

A Study of Decision-Making Ability in Adolescents under Peer Influence

Prof. Om Sharan,
Asstt. Professor & Head, Department Of Psychology, Katras college, Katrasgarh, Dhanbad, Jharkhand

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Correspondence:

E-mail: omsharan555@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between decision-making ability and peer pressure among adolescents. A sample of 150 students (75 boys and 75 girls) studying in Class 12th across Arts, Science, and Commerce streams was selected using a random sampling technique. Standardized tools were used to collect the data. Statistical techniques such as Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and t-test were applied for analysis. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between decision making and peer pressure. Furthermore, a significant difference was observed in decision-making ability between adolescents experiencing high and low levels of peer pressure. The study concludes that increased peer pressure adversely affects the decision-making ability of adolescents.

Introduction

Decision making is a fundamental cognitive process that involves the identification of a problem, evaluation of possible alternatives, and selection of the most appropriate course of action. It is a complex and goal-oriented activity that plays a vital role in shaping an individual's behavior, personality development, and life outcomes. Effective decision making requires critical thinking, reasoning ability, and emotional regulation, all of which continue to develop during adolescence. According to Albert Bandura, cognitive processes and environmental influences interact to guide human behavior, making decision making a product of both internal capabilities and external factors. Adolescence is a transitional stage marked by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. During this period, individuals begin to develop autonomy and are frequently required to make independent decisions regarding academics, career choices, social relationships, and lifestyle behaviors. However, due to ongoing brain development—particularly in regions associated with impulse control and risk assessment—adolescents are often more prone to impulsive and emotionally driven decisions. Research by Laurence Steinberg highlights that adolescents exhibit heightened sensitivity to social and emotional stimuli, which significantly influences their decision-making patterns.

One of the most influential social factors during adolescence is peer pressure. Peers, defined as individuals of similar age, background, or social status, play a central role in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Peer pressure refers to the direct or indirect influence exerted by peers that encourages individuals to conform to group norms, values, or expectations. This influence can manifest in various forms, including encouragement, persuasion, or even coercion, leading adolescents to alter their behavior to gain acceptance or avoid rejection. Peer influence can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, peers can motivate adolescents to adopt healthy behaviors, such as academic engagement, participation in extracurricular activities, and development of social skills. However, negative peer pressure is often associated with risky and maladaptive behaviors, including substance abuse, aggression, academic disengagement, and other forms of deviant behavior. Studies have shown that adolescents are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors when in the presence of peers, as compared to when they are alone (Steinberg, 2014).

Adolescents spend a substantial amount of their daily time interacting with peers—in schools, social gatherings, and increasingly through digital platforms. This extensive interaction enhances the likelihood of peer influence on their thoughts, emotions, and actions. According to research, adolescents may spend up to two-thirds of their waking hours with peers, making peer groups a primary context for social learning and behavioral reinforcement. The desire for social acceptance and fear of rejection often compel adolescents to conform to peer expectations, even when such behaviors conflict with their personal values or long-term goals. Furthermore, peer pressure significantly affects various domains of adolescent life, including academic decision making, emotional well-being, and social adjustment. Excessive dependence on peer approval may weaken an individual's ability to make independent and rational decisions. This can lead to decreased self-confidence, poor judgment, and increased vulnerability to external influences. Conversely, adolescents with strong self-efficacy and supportive social environments are better equipped to resist negative peer pressure and make informed decisions.

Given the critical role of decision making in determining future outcomes and the pervasive influence of peer pressure during adolescence, it becomes essential to examine the relationship between these two variables. Understanding how peer pressure affects decision-making ability can provide valuable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to design interventions that promote healthy psychological development. Enhancing decision-making skills and fostering resilience against negative peer influence can contribute significantly to the overall well-being and success of adolescents.

Review of Literature

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the significant impact of peer influence on adolescent behavior and psychological development. Adolescence is a critical period characterized by increased social interaction and a growing dependence on peer groups, which makes individuals more vulnerable to external influences. Research by Laurence Steinberg and colleagues (Albert, Chein, & Steinberg, 2013) demonstrated that the presence of peers increases adolescents' tendency to engage in risk-taking behaviors. This is primarily attributed to the activation of reward-related brain regions, which heightens the desire for social acceptance and approval, often overriding rational decision-making processes.

Birkeland et al. (2014) found that peer acceptance plays a crucial role in enhancing self-esteem among adolescents. Positive peer relationships contribute to emotional

well-being, social competence, and a sense of belonging. However, excessive reliance on peer approval may result in conformity, reduced autonomy, and impaired decision-making ability. Adolescents who prioritize peer acceptance over personal judgment are more likely to make choices that align with group norms rather than their own values.

Further studies have examined the negative consequences of peer pressure on adolescent behavior. Maduvanhu and Schenck (2014) reported that peer influence is a major contributing factor to substance abuse among youth. Adolescents often engage in behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use in an attempt to gain acceptance within their peer groups. Similarly, Deepika and Prema (2017) identified a negative correlation between peer pressure and academic achievement, suggesting that increased peer influence can lead to decreased academic focus and performance.

In addition to these findings, research has shown that peer pressure can also affect emotional and psychological well-being. Adolescents experiencing high levels of negative peer pressure are more likely to report feelings of anxiety, stress, and low self-confidence. The need to conform to peer expectations can create internal conflicts, particularly when such expectations contradict personal beliefs or family values.

Despite the predominantly negative perspective, some studies emphasize the positive role of peer influence. Ogowewo et al. (2015) highlighted that peers can act as agents of positive change by encouraging prosocial behaviors such as cooperation, empathy, and responsible decision making. Positive peer groups can motivate adolescents to adopt healthy habits, improve academic engagement, and develop constructive social skills.

Moreover, research grounded in Albert Bandura Social Learning Theory (1977) suggests that adolescents learn behaviors through observation and imitation of their peers. When adolescents are exposed to positive role models within their peer group, they are more likely to adopt beneficial behaviors. Conversely, exposure to negative peer models increases the likelihood of engaging in risky or maladaptive activities.

Overall, the existing body of literature indicates that peer pressure is a powerful determinant of adolescent behavior. It plays a dual role—both constructive and destructive—depending on the nature of peer interactions. However, a common conclusion across studies is that excessive or negative peer pressure tends to impair adolescents' decision-making abilities by promoting impulsivity, conformity, and risk-taking tendencies. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of peer influence is essential for fostering independent thinking and effective decision-making skills among adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Decision Making among Adolescents in relation to Peer Pressure

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the relationship between decision-making ability and peer pressure among adolescents.
2. To compare decision-making ability among adolescents with high and low levels of peer pressure.

Hypotheses

1. There exists no significant relationship between decision making and peer pressure among adolescents.
2. There exists no significant difference in decision making between adolescents with high and low peer pressure.

Delimitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to senior secondary students (Class 12th).
2. Only students from Arts, Science, and Commerce streams were included.
3. The sample size was restricted to 150 students.

Gender	Science	Commerce	Arts	Total
Boy	25	25	25	75
Girls	25	25	25	75

For the present investigation, a total of 150 students studying in Class 12th were selected. The sample consisted of 75 boys and 75 girls, ensuring equal gender representation. Participants were drawn equally from three academic streams—Arts, Science, and Commerce. A random sampling technique was employed to select the respondents.

Tools Used

1. Decision Making Scale (Mincemoyer, Perkins & Munyua, 2001; revalidated)
2. Peer Pressure Scale (Singh & Saini, 2016)

Statistical Techniques Used

1. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation
2. t-test

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between Decision Making and Peer Pressure

Variables	N	Correlation (r)	Level of Significance
Decision Making & Peer Pressure	150	-0.25**	0.01

The results indicate a **significant negative correlation** between decision-making ability and peer pressure at the 0.01 level. This implies that higher peer pressure is associated with lower decision-making ability among adolescents. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Difference in Decision Making (High vs Low Peer Pressure)

Level of Peer Pressure	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
High	31	59.29	6.5	5.37**	0.01
Low	29	67.8	5.6		

The findings reveal a significant difference in decision-making ability between adolescents with high and low peer pressure. Students experiencing lower peer pressure demonstrated better decision-making ability. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion

The study concludes that peer pressure significantly influences the decision-making ability of adolescents. A negative relationship exists between the two variables, indicating that increased peer pressure reduces adolescents' ability to make effective decisions. Additionally, adolescents experiencing lower levels of peer pressure exhibit better decision-making skills compared to those experiencing higher levels.

The findings highlight the need for educators, parents, and counselors to guide adolescents in developing independent thinking and resistance to negative peer influence. Encouraging positive peer interactions and strengthening decision-making skills can contribute to better psychological well-being and overall development.

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