

Original Article

Exploring Peer Dynamics: A Cross-Sectional Quantitative Analysis

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Conflict of Interest: None.

Gul S., et al. (2024). 4(1): DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61919/jhrr.v4i1.366>

ABSTRACT

Background: Peer pressure plays a pivotal role in shaping the behaviors and values of adolescents and young adults, with family systems often posited as a significant influencing factor. Traditional research emphasizes the substantial impact of these elements on individual development, yet recent findings suggest a need for reevaluation of these relationships.

Objective: This study aimed to explore the relationship between family systems and peer pressure, with a particular focus on understanding how family dynamics influence peer interactions among youth and young adults.

Methods: A correlation research design was employed, sampling 40 private university students aged between 18-25 years, balanced in gender (20 males, 20 females) and enrolled in various bachelor's degree programs. Exclusion criteria included hostellite students, government university students, and those above 26 years. The Subjective Peer Pressure Scale (ppQ-r) was utilized to measure peer influence, demonstrating good internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas between 0.80 and 0.78). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25, considering factors such as age, gender, educational background, and family type.

Results: The study found that 62.5% of participants were in the 18-22 age range, with 55% being female. Most participants (80%) came from joint families. The mean score for family system influence was 1.4000 (SD = 0.49), while peer pressure recorded a mean of 76.47 (SD = 13.41). The correlation coefficient between family systems and peer pressure was 0.306, indicating a statistically insignificant relationship ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusion: The findings challenge the traditionally assumed significant influence of family systems on peer pressure. This study suggests that the relationship between family dynamics and peer interactions is less direct and significant than previously thought, calling for a more context-specific understanding of these dynamics. These insights are vital for developing more effective educational and counseling strategies that address the complexities of peer dynamics in youth.

Keywords: Peer Pressure, Family Systems, Young Adults, Adolescents, Correlation Study, University Students, Behavioral Influence.

INTRODUCTION

Peer pressure, a critical social phenomenon, is characterized by an individual's inclination to conform to group norms for social acceptance, manifesting in behaviors ranging from the benign, such as consuming water during lectures, to the more complex, like compromising one's sleep patterns (1, 2). This phenomenon becomes particularly salient during adolescence, a transitional stage marked by heightened sensitivity to social validation. Adolescents, in their quest for acceptance, often navigate a maze of social dynamics that significantly shape their values and behaviors, influenced by their immediate social circles comprising friends and peers. The impact of these dynamics extends beyond immediate social interactions, playing a pivotal role in shaping educational trajectories and outcomes. Educational achievements during this phase are not only influenced by family support and the guidance of educators but also by the nuanced interplay of peer influences, which can have both beneficial and detrimental effects (3-5). The role of schools in fostering academic engagement is crucial, as they serve as a milieu for the development of essential skills, knowledge, values, and social competencies, thereby facilitating a smoother transition into adulthood (6). From a behavioral and psychological standpoint, the manner in which adolescents cope with academic and social challenges is a subject of considerable interest (7). Academic engagement, underpinned by theoretical frameworks, is influenced by various motivational factors present in

the school environment. These factors play a significant role in either inhibiting or fostering the academic engagement of individual students (8). Positive school experiences are instrumental in transforming adolescents into learners who are not only academically proficient but also socially integrated and committed, underscoring the importance of understanding the complex interplay between individual students and various factors such as classroom dynamics and peer characteristics. This interplay can be dissected further into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components, each playing a unique role in shaping student engagement (9, 10).

This study further delves into the nuances of peer dynamics by examining gender differences and family systems in the context of peer pressure, with a focus on understanding the social, cultural, and educational dynamics among peer groups. It specifically explores how peer processes influence risky adolescent behaviors, taking into account the complex interplay of peer influence and friend selection. The study underscores the importance of comprehending how gender dynamics shape these processes, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in adolescents' social worlds. It is observed that girls typically form smaller, emotionally intimate networks, whereas boys are inclined towards larger groups centered around shared activities, such as extracurricular engagements (11). Adopting a social network perspective sheds light on the interplay of risky behaviors, gender dynamics, and their consequences in youth. Significant research indicates that adolescents often engage in behaviors similar to those of their friends, driven by two social processes: peer influence and friend selection. This suggests that adolescents may either gravitate towards friends who exhibit similar behaviors or be influenced by their peers to conform to group norms (12). However, existing research often falls short in differentiating these mechanisms between genders, leaving a gap in understanding how these processes vary between girls and boys (13).

Gender, as a fundamental social construct, profoundly influences lived experiences, shaping the norms, goals, and expectations that adolescents bring into their social interactions (14). Research exploring gender differences in peer influence and friend selection has produced mixed results, which may be attributed to factors such as limited sample sizes or a focus on a singular type of behavior (15). This highlights the necessity for further research to elucidate the impact of gender on these social processes, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities in adolescents' social dynamics. The primary objective of this study is to elucidate the relationship between gender differences, family systems, and peer pressure, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of these interrelated factors in the context of adolescent development.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the present study, a correlation research design was employed to investigate the relationship between gender differences, family systems, and peer pressure among university students. The sample comprised 40 individuals, evenly divided by gender with 20 men and 20 women, all of whom were students at a private university. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 25 years. The inclusion criteria specified that the study was open to students enrolled in any bachelor's degree program. However, certain groups were excluded: students residing in hostels (hostellites), those attending government universities, and individuals above the age of 26.

The primary instrument used in this study was the Subjective Peer Pressure Scale (ppQ-r), developed by Sunil Saini in 2016. This scale, targeting adolescents and adults, is a 29-item self-report tool designed to assess peer influence in everyday life situations. It employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The scale is divided into five subscales, with higher scores in each subscale indicating greater peer pressure in that domain. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency, with test-retest reliability and concurrent and predictive validity. Specifically, its internal reliability for the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) showed Cronbach's alphas between 0.80 and 0.78, and its stability and reliability were noted at 0.72.

The methodology for this study involved several critical steps. Initially, permission to use the scales was obtained from the respective authors. Following this, participants were approached, and the subject matter and purpose of the study were explained to them. All queries from the participants were addressed, and their confidentiality was assured. Before administering the questionnaire, oral informed consent was obtained from each participant. Upon collecting the data, statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.

Ethical considerations were rigorously followed throughout the study. This included obtaining prior permission from the authors for the use of their tools and from the concerned authorities for data collection. Informed consent was a prerequisite, with participants being informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data were strictly maintained. These ethical considerations were integral to the conduct of the study, ensuring adherence to the highest standards of research ethics.

RESULTS

The study's demographic characteristics, as detailed in Table 1, reveal insightful trends among the participating individuals. The age distribution of the sample shows a predominance of younger participants, with 25 individuals (62.5%) falling in the 18-22 age group, while the remaining 15 (37.5%) are between 23-25 years old. Gender representation is fairly balanced.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group			
	18-22	25	62.5
	23-25	15	37.5
Gender			
	Female	20	50.0
	Male	20	50.0
Educational Background			
	Engineering	13	32.5
	Commerce	11	27.5
	Arts	8	20.0
	Science	5	12.5
	Others	3	7.5
Family Type			
	Joint	32	80.0
	Nuclear	8	20.0

In terms of educational background, a diverse range of disciplines is represented. Engineering is the most common field of study, with 32.5% (13 participants) of the sample, followed closely by Commerce at 27.5% (11 participants). The Arts are pursued by 20% (8 participants), while Science and other fields of study are chosen by 12.5% (5 participants) and 7.5% (3 participants) of the participants, respectively. The family background of the participants predominantly features joint families, accounting for 80% (32 participants) of the sample, whereas nuclear families constitute the remaining 20% (8 participants).

Table 2 Correlation between family system and peer pressure

Variable	Mean (SD)	95% CI	Correlation p-value
Family System	1.4000 (0.49)	(72.18, 807652)	0.306
Peer Pressure	76.47 (13.41)		

The correlation between family system and peer pressure, as indicated in Table 2, presents notable findings. The Family System variable shows a mean score of 1.4000 with a standard deviation of 0.49. On the other hand, Peer Pressure records a higher mean of 76.47 with a standard deviation of 13.41. Interestingly, the correlation coefficient between these two variables stands at 0.306, suggesting a moderate positive relationship. This correlation suggests that variations in family systems may have some level of influence on the peer pressure experienced by individuals. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval for the Family System is notably wide, ranging from 72.18 to 807652, indicating a significant spread in the data points around the mean, which could imply a diverse range of family dynamics within the sample.

DISCUSSION

The interrelationship between family systems and peer pressure, a topic of considerable academic interest, has been extensively explored in various studies, including those by Verma et al. (2021), Huang et al. (2022), Akbar et al. (2022), Bandzeladze and Arutiunov (2020), and Gxubane (2021) (16-21). These studies collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics between family influence and peer interactions. However, the findings of the current study offer a novel perspective, challenging some established assumptions in this domain.

Verma et al. (2021) identified a positive correlation between family and peer pressure in influencing the academic performance of undergraduate nursing students, underscoring the significant role of these factors in shaping academic outcomes (17). This aligns with the traditional notion that family and peers are critical in academic development. In contrast, the present study, which found an insignificant correlation between family systems and peer pressure ($r = .306$, $p > 0.05$), suggests that family influence on peer

pressure might not be as impactful as traditionally perceived. This variation in findings points to the potential context-specific nature of these relationships, indicating that the effect of family systems on peer pressure might differ across various demographics.

Huang et al. (2022) further explored the implications of family functioning on adolescent depression, revealing a significant inverse predictive effect. Their research also highlighted the moderating role of peer relationships in the context of self-esteem and adolescent depression, suggesting a multifaceted interaction between family dynamics and peer influences (18). However, the current study suggests that the impact of family systems on peer pressure may not be as straightforward or significant as Huang et al. proposed, contributing additional layers of complexity to these interactions.

The research by Akbar et al. (2022) showed that family pressure, along with peer and media pressures, positively influences body image dissatisfaction among working women (19). This implies a substantial impact of family systems on individual perceptions and behaviors in tandem with peer influence. Nevertheless, the lack of a significant correlation in the current study between family systems and peer pressure contradicts the assumption of family pressure as a key factor in such outcomes.

Bandzeladze and Arutiunov (2020) emphasized the importance of peer control in shaping adolescent behavior, identifying peer influence as a significant predictor of adolescents' problem behavior, with moral disengagement as a mediating factor (20). While this study highlights the role of peer influence, the current study's findings suggest that the influence of family systems on peer pressure might be less significant than previously assumed.

Gxubane (2021) discussed the impact of social and peer pressures on young people in South Africa, stressing the importance of fostering healthy human relationships for better social functioning among youth (21). This study underscored the significance of peer dynamics in youth development. However, the present study suggests that the impact of family systems on these dynamics might not be as pronounced as indicated by Gxubane.

The current study also revisited the topic of gender differences in peer pressure, challenging earlier findings that suggested notable disparities between genders. With a larger sample size, this research did not corroborate the previous assertions regarding significant gender differences in peer pressure, suggesting that gender may not be as influential in peer pressure dynamics as previously believed. This finding warrants further investigation into the role of gender in peer pressure.

The study's methodology, while robust, had certain limitations. The data collection was restricted to youth and young adults aged between 15-25 years and was confined to a single location due to time constraints. These limitations suggest that the findings may not be generalizable across broader age ranges or diverse geographical areas.

Given these constraints, future research should consider expanding the data collection to include other cities and possibly extend the age range to encompass adulthood. Such expansions in research scope could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances in the relationship between family systems and peer pressure across different life stages and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, while previous studies have underscored the significant influence of both family systems and peer pressure in shaping individual behavior and well-being, the current study introduces a fresh perspective that questions the strength and universality of this relationship. This divergence highlights the need for continued research to further elucidate the determinants and implications of peer pressure, particularly regarding the potential variability of these influences across diverse demographics and contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings suggest a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between family systems and peer pressure, challenging previously held assumptions about their interplay. While traditional research underscores the significant impact of family and peer influences on individual behavior and development, this study indicates that the influence of family on peer pressure may not be as pronounced as once thought. This revelation has important implications for both academic research and practical interventions. It underscores the necessity for a more tailored approach in understanding the dynamics of peer pressure, considering the varying effects of family influence across different contexts and demographics. These insights are crucial for developing more effective strategies in education, counselling, and policymaking, aimed at addressing the complexities of peer dynamics among young adults.

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