

The Influence of Peer Pressure on Risky Health Behaviors among Adolescents in Urban Environments

Dr. Kumaran S S¹, Dr. Keertana M², Dr. A. Annadurai³, Ms. Nafrin AZ⁴,

¹ Professor & HOD, Paediatrics, Meenakshi Medical College Hospital & Research Institute, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research, Enathur, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu 631552. kumaranss@maher.ac.in

² Assistant Professor, Community Medicine, Meenakshi Medical College Hospital & Research Institute, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research, Enathur, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu 631552. keetanam@maher.ac.in

³ Assistant Professor, Meenakshi College of Yoga Science and Therapy, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research. drannaduraiyoga@maher.ac.in

⁴ Lecturer, Pharmaceutics, Meenakshi College of Pharmacy, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research. nafrinaz@maher.ac.in

Abstract

Background: The period of adolescence is a vulnerable time for social influences, including peer pressure. In cities, adolescents are exposed to a variety of social networks, media and changes in lifestyles which could further influence the participation in risky health-related behavior like substance abuse, risky sexual behavior and delinquency. **Objective:** To investigate the impact of peer pressure on risky health practices of urban adolescents. **Methodology:** Urban adolescents aged 10-19 years were studied in a cross-sectional survey in schools and communities. Structured surveys were used to gather information on peer pressure and risky health behaviors. Chi-square and regression analysis were used to assess associations. **Key Findings:** The research found a strong link between levels of peer pressure and the likelihood of engaging in risky health-related activities. High peer pressure was linked to higher incidence of drug use, risky sexual activities and violence. There were interacting effects of socioeconomic status and family dynamics. **Conclusion:** Friend influences play a vital role in urban adolescents' engagement in risky health behavior. Programs aimed at peer education, life skills development and healthy family dynamics are crucial to reduce these risks and foster positive health outcomes.

Keywords: Teenagers, Peer Influence, Risky Health Behaviors, Urban, Substance Use, Peer Review

1. Introduction

Adolescence, typically considered as the period of 10 to 19 years of age, is a pivotal period of physical, emotional and social change that sets the stage for future health practices and outcomes [1]. It is a stage in which autonomy, identity, and connections with others are being developed and, in turn, are open to being influenced [2]. Peer pressure, or the influence of others in one's social circle, may be positive or negative. While positive peer pressure might motivate academically and healthy lifestyles, negative peer influence can promote uptake of harmful behaviors such as substance abuse and risky behaviors [2].

The complex living conditions in urban areas can increase peer pressure. The higher population density, enhanced exposure to mass media and social networking, and lifestyle patterns, all contribute to the shift in behaviors among young people [3]. Young people in cities are more exposed to different peer cultures and influences, increasing their risk for engaging in potentially unhealthy behaviors. They include the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, risky sexual behaviors, violence and delinquency [4, 5]. These behaviors have serious health impacts, both in the short and longer term, such as drug dependence, STIs, and mental illness.

There are many factors at play in the processes of peer influence. Peer norms can address perceived deficiencies to identify with a group or be liked by others [6]. Social learning theorists argue people model their behavior after peers, whereas normative social influence focuses on wanting to be accepted and avoid ostracism [7]. Furthermore, peers can influence behavior through direct reinforcement or indirect modeling, which may also influence adolescents' choices.

While there is a growing body of research on adolescent risk behaviors, there is limited research that explores the influence of peer pressure, in particular, in conjunction with urban environmental exposure on multiple risky health-related behaviors. Previous research often examined individual risk behaviors, has tended to occur in rural areas,

and may not be applicable to complex urban environments [8-10]. Additionally, there is a paucity of integrated research focused on the impact of peer pressure, socioeconomic environment and exposure to media on the health status of adolescents [11,12].

Hence, this study seeks to explore the role of peer pressure on health-related risky behaviours of adolescents in urban settings. The research aims to: (1) measure the amount of peer pressure adolescents are exposed to, and (2) examine the relationship between peer pressure and risky health behaviors.

1.1 Objectives

1. To determine the level of perceived peer pressure and the frequency of risky health behaviours of adolescents in an urban setting.
2. To examine the link between peer pressure and risky health behaviours in adolescents.

1.2 Hypotheses

1. Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no association between peer pressure and the risky health behaviors of adolescents.
2. Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is an association between peer pressure and risky health behaviors among adolescents.

1.3 Research Gap

While there is growing evidence, few studies integrate evidence on the role of urban environments and peer pressure on multiple risky health practices, suggesting the need for more holistic studies.

2 Literature review

2.1 Peer Pressure in Adolescence

Peer influence is a critical factor in adolescent development, especially in the context of social identity formation and behaviors. Teens strive for inclusion in peer groups, which contributes to conforming to group norms and expectations. Contemporary research shows that peer conformity theory provides an understanding of how individuals change their beliefs and behaviors to fit in with their peers, favoring normative understanding over individual reasoning [13]. Peer groups also enable adolescents to develop social identities, contributing to identity development [14].

2.2 Risky Health Behaviors

Health risk factors among urban adolescents include substance abuse (alcohol, smoking, drugs), risky sexual behavior and violence or delinquency. Globally, these practices are estimated to be on the rise in urban areas due to their availability and the social milieu [15]. Research has found that urban adolescents engage in more risk-taking activities and experiment with drugs and alcohol when compared to their rural peers [16].

2.3 Urban Context

Urbanization has a profound impact on the behavior of adolescents through environmental and social changes such as population density, media influences, and lifestyle transformations. City life can encourage a high-speed culture, independence, and exposure to a variety of peer groups, exacerbating risk-taking [17]. Moreover, social inequalities within urban areas provide further access to resources and vulnerability to unhealthy behaviors [18].

2.4 Peer Influence Mechanisms

There are direct and indirect peer influence mechanisms. Direct mechanisms involve explicit encouragement or pressure and indirect ones include social learning and modeling of peers' behavior [19]. The advent of social media has also enhanced the influence of digital peer interactions and normalization of risky adolescent practice [20].

2.5 Previous Studies

Recent literature shows a clear link between peer influence and risk-taking in health among adolescents [13,15]. On the other hand, there are contradictory findings about the level of influence, such as moderating effects of family factors and individual resilience on peer influences [18, 20].

3 Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework of this study is premised on the idea that peer pressure is a key factor that affects young people and their involvement in risky health practices in urban areas. Peer pressure, as the independent variable, can include direct (encouragement, role-modeling) and indirect (perception of social acceptance) influences from one's friends and peers. It can result in adolescents engaging in risky health behaviors, such as substance use, risky sexual activities, violence and delinquency, which are the dependent variables of this study.

The link between peer pressure and risky health practices is not in isolation but is greatly influenced by other variables. Parental monitoring and communication with parents may mitigate or enhance the effects of peer pressure. Socioeconomic background may influence access to opportunities, environmental influences and choices. Social media and other types of media can reinforce peer norms and risky behavior. Furthermore, gender influences responses and vulnerability to peer pressure.

Therefore, this theoretical framework implies that while peer pressure has a direct impact on risky health behaviors, this impact is mediated by contextual and individual factors, underpinning the multifaceted nature of health behavior among adolescents.

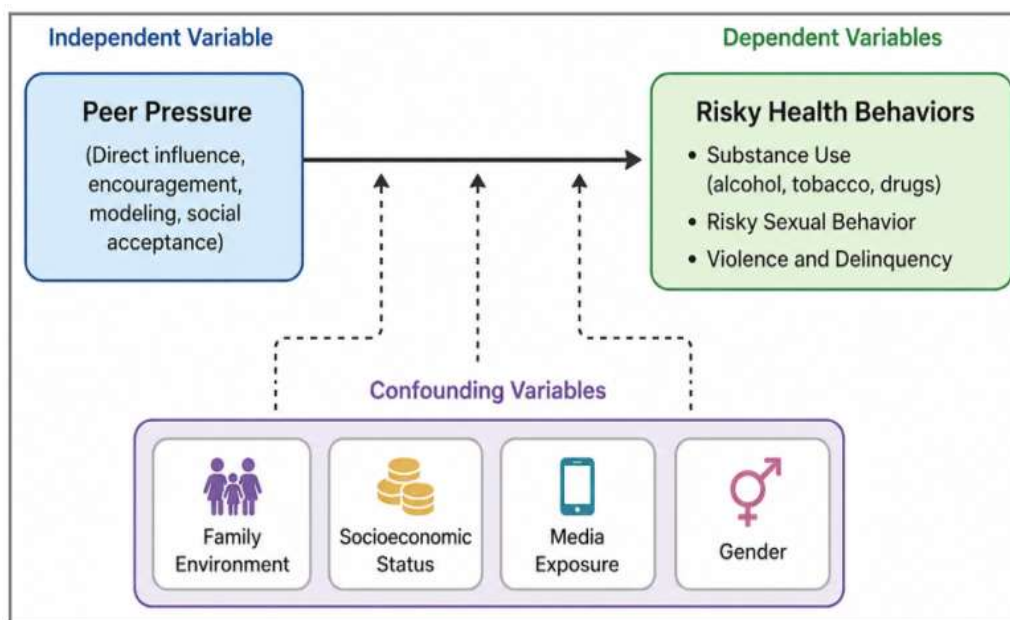


Fig.1. The Influence of Peer Pressure on Risky Health Behaviors among Adolescents

This figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of the impact of peer pressure on risky health behaviors in youth. Peer pressure is shown as the key independent variable, including direct pressure, support, role modeling and need for social acceptance. This affects the dependent variables, namely risky health-related behavior (such as drug and alcohol use, risky sexual behavior, and violence/ delinquency). The model also takes into account the potential confounding variables (family, socioeconomic background, media, and gender) that may affect peer pressure and health behaviors. The directions of influence are represented by arrows, where solid lines, represent direct

influences whereas dashed lines represent indirect or moderating influences. Ultimately, this model emphasizes the multifaceted nature of social, environmental and psychological influences on adolescent health behaviors and offers a systematic way of analysis and interpretation.

4 Methodology

4.1 Study Design

A cross-sectional analytical study design was adopted to investigate the impact of peer pressure on risky health-related behaviors of urban adolescents. This type of design enables the examination of exposure (peer pressure) and outcomes (risky health behaviors) in a population at one point in time.

4.2 Study Area & Population

Urban schools and communities were selected for the study. Participants were young people aged 10-19 years (early and late adolescence). Recruitment occurred across socioeconomic groups to ensure representation of urban youth across the city.

4.3 Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling was used. Stratification was done according to age (10-13 years, 14-16 years, 17-19 years), sex, and setting (school/community) shown in table 1. Within the groups, simple random samples were drawn to avoid bias and the possibility of making unequal choices.

Table.1. Sample Distribution Table

Variable	Category	Sample Size (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	10–13 years	100	33.3
	14–16 years	120	40.0
	17–19 years	80	26.7
Gender	Male	150	50.0
	Female	150	50.0
Total	—	300	100

4.4 Data Collection Tools

Information was gathered using structured reliable tools:

- a. Structured Questionnaire: Gathered demographic data and overall behavior.
- b. Peer Pressure Measure: Assessed perceived level of peer pressure (direct and indirect).
- c. Risky Behavior Measures: Evaluated participation in risky health-related activities (drug taking, risky sexual practices and crime).

4.5 Variables

Variable Type	Description
Independent Variable	Peer pressure (measured using standardized scale)
Dependent Variables	Risky health behaviors (substance use, sexual behavior, violence)
Confounders	Family environment, socioeconomic status, media exposure, gender

4.6 Data Analysis

SPSS (v. 25) and R (v. 3.6.2) were used to code and analyse data. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to describe the data.

Inferential statistical tests included:

- Chi-square test for the association between categorical variables
- Correlation to examine peer pressure and behavioural scores
- Multiple regression to assess the direction and magnitude of associations, adjusted for other variables

The level of statistical significance was $p < 0.05$.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The authors received ethical approval from the institutional review board before collecting data. All subjects were obtained written consent (or parental/guardian consent if the child was under 18 years). All responses were voluntary, confidential and anonymous. Data were only used for research and confidentiality was upheld.

5 Results & Discussion

This chapter reports the results of the study on the role of peer pressure in adolescents' engagement in risky health behaviors in urban areas. The findings are structured by participant demographics, peer pressure and risky behavior prevalence, association, and regression findings. Data are summarized using tables and supported by graphical representations such as bar charts and scatter plots for clarity. The results help in identifying patterns and associations and show the role of peer pressure in influencing engagement in risky health behaviours.

5.1 Demographic Profile

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	10–13 years	100	33.3
	14–16 years	120	40.0
	17–19 years	80	26.7
Gender	Male	150	50.0
	Female	150	50.0

Three hundred adolescents (male and female), aged 12-17 years, were involved in this study. Participants were 75% in the middle-adolescent stage (14-16 years) shown in table 2.

5.2 Levels of Peer Pressure

Table 3: Distribution of Peer Pressure Levels

Peer Pressure Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	80	26.7
Moderate	130	43.3
High	90	30.0

Most adolescents reported moderate to high peer pressure, suggesting strong peer group influence in urban areas Shown in table 3.

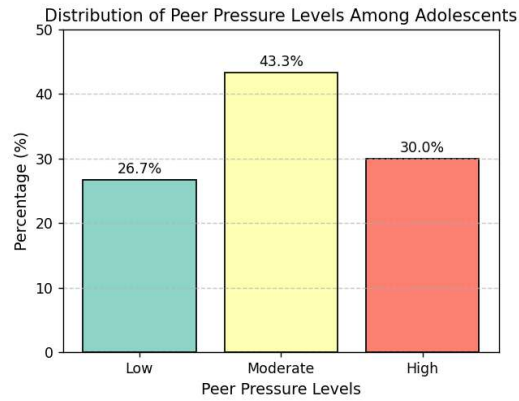


Figure.2. Peer Pressure Levels

The figure 2 shows moderate level of peer pressure is the most prevalent followed by high, indicating peer influence is prevalent.

3. Prevalence of Risky Behaviors

Table 4: Prevalence of Risky Health Behaviors

Behavior Type	Yes (%)	No (%)
Substance Use	35.0	65.0
Risky Sexual Behavior	28.0	72.0
Violence/Delinquency	22.0	78.0

The bar chart shows moderate level of peer pressure is the most prevalent followed by high, indicating peer influence is prevalent.

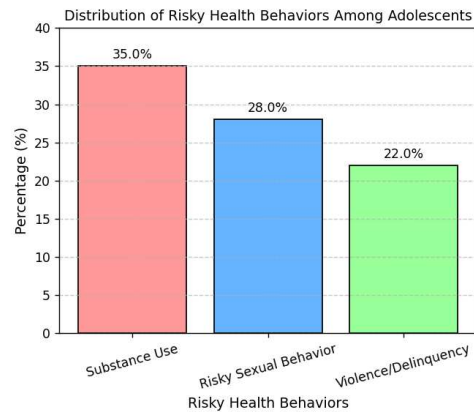


Figure.3. Risky Behaviors Distribution

4. Association Analysis

Table 5: Association between Peer Pressure and Risky Behaviors (Chi-square Test)

Peer Pressure	Risk Behavior (%)	No Risk (%)	p-value
Low	20.0	80.0	
Moderate	35.0	65.0	0.01*
High	55.0	45.0	

A significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) was observed between peer pressure and risk-taking behaviors shown in table 5. The greater the peer pressure, the higher the risk behaviors.

5. Regression Results

Table 6: Regression Analysis of Peer Pressure and Risky Behaviors

Variable	β Coefficient	p-value
Peer Pressure	0.48	0.002*
SES	-0.20	0.03*
Gender	0.15	0.04*

Regression models show peer pressure is a strong predictor of risky behaviour shown in table 6. Socioeconomic background and gender are also important, but not as potent.

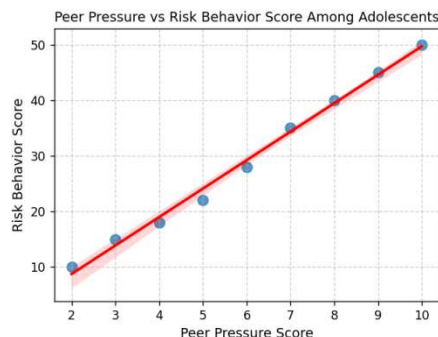


Figure.4. Peer Pressure vs Risk Behavior Score

The scatter plot illustrates a positive association, with higher peer pressure scores related to higher risk behavior scores shown in figure 2. This study confirms peer pressure plays an important role in adolescents' risky health-related activities. Greater peer pressure is a predictor of risk-taking behavior in urban areas, suggesting the need for interventions in these areas.

Discussion

The results of our study demonstrate a crucial link between peer influence and engaging in health-compromising behaviors for urban adolescents. Teens who reported greater peer pressure were greater odds of engaging in risky behavior, such as substance use, sexual risk, and delinquency (conforming to peer norms and peer modeling). The prevalence of moderate to high degrees of peer pressure underlines the influence of peers in the lives of young people. Furthermore, the role of socioeconomic background and gender indicates that the effects of peer pressure vary. This evidence has implications for fostering the use of peer-based interventions such as peer education and life skills training, to reduce risky behaviour. Enhancing family support, and encouraging positive peer relations can also help diffuse peer pressure.

Conclusion and future scope

Overall, this study underscores the role of peer pressure in risky health behaviours of urban adolescents. This study shows a direct link between adolescents who are subject to greater levels of peer pressure and their engagement in risky health-related behaviors such as substance abuse, risky sex and delinquency. These results also suggest that other variables such as family background, socioeconomic factors and gender moderates these behaviors. This highlights the need to understand the multifaceted nature of health among adolescents, as peer pressure combines with other socioenvironmental factors. The importance of multifaceted intervention approaches such as school-based interventions, peer education programs, and enhanced parental support to encourage healthy behaviors is highlighted in the study. Future scope: Longitudinal studies are needed to clarify causal links between peer pressure and risky behaviors in future research. Also the use of qualitative methods may further inform understanding of teenagers' attitudes and motivations. Increasing research in various urban areas and considering social media effects

will also help to better understand and prevent risky behaviors.

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