant predictors are depicted below.

Results show that all norms are predictive of all the outcomes. However, the relative importance of norms differed for the three outcomes. Peer norms seem more important for contact intention and general evaluations of refugees, while personal and teachers' norms were more important in predicting social acceptance. Regarding the sociodemographic variables, age was a relevant predictor for general attitude and, together with gender, significantly predicted social acceptance. The predictive power of norms becomes more pronounced for outcomes closer to real behaviour, such as contact intentions (38% of variance explained in Step 2), than for attitudes, such as general evaluation of refugee children (23%) and social acceptance (26%).



Conclusion

The results highlight the crucial role played by social and personal norms within the school context in shaping attitudes towards refugee peers. These findings have important implications for educators and policymakers, particularly in light of Croatia's growing diversity of classrooms.

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