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The Long and Short-Term Effects of Problems Experienced by Young Children in Their Peer Relationships on Social and Emotional Development

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the long and short-term effects of aggressive behaviour with peers, asocial behaviours with peers, and excluded by peers levels of preschool children on the social-emotional variables (making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness). In this study, where five-year-old children were included, the pre-school education teachers completed the Child Behaviour Scale (aggressive with peers, asocial behaviours with peers and excluded by peers subscales) and Social-Emotional Well-Being and Resilience Scale (making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness subscales). According to the findings of the study, the problems in peer relationships decreased in the second measurements compared to the first measurements, while the social-emotional variables increased in the second measurements compared to the first measurements. In the study, the three problems faced in peer relationships predicted at least one of the social-emotional well-being variables both in the short-term and the long-term. This result may be interpreted as the fact that peer relationships have strong effects on social and emotional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Preschool period is a period of time when the peer relationships, social-emotional well-being and resilience variables develop. The development in the first years of life has a power to affect the subsequent years (Gülay 2011; Ladd 1999). Preschool period is an important time for children to acquire social and emotional competencies (Dobrin & Kallay, 2013). Social-emotional competencies include the concepts of self-regulation, social awareness, social problem-solving, peer relationships and social skills (Denham et al., 2014). Social-emotional competencies are closely associated with the concepts of well-being and resilience (Erbay, & Durmuşoğlu Saltalı, 2020). Well-being concerns the daily life of individuals. Thus, it is perfectly natural for adults to care about their children's well-being (Mayr & Ulich, 2009). Effects on the physical and emotional health in childhood may remain for a life-time (Ray et al, 2020). Resilience is the capacity for a person to survive difficulties and successfully adapt to these difficulties (Masten, 2014). In fact, it is a dynamic process expressing adaptation in a positive direction (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker 2000, p.543). Howell et al., (2010) stated that resilience develops pre-school emotion regulation and prosocial skills. Social and emotional competence may either ease or complicate children's life, according to its degree (Denham et al., 2009). Social and emotional development which progresses in a healthy way, develops abilities such as establishing positive relationships, developing a positive sense of self, effectively expressing feelings and regulating emotions, successfully performing difficult tasks and developing a positive viewpoint (Oades Robinson & Green 2011; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). As a result of their study based on observations and interviews which took about nine months, Kirk and Jay (2018) found that the environment, plays and relationships in preschool classrooms supported the social and emotional development of children. Any setback in one of these three elements affected the others negatively.

Peer relationships facilitate the process of knowing themselves as from childhood and help to see their abilities and limits. When young children start preschool education, they realize that they are a member of a crowded group. Peers and peer relationships begin to develop and to affect the child's development both directly and indirectly (especially during plays) (Kruszewska & Kocot, 2019). Children who develop positive relationships with their peers develop a positive sense of self that provides resilience (Mihaela, 2015). Within the scope of this study, aggression, asocial behaviours and exclusion were addressed as peer problems. Social exclusion and peer rejection are the phenomenon that may commonly be encountered in social interactions of children and adolescents. Exclusion and rejection may arise due to a number of reasons and these experiences may have harmful consequences in terms of emotional and behavioural health (Killen & Rutland, 2011). Aggression, which can be encountered in the first years of life, may continue in the subsequent years (Campbell, 2002; Olweus, 1979). Asocial behaviour contains aggression, as well as negative behaviours such as impulsivity, hostility toward authority, noncompliance, and defiance (Chacko, Anderson & Rajwan, 2013). The aggression, asocial behaviours, and exclusion variables are the peer problems that may be in interaction. Children, who display aggressive behaviours toward their peers, may be excluded by them and may also display asocial behaviours outside aggression (Bayat & Jamnia, 2019). Similarly excluded children may display behavioural problems like aggression in the course of time. This necessitates approaching peer relationships in the preschool period more carefully. Peer relationships in the first years of life may affect social-emotional well-being in both kindergarten and in the subsequent years. In a study conducted by Öneren Şendil and Tantekin Erden (2014) with 42 preschool children, they found that as children's peer preference levels increased, their social competence levels also increased. Likewise, a lower peer preference level was found to be associated with social incompetence. In their longitudinal study conducted in Canada, Guhn et al., (2016) followed preschool children until the fourth grade in the primary school. They found that teacher-rated social competence in kindergarten most strongly predicted 4th graders' self-report of their connectedness to peers, and emotional maturity most strongly predicted emotional well-being (Guhn et al., 2016). The studies on peer rejection and victimisation suggest that negative social experiences may ruin children's emotional well-being, hinder their socio-

emotional development, and make them defenceless against peer experiences in the future (Stenseng et al., 2015).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of studies on the peer relationships, social-emotional well-being and resilience variables in Turkey. However, the number of longitudinal studies examining peer relationships in Turkey is limited (Gülay Ogelman & Erten Sarıkaya, 2013). It is believed that this study will guide relevant future studies especially in Turkey. Increasing relevant longitudinal studies is crucial for revealing the variables which affect the social and emotional development of young children and following the process.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the long and short-term effects of aggressive behaviour with peers, asocial behaviours with peers, and excluded by peers levels of preschool children on the social-emotional well-being and psychological resilience variables. In this context, the subgoals of the study are as follows:

- Do the variables of peer relationships (aggressive behaviour with peers, excluded by peers and asocial behaviours with peers) in the autumn term have a predictive effect on the social-emotional well-being and psychological resilience variables (making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness) in the same term?

- Do the variables of peer relationships (aggressive behaviour with peers, excluded by peers and asocial behaviours with peers) in the autumn term have a predictive effect on the social-emotional well-being and psychological resilience variables (making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness) in the spring term?

- Do the variables of peer relationships (aggressive behaviour with peers, excluded by peers and asocial behaviours with peers) in the spring term have a predictive effect on the social-emotional well-being and psychological resilience variables (making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness) in the same term?

METHOD

Participants

Five-year-old children (19 boys (47.5%), 21 girls (52.5%)), attending preschool education and showing normal developmental characteristics, were included in the study. The average age of children is 5 years, 3 months, 27 days (minimum 5 years, 3 days; maximum 5 years, 7 months, 9 days). All of the children live with their parents.

Research Instruments and Processes

The Child Behaviour Scale (Aggressive with peers, asocial behaviours with peers and excluded by peers subscales): It is a measurement tool developed by Gary W. Ladd and Suzan M. Profilet in 1996 to evaluate the peer relationships of preschool children according to the information provided by teachers. The scale consists of six subscales and a total of 44 items. The subscales are as follows: Aggression with peers, prosocial behaviours with peers, asocial behaviours with peers, anxiety-fear, exclusion by peers, hyperactivity-distractibility. Items are scored as “Never”, “Sometimes”, and “Always” (Ladd & Profilet, 1996). Child Behaviour Scale was adapted to Turkish in 2008 (Gülay, 2008). In the measurement tool, the subscales are evaluated independently. Scores obtained from the scale indicate levels in various dimensions regarding peer relationships. Higher scores signify that this dimension is encountered more often and lower scores signify that the dimension is encountered less often. In this study, aggressive with peers, asocial behaviours with peers and excluded by peers subscales were used. Internal consistency coefficients of the subscales within the scope of the study were .79 for aggressive with peers subscale, .84 for asocial behaviours with peers subscale, and .88 for excluded by peers subscale.

Social-Emotional Well-Being and Resilience Scale (PERIK-in English: Positive development and resilience in kindergarten) (Making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness subscales): (Mayr and Ulich (2006) focused on well-being positive development concepts when developing this assessment tool. PERIK was developed based on the concepts of mental health, resilience, and school readiness. In a recent study related to the scale, the final form of the scale with six subscales and 36 items, was attained (Mayr & Ulich, 2009). The scale consists of five subscales. The subscales are as follows: Making contact-social performance, self-control-thoughtfulness, self-assertiveness, emotional stability-coping with stress, task orientation and pleasure in exploring. The scoring of the five- point likert scale is performed as follows: "Always=5, Usually=4, Partly=3, Seldomly=2, Never=1". The highest and lowest scores to be obtained from each subscale are 30 and 1, respectively. The scale is completed by teachers in the name of children. PERIK was adapted to Turkish in 2018 (Durmuşoğlu Saltalı et al., 2018). In this study, making contact-social performance and self-control-thoughtfulness subscales were used. Within the scope of the study, the internal consistency coefficient was found to be .92 for the making contact-social performance subscale and .92 for the self-control-thoughtfulness subscale.

Application

In this study, the preschool education teachers completed the Child Behaviour Scale and Social-Emotional Well-Being and Resilience Scale for each child twice (autumn and spring). The teachers were informed about the topic and assessment instruments before the study.

Data analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was applied in the study. Büyüköztürk (2004, p. 87) defined regression analysis as a process of distinguishing one of two or more interrelated variables as dependent variable and the others as independent variable and explaining the correlation between them with a mathematical equation. Additionally, it is stated that if the dependent variable is one and the independent variable is also one in regression analysis, the Simple Linear Regression Analysis will be used (Büyüköztürk, 2004, p. 87).

FINDINGS

Table 1. *Results of correlation coefficients and simple linear regression analysis on the exclusion by peers and social-emotional well-being, resilience variables*

Variables	r	R	R^2	*F*	Std. E.	ß	t	p
Excluded-A*								
Making contact, social performance- A*	-.692****	.692	.479	34.943	.066	-.692	-5.911	.000*****
Excluded- A.*								
Self-control, thoughtfulness-A.*	-.561****	.561	.315	17.470	.087	-.561	-4.180	.000*****
Excluded-A.*								
Making contact, social performance- S.**	-.638****	.638	.407	26.030	.092	-.638	-5.102	.000*****
Excluded- A.*								
Self-control, thoughtfulness-S. **	-.556****	.556	.309	17.002	.098	-.556	-4.123	.000*****
Excluded- S.**								
Making contact, social performance- S.**	-.648****	.648	.420	27.570	.066	-.648	-5.251	.000*****
Excluded- S.**								
Self-control, thoughtfulness-S**	-.359***	.359	.129	5.636	.080	-.359	-2.374	.023***

* A: Autumn ** S: Spring *** *p<.005,* **** *p<.001,* ***** *p<.000*

According to Table 1, the first measurement performed in the autumn term showed that the excluded level had a negative significant correlation with the making contact and social performance (r=.-692), self-control, thoughtfulness (r=-.561) levels in the same term (p<.001). As the excluded level increased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables decreased and as the excluded level decreased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables increased. The excluded level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance (R=.692, R^2= .479, *F*= 34.943, p<.000), self-control, thoughtfulness (R=.561, R^2= .315, *F*= 17.470, p<.000) in the same term.

According to Table 1, the excluded level in the autumn term had a negative significant correlation with the levels of making contact and social performance (r=.-638), self-control, thoughtfulness (r=-.556) in the spring term (p<.001). As the excluded level in the autumn term increased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables in the spring term decreased and as the excluded level decreased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables increased. The excluded level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance (R=.638, R^2= .407, *F*= 26.030, p<.000), self-control, thoughtfulness (R=.556, R^2= .309, *F*= 17.002, p<.000) in the spring term.

In Table 1, the excluded level in the spring term had a negative significant correlation with the making contact and social performance (r=.-648; p<.001), self-control, thoughtfulness (r=-.359; p<.005). As the excluded level increased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables decreased and as the excluded level decreased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables increased in the same term. The excluded level in the spring term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance (R=.648, R^2= .420, *F*= 27.570, p<.000) and self-control, thoughtfulness (R=.359, R^2= .129, *F*= 5.636, p<.005) in the same term.

Table 2. *Results of correlation coefficients and simple linear regression analysis on the aggression with peers and social-emotional well-being, resilience variables*

Variables	r	R	R^2	*F*	Std. E.	ß	t	p
Aggression –A.*								
Making contact, social performance- A. *	-.326***	.326	.106	4.515	.074	-.326	-2.125	.040***
Aggression - A.*								
Self-control, thoughtfulness- A.*	-.634****	.634	.402	25.560	.070	-.634	-5.056	.000*****
Aggression – A.*								
Making contact, social performance- S.**	-.169	.169	.029	1.122	.101	-.169	-1.059	.296
Aggression - A.*								
Self-control, thoughtfulness- S.**	-.638****	.638	.407	26.082	.078	-.638	-5.107	.000*****
Aggression -S.**								
Making contact, social performance- S.**	-.214	.214	.046	1.830	.065	-.214	-1.353	.184
Aggression - S.**								
Self-control, thoughtfulness- S. **	-.495****	.495	.245	12.363	.057	-.495	-3.516	.001****

* A: Autumn ** S: Spring, *** *p<.005,* **** *p<.001,* ***** *p<.000*

In Table 2, the first measurement performed in the autumn term showed that the aggression level had a negative significant correlation with the making contact and social performance (r=.-326), self-control, thoughtfulness (r=-.634) levels in the same term (p<.005, p<.001). As the aggression level increased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables decreased and as the aggression level decreased, the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables increased. The aggression level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance (R=.326, R^2= .106, *F*= 4.515, p<.005) and self-control, thoughtfulness (R=.634, R^2= .402, *F*= 25.560, p<.000) in

the same term.

According to Table 2, there was a negative significant correlation between the aggression level in the autumn term and the self-control, thoughtfulness (r=-.638) level in the spring term (p<.001). As the aggression level in the autumn term increased, the self-control, thoughtfulness level in the spring term decreased and as the aggression level decreased, the self-control, thoughtfulness level increased. The aggression level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of self-control, thoughtfulness (R=.638, R^2= .407, *F*= 26.082, p<.000) in the spring term. The aggression level in the autumn term did not significantly predict the making contact and social performance variable in the spring term.

In Table 2, the aggression level in the spring term had a negative significant correlation with the self-control, thoughtfulness (r=-.495) (p<.001) in the same term. As the aggression level increased, the self-control, thoughtfulness variable decreased and as the aggression level decreased the self-control, thoughtfulness variable increased. The aggression level in the spring term significantly predicted the levels of self-control, thoughtfulness (R=.495, R^2= .245, *F*= 12.363, p<.001) in the same term. The aggression level in the spring term did not significantly predict the making contact and social performance variable in the same term.

Table 3. *Results of correlation coefficients and simple linear regression analysis on the asocial behaviours with peers and social-emotional well-being, resilience variables*

Variables	r	R	R^2	*F*	Std. E.	ß	t	p
Asocial B. -A*								
Making contact, social performance- A.*	-.713***	.713	.508	39.300	.063	-.713	-6.269	.000****
Asocial B.- A.*								
Self-control, thoughtfulness- A.*	-.276	.276	.076	3.122	.100	-.276	-1.767	.085
Asocial B.-A.*								
Making contact, social performance- S.**	-.635***	.635	.403	25.612	.091	-.635	-5.061	.000****
Asocial B.- A.*								
Self-control, thoughtfulness- S.**	-.294	.294	.087	3.599	.111	-.294	-1.897	.065
Asocial B.-S.**								
Making contact, social performance- S. **	-.635***	.635	.403	25.634	.087	-.635	-5.063	.000****
Asocial B.- S. **								
Self-control, thoughtfulness- S.**	-.139	.139	.019	.752	.109	-.139	-.867	.391

* A: Autumn ** S: Spring, *** *p<.001*, *** *p<.000*

In Table 3, the first measurement performed in the autumn term showed that the asocial behaviour level had a negative significant correlation with the making contact and social performance (r=.-713) level in the same term (p<.001). As the asocial behaviour level increased, the making contact and social performance level decreased and as the asocial behaviour level decreased, the making contact and social performance level increased. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact, social performance (R=.713, R^2= .508, *F*= 39.300, p<.000) in the same term. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness in the same term.

According to Table 3, there was a negative significant correlation between the asocial behaviour level in the autumn term and the making contact and social performance (r=.-635) in the spring term (p<.001). As the asocial behaviour level in the autumn term increased, the making contact, social performance level in the spring term decreased and as the asocial behaviour level decreased, the making contact, social performance level increased. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact, social performance (R=.635, R^2= .403, *F*= 25.612,

p<.000) in the spring term. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness variable in the spring term.

In Table 3, the asocial behaviour level in the spring term had a negative significant correlation with the making contact and social performance (r=.-635) level in the same term (p<.001). As the asocial behaviour level increased, the making contact and social performance in the spring term decreased and as the asocial behaviour level decreased, the making contact and social performance level increased. The asocial behaviour level in the spring term significantly predicted the levels of making contact, social performance (R=.635, R^2= .403, F= 25.634, p<.000) in the same term. The asocial behaviour level in the spring term did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness variables variable in the same term.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results of the study; the problems experienced by young children in their peer relationships had long-term and short-term effects on social-emotional well-being and resilience while excluded by peers significantly predicted the making contact, social performance and self-control, thoughtfulness levels in the long and short terms.

The aggression level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance and self-control, thoughtfulness in the same term. The aggression level in the autumn term significantly predicted the level of self-control, thoughtfulness in the spring term. The aggression level in the autumn term did not significantly predict the making contact and social performance in the spring term. The aggression level in the spring term significantly predicted the levels of self-control, thoughtfulness in the same term. The aggression level in the spring term did not significantly predict the making contact and social performance variable in the same term. As is seen, aggression toward peers predicted the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables at the beginning of the school year; whereas, it predicted only one variable (self-control, thoughtfulness) in the long term. Aggression in the spring term predicted one variable (self-control, thoughtfulness) in the same term. This may be interpreted as the fact that aggression was no longer effective on social-emotional well-being and resilience.

The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance in the same term. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness variable in the same term. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term significantly predicted the levels of making contact, social performance in the spring term. The asocial behaviour level in the autumn term did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness variable in the spring term. The asocial behaviour level in the spring term significantly predicted the levels of making contact and social performance in the same term. The asocial behaviour level in the spring term did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness variables variable in the same term. As is seen, in the study the three problems experienced in peer relationships predicted at least one of the social-emotional well-being variables both in the short and the long term. This result may be interpreted as the fact that peer relationships have strong effects on social and emotional development.

The fact that the problems experienced in peer relationships predicted the social-emotional well-being and resilience variables in the long and short terms, is one of the results supported with several studies in the literature. For example, in a study in which 133 girls and 134 boys who are five and a half years old were tracked from kindergarten until the fourth grade (Schrepferman et al., 2006), the correlation between peer relationships and depression was examined. According to the results of the study, it was determined that peer interaction and affinity in kindergarten was a protective factor against depression in the primary school period. It was stated that establishing close relationships with peers and having peer support could support social skill development and sense of trust. It is indicated that

children who have weak communication skills, generate aggressive solutions to interpersonal problems and are unable to collaborate with their peers, are rejected, criticized and punished by their peers (Climie & Deen, 2014). Such problems in peer relationships may negatively affect social and emotional development. Also, school-based violence prevention programs aim to develop social and emotional well-being, resilience, empathy and prosocial skills (Thompson, 2002). In the study conducted by Gazelle and Ladd (2003) in which they followed 388 children from kindergarten until the fourth grade, they determined that the combination of anxious solitude and peer excluded predicted depressive symptoms in the subsequent years.

While asocial behaviour did not significantly predict the self-control, thoughtfulness level in the long and short terms. This makes us think that there may be stronger variables than peer relationships to predict self-control and thoughtfulness. In their review study, Zimmer-Gembeck et al., (2015), stated that in some studies parent-child attachment was found to be associated with children's emotion regulation and coping skills. Smith and Carlson (1997) indicated that peers, as well as family variables, temperament and gender variables also might be among protective and risk factors affecting the resilience level. Shonkoff and Philips (2000) stated that social-emotional skills may also be associated with variables such as self-confidence, positive relationships with adults, and concentration. Fiorelli and Russ (2012) stated that opportunities for pretend play were significantly related to the measures of subjective well-being.

It was found that among the three variables discussed as peer problems within the scope of the study, aggression had gradually lost its predicting effect in the course of time. This may partially be explained with the decrease of children's aggression level and the increase of positive skills such as establishing social relations in the second term. The mean score of aggression was found to be 8.97 for the autumn term and 8.35 for the spring term. The excluded mean score was 8.87 in the first measurement and 8.70 in the second measurement. The asocial behaviour mean score was 8.92 in the first measurement and 8.47 in the second measurement. As is seen, there was a decrease in the mean scores in peer relationship problems discussed within the scope of the study, within the term. The skill of establishing social relations increased as 18.20 for the autumn term and 20.83 for the spring term. Self-control was found to be 18.93 for the autumn term and it increased to 20.63 in the spring term. In line with the findings, it was observed that the Social-Emotional Well-Being and Resilience variables increased within the term. In addition, aggression might have decreased and positive skills might have increased owing to factors progressing in the course of time, such as the maturation of classroom management approach and development of teacher-child and child-child relationships. Children's aggression may decrease with developmental maturation in the course of time (NICHD ECRN, 2004). Gülay Ogelman and Erten Sarıkaya (2013) tracked peer relationships of 78 Turkish children whose ages differ from five to six, for two years. According to the general results of the study; while aggression levels, asocial behaviour levels, anxious-fearful levels, exclusion levels and peer victimization levels of preschool children decrease at the age of 6, their prosocial behaviour levels increase at the age of 6 (Gülay Ogelman & Erten Sarıkaya, 2013). In a longitudinal study conducted by McTaggart, McGill and Stephens (2020), 100 young children were observed in preschool education for three terms in terms of social and emotional competencies. According to the findings of the study it was found that social emotional competencies increased at the end of the third term. Also, in the study it was reported that emotional competencies had higher levels of competencies compared to social competencies (McTaggart, McGill, & Stephens, 2020). As is seen, children's negative behaviours may decrease, while their positive behaviours may increase in preschool education. This can be explained with the effects of new social and emotional skills learned by children in the course of time, as well as maturation and positive relationships with peers and teachers (Durmuşoğlu Saltalı & Erbay, 2020). Lindsey (2019) evaluated 122 young children from different ethnic groups in terms of peer competencies and emotional competencies for two years. In the findings of the study, the expression of happiness in the first year predicted the social competence in the second year. In addition, the anger and

sadness in the first year predicted the lower peer social competence in the second year. In line with a variety of examples presented in this study and relevant studies, it is revealed that there are high-level correlations between the peer relationships and social-emotional well-being of young children. The structure of children's peer interactions may cause them to take positive and negative behaviours as a model, acquire new skills, get excluded from the group, become lonely and be unable to find social interaction opportunities. Thus, young children's development of positive peer relationships should be among the priorities of teachers throughout the term.

The results of this study revealed that young children's peer relationships may affect their social and emotional development in the long and short terms. In accordance with the limitations and results, future longitudinal studies can be increased with more crowded study groups in a longer term. Longitudinal studies can be increased more often in countries like Turkey, where relevant studies are not adequate in number. With intercultural studies, young children from different cultures can be compared in accordance with the peer relationships, social-emotional well-being, and resilience variables. Training and counselling services can be provided to preschool education teachers in order to enable them to follow children's peer relationships and emotional and social skills regularly. Studies on the emotional stability/coping with stress variable can be generalized and the variables affecting this skill can be revealed.

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