

Changes in Social Relationships from 26 to 34 Years of Age in Adults Born Very Preterm

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Background

Fewer individuals born very preterm and/or very low birth weight (VP/VLBW; <32 weeks' gestation and/or <1500g birth weight) have friends, experience sexual intercourse or form romantic relationships compared to their term-born peers in emerging adulthood (ages 18-29).^{1,2} It is unknown whether difficulties in social relationships decrease, persist or even increase into established adulthood (ages 30-45).

Objectives

- To investigate social relationships with parents, partners and peers in VP/VLBW adults in comparison to term-born adults and changes in these relationships from 26 to 34 years
- To examine the effects of sex on social relationships of VP/VLBW and term-born adults

Methods

Sample

Bavarian Longitudinal Study (BLS): Geographically defined prospective whole-population sample of neonatal at-risk children in the south of Germany



From birth to adulthood, 262 VP/VLBW (52.7% males) and 230 term-born individuals (47% males) were assessed.

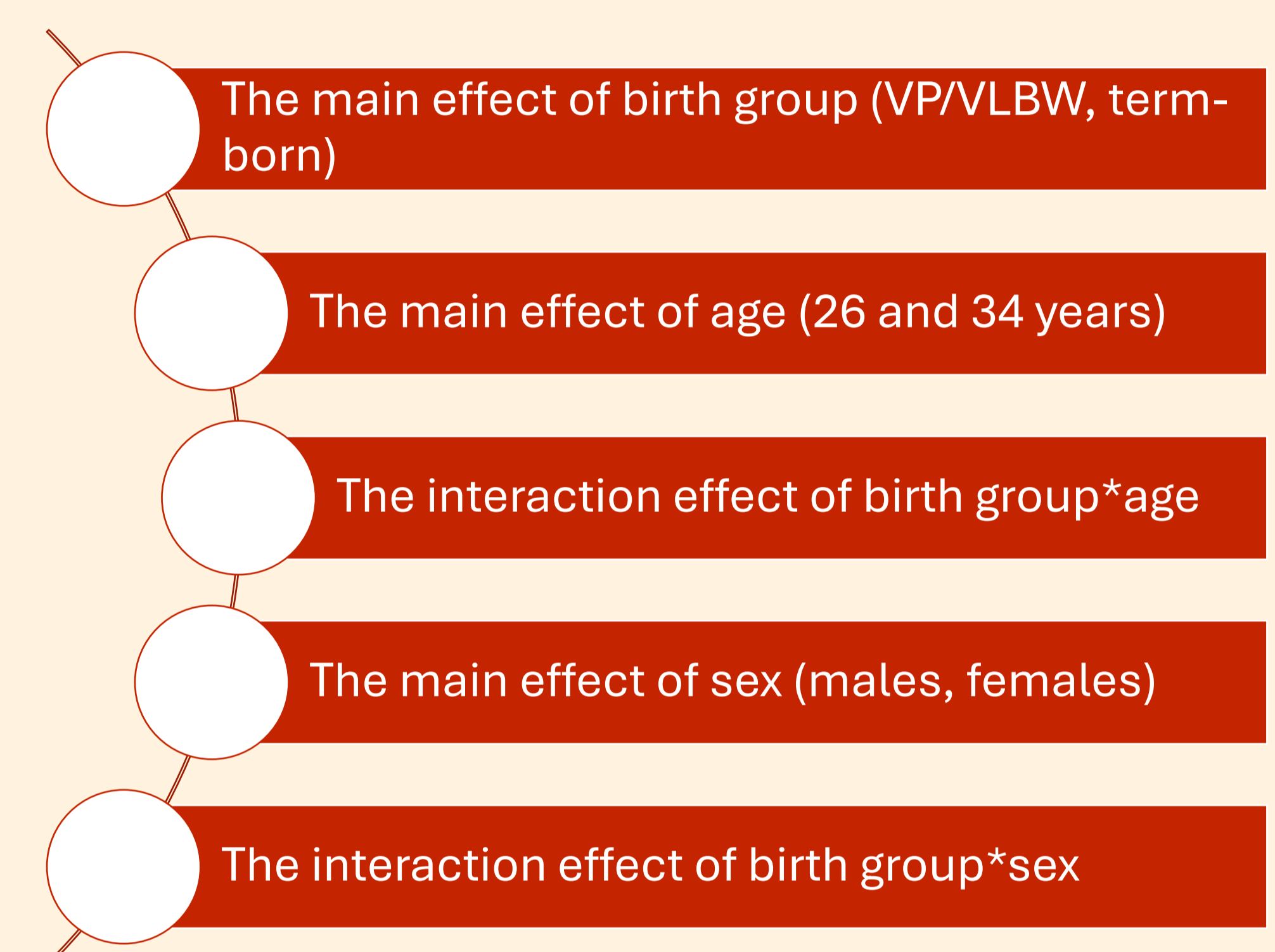
Measures

Life Course Interview

Social relationships with parents, partners and peers, and overall social relationships across these domains were evaluated with a Life Course Interview at 26 and 34 years.

Analysis

Linear mixed model analysis was used to investigate each main and interaction effect on social domains (overall social, parent, partner, peers).



Results

Social Relationships	β (95% CIs)	P value
Overall social		
VP/VLBW	-0.61, (-0.85, -0.37)	<.001
34 years	-0.11, (-0.24, 0.01)	.08
Male	-0.07, (-0.30, 0.15)	.52
VP/VLBW*34 years	0.10, (-0.07, 0.28)	.24
VP/VLBW*male	0.29, (-0.02, 0.60)	.07
Parent relationships		
VP/VLBW	-0.06, (-0.28, 0.17)	.62
34 years	-0.64, (-0.79, -0.49)	<.001
Male	-0.23, (-0.44, -0.03)	.02
VP/VLBW*34 years	0.10, (-0.11, 0.31)	.37
VP/VLBW*male	0.29, (0.01, 0.57)	.04
Partner relationships		
VP/VLBW	-0.50, (-0.74, -0.27)	<.001
34 years	0.25, (0.14, 0.35)	<.001
Male	0.02, (-0.22, 0.25)	.89
VP/VLBW*34 years	-0.05, (-0.20, 0.10)	.50
VP/VLBW*male	0.12, (-0.20, 0.44)	.45
Peer relationships		
VP/VLBW	-0.55, (-0.78, -0.32)	<.001
34 years	0.16, (0.03, 0.29)	.02
Male	0.07, (-0.15, 0.30)	.52
VP/VLBW*34 years	0.12, (-0.06, 0.30)	.19
VP/VLBW*male	0.12, (-0.19, 0.43)	.44

- VP/VLBW adults had lower overall social, partner and peer relationship scores than term-born adults.
- Particular difficulties in initiating relationships, i.e., making friends and finding romantic partners
- Parent relationship scores were comparable to those of term-born adults.
- For all adults, partner and peer relationships improved whereas parent relationships deteriorated from 26 to 34 years. These changes were similar for VP/VLBW and term-born adults.
- Term-born males had the lowest parent relationship scores.

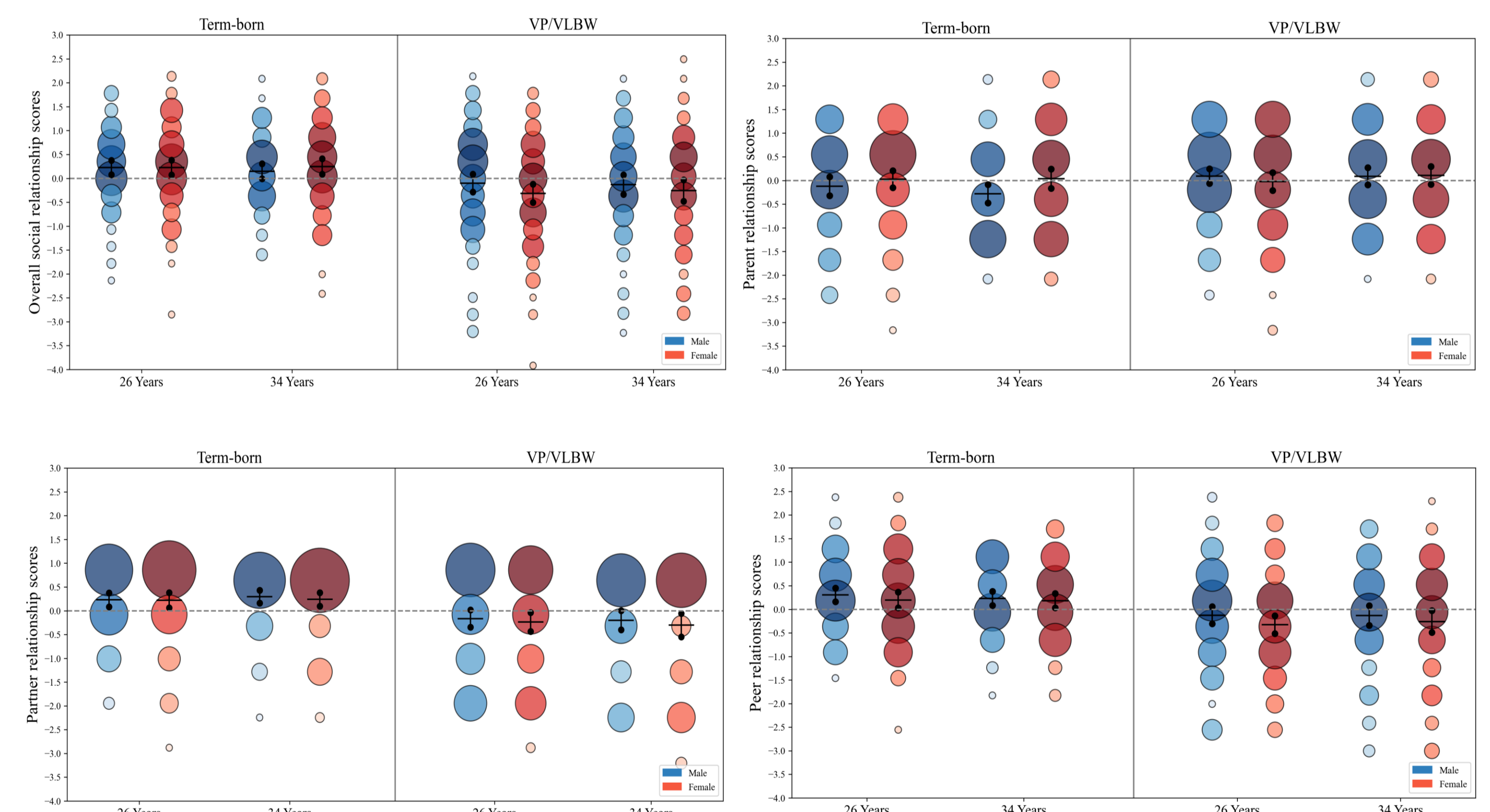


Figure. Standardized scores per domain for birth groups and sex with 95% CIs. The increased size and darker shading of circles represent more frequent scores.

Conclusion

VP/VLBW individuals have persistent difficulties in partner and peer relationships across emerging and established adulthood compared with term-born adults, with no evidence of catching up.

Implications

- We may consider new methods of facilitating new social contacts ranging from support groups for VP/VLBW adult or dating applications tailored to people who are inhibited to make initial contacts.
- Identifying early risk and protective factors related to social difficulties and endeavoring to minimize social difficulties in childhood may have a long-term positive impact on later social relationships.

References

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