

The Level of Peer Pressure In Adolescents In Relation To Demographic Variables In Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate the level of peer pressure experienced by adolescents in public and private education institutions and explored the influence of various demographic variables, including sex, age, and education level. The study collected data from a sample of 400 students (200 from public education institutions and 200 from private education institutions) using a quantitative research design, with a Chi-Square test to determine the association of the variables. Adolescent peer pressure was measured using the Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPSQ), which consists of 25 questions. The results showed that adolescents experienced a moderate level of peer pressure, and most were able to stand their ground and resist the influence of peers. Overall, the level of peer pressure was slightly higher among higher secondary-level students compared to their counterparts. Additionally, no statistically significant differences were found between public and private education institutions, as students from both experienced similar levels of peer pressure.

Keywords: peer pressure; adolescent; conformity; susceptibility;

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is marked by shifts in socially oriented behaviors, and research demonstrates that youth are especially receptive to peer influence compared to other age groups (Albert et al., 2013). As individuals develop their sense of self, their peer group, consisting of those with similar interests, ages, backgrounds, or social standing, becomes a key source of knowledge, criticism, and support. Peers significantly influence the socialization process by rewarding or penalizing behaviors and interactions, with this influence being particularly heightened during adolescence (Little, 2020).

Interacting with peers in a safe environment allows adolescents to experiment, learn, and maintain social norms, supporting their development of competence as they explore identity and independence. However, peer pressure is often unavoidable for teenagers and occurs when peers coerce them into engaging in or avoiding specific behaviors. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to both overt and subtle forms of peer pressure (Lou, 2023).

Peer influence often compels individuals to adopt their peers' viewpoints, driven by a desire for acceptance rather than personal growth. This influence, whether conscious or unconscious, has long shaped people's decisions. The Ventral Striatum's regulatory role supports the dual systems model, indicating that adolescents rely more on motivational systems like the Ventral Striatum while the cognitive control regions are still maturing (Pei et al., 2020). This biological phase explains adolescents' tendency to value peer opinions over their own.

Adolescents naturally prioritize peer relationships, significantly impacting their decision-making. Over time, peer pressure has become a detrimental source of validation, driving adolescents toward activities that enhance their social standing. Since teenagers

spend most of their formative years within their social circles, peer pressure is inescapable. Peer influence, shaped by parental involvement, conformity, and personal values, plays a crucial role in decision-making.

Being part of a group often requires aligning with group norms, which may involve risky behaviors such as substance use or sexual activities to demonstrate loyalty (Santor et al., 2000). Adolescents' impulsive actions stem from an imbalance in brain development, as the amygdala, responsible for decision-making, matures earlier than the prefrontal cortex. This imbalance increases susceptibility to peer pressure, often resulting in negative behaviors like smoking, drinking, and gambling, influenced by factors such as conformity, financial status, and developmental stage.

Children's initial interactions with their parents significantly impact their development, but other factors also influence their growth (Bolger et al., 1998). Adolescent decision-making is often believed to be affected by their peer group, although the degree of peer influence varies based on background.

While age definitions are arbitrary and culturally influenced, puberty marks a significant turning point. Neurocognitive development continues beyond age 20, and a broader definition of adolescence, ranging from 10 to 24 years, aligns better with contemporary patterns (Sawyer et al., 2018).

The objective of this study is to assess the extent of peer pressure experienced by adolescent students. It also aims to examine the impact of peer influence across different variables, including sex and age groups (13-16 years and 17-21 years), and among students attending both private and public educational institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "adolescence" originates from the Latin word *adolescere*, meaning "to mature." Defining this stage, which bridges childhood and adulthood, has always been complex. Adolescence encompasses physical development and changes in social roles, with the timing of these changes varying across eras and locations. Extending adolescence to the age range of 10 to 24 years more accurately reflects contemporary development patterns (Sawyer et al., 2018). While adolescence is often marked from 10 to 24 years, this study includes individuals aged 13 to 21.

Adolescence is characterized by significant social changes, including the development of socio-cognitive processes such as understanding others' thoughts, resisting peer pressure, and managing emotions. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues and social risks like peer exclusion during this period, making research into adolescence a priority (Andrews et al., 2021).

Adolescence begins with biological changes and ends with cultural transitions. Puberty marks its onset, but the transition to adulthood lacks a clear endpoint. Brain studies show maturation continues into the mid-twenties, influencing the shift to adulthood (Smetana et al., 2006).

Peers significantly influence the development of personal efficacy and the life trajectories of adolescents as they transition from childhood to adulthood (Kiran-Esen, 2012). During this pivotal period, adolescents increasingly seek social support and validation from peers. Positive peer influences can boost self-efficacy, motivating academic success, constructive activities, and self-confidence, while negative peer pressure may lead to risky behaviors or lowered self-esteem.

As adolescents gain independence from parents, they spend more time with peers, who form close-knit groups of similar ages and activities (Jackson & Tomé, 1993). These peer groups play a central role in development, offering support, managing generational

differences, and fostering tolerance for individual differences. They provide safety, validation, and acceptance among individuals of equivalent age and developmental stage (Cook & Dayley, 2001).

The heightened need for belonging, acceptance, and attachment during adolescence increases the influence of peer groups (Kiran-Esen, 2012). During middle adolescence, peers become increasingly important as teenagers spend more time with friends, but peer influence diminishes in later adolescence as new connections, such as work or romantic relationships, take precedence. Peer influence, whether positive or negative, is shaped by group norms. Research shows adolescents engage in more risky behaviors when observed by peers, driven by a desire for acceptance and security (Huijsmans et al., 2021). As adolescents gain unique experiences, their susceptibility to peer influence decreases.

Adolescents can respond to peer pressure in various ways: they might conform to peers' norms or counteract it. Their reactions depend on multiple factors categorized by Brown et al. (2008) into six groups, including individual factors like sex and age, and contextual factors such as schools and neighborhoods. Additionally, four key aspects influence an adolescent's susceptibility to peer pressure: openness to influence, the significance of the peers exerting pressure, their ability to act, and relationship dynamics (Rihtaric & Kamenov, 2013).

Adolescents' brain responses to social cues influence their propensity for risk-taking under peer pressure, though the interaction of neural mechanisms with different peer influences remains poorly understood (Pei et al., 2020). Adolescents are significantly influenced by their friends' attitudes and behaviors, which impact their developmental path. Perceived peer support motivates students and highlights the importance of academic achievement. Studies show peers greatly affect adolescents' motivation and adaptation to educational settings. Adolescents can evaluate peer pressure before fully adopting it, with variations in preferences linked to initial choices. Those with less stable preferences are more influenced by others, while younger participants are generally less confident and more susceptible to peer influence. These influences are strong during adolescence, driven by social changes and the need to secure a position within new groups (Andrews et al., 2021).

Upon entering adolescence, individuals often prioritize social perception over personal well-being, driven by a desire for inclusion and status, making them particularly vulnerable to social acceptance. The idea that early adolescence is marked by increased susceptibility to peer influence challenges the stereotype of teenagers as overly conformist. If early adolescents show more conformity in both negative behaviors and non-antisocial areas like fashion and music, this may be due to stronger peer pressure rather than a decline in their ability to resist influence. If susceptibility remains constant while pressure intensifies, increased conformity could occur without a decrease in personal resilience (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

Peer influence occurs when individuals affect the behavior of others within the same group, involving at least two individuals. Firstly, an individual or group engages in an action observed by their peers, which may involve demonstrating behavior, adopting a new appearance, promoting certain behaviors, or issuing directives for conformity. They may also reward those who conform or punish those who do not. The first step features an influencer who initiates a behavior that affects others, acting as the source of influence. In the second step, the influence individual adjusts their behavior to match that of the influencer, increasing similarity. In summary, peer influence involves an influencer's behavior prompting conformity from others (Laursen & Faur, 2022).

It can be inferred that for significant influence, the presence of a pivotal individual is crucial, as they must engage in behaviors that exemplify conformity, setting a precedent for similar patterns. The adolescent is then likely to adopt these patterns, demonstrating the influence of the conforming actor on their actions and attitudes, highlighting the role of social modeling in shaping adolescent behavior through established norms.

Peer pressure is defined as the personal experience of feeling coerced, encouraged, or challenged by others to participate in specific behaviors or actually engaging in those behaviors due to external pressure, persuasion, or daring. This concept hinges on the perception of pressure from peers to engage in certain activities. Our measure focused on various delinquent behaviors, such as substance abuse, skipping classes, and theft (Santor et al., 2000).

Peer pressure refers to the impact that a peer group has to encourage an individual to modify their attitudes, values, or behavior to conform to group norms. It involves pressure to adopt certain actions or styles, such as ways of dressing, and can manifest in educational institutions, at home, or within the wider community (Nayak & Kumari, 2018).

As adolescents spend more time with peers, they create an environment conducive to peer pressure. This shift from family to friends makes peer influence prominent and impactful. Friends become primary sources of companionship and support for personal issues, and peer pressure gains influence from both biological and sociocultural factors (Lou, 2023).

Misbehavior associated with adolescent risk-taking, such as delinquency and substance use, commonly occurs in peer groups. Research shows that peer influence is stronger in adolescents than in adults; for instance, peer exposure during risk-taking tasks significantly increased risky behavior in middle adolescents and college students but not in adults (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

Poor-quality friendships are more likely to engage in delinquency, risky sexual behavior, and substance abuse. These negative outcomes often stem from distress caused by peer conflicts and a lack of emotional intimacy. Conversely, positive friendships characterized by strong support and low conflict can reduce risky behaviors. Emotional support in healthy relationships helps adolescents manage stress and confusion, lowering the likelihood of harmful activities (Lou, 2023).

The type of peer influence is crucial; adolescents are responsive to both positive and negative feedback, which can increase the likelihood of engaging in approach-oriented behavior. Emulating high-status peers is more beneficial for integration into social circles, as they exert greater normative influence. Peer attributes, such as social connections and group dynamics, significantly determine the extent of influence. For instance, higher secondary education students are more swayed by popular classmates or those with closer social ties (Karakos, 2014).

Addressing peer pressure's effects on adolescents is challenging because they seek peer approval and fear rejection. Besides overt pressure, a subtler form influences conformity indirectly through peers' actions, which is powerful yet harder to identify (Lou, 2023). Thus, peer pressure is an inevitable aspect of adolescent life, manifesting as both direct and subtle influences.

Susceptibility refers to the likelihood of conformity under peer pressure and focuses on the factors influencing this susceptibility. Being susceptible means being easily influenced by the opinions and behaviors of others. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines "susceptible" as being sensitive to influence or damage. In peer relations, susceptibility implies the probability of being swayed rather than just being easily influenced. Describing a child as easily influenced suggests minimal effort is needed from peers to change their behavior, while stating a child is likely to be influenced indicates a higher chance of successful peer influence if consistent effort is applied (Laursen & Faur, 2022).

Susceptibility to peer pressure is best understood behaviorally, as it refers to conforming in response to peers' actions. If someone has been influenced by peers, they are, by definition, susceptible. Susceptibility to influence (SI) measures how receptive a person is to peer influence, varying both between individuals and within the same individual over time (McConchie et al., 2019). A higher

level of susceptibility indicates a greater likelihood of yielding to peer pressure, while lower susceptibility suggests a reduced tendency to be influenced.

Peer pressure can significantly impact academic performance, depending on whether the influence is positive or negative. Teenagers often seek reassurance from peers, unaware of how these interactions affect academic outcomes. Middle school marks a shift from family-centered activities to peer-focused ones, with growing pressure to conform to group norms (Moldes et al., 2019).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative methodology to assess peer pressure among adolescents aged 13 to 21 years, focusing on the relationship between peer pressure and demographic variables such as age, sex, and type of educational institution. Participants were selected from two public and two private institutions in Kathmandu District, representing secondary, higher secondary, and bachelor's 1st-year students. A total of 400 students, selected via quota sampling, completed the Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPSQ) by Sunil Saini and Sandeep Singh, which measures susceptibility to peer pressure on a 5-point Likert scale. Data were collected through Google Forms and in-person questionnaires, then analyzed using SPSS-23. The reliability of the PPSQ was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79, and a chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between peer pressure and key demographic factors.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Adolescents' Peer Pressure

	Mean score of Peer Pressure
N	400
Mean	2.45
Standard deviation	0.543
Minimum	1
Maximum	3.96

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

Table 1 shows that the average peer pressure score was 2.45 on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating a slightly neutral to disagree stance regarding peer influence. The standard deviation of 0.543 suggests a relatively low spread of scores around the mean, with ratings ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 3.96. This means that, on average, individuals felt somewhat neutral to not be pressured by their peers. Most individuals' ratings were close to 2.45, with some reporting very little peer pressure (minimum rating of 1) and others experiencing a somewhat higher level of pressure (maximum rating of 3.96). Overall, this indicates that adolescents experience moderate levels of peer pressure.

Table 2: Scoring of Peer Pressure in relation to sex

Sex	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Male	46 (23%)	106 (53%)	48 (24%)	200 (100%)
Female	86 (43%)	86 (43%)	28 (14%)	200 (100%)
Total	132 (33%)	192 (48%)	76 (19%)	400 (100%)

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

Table 2 summarizes the findings on peer pressure experienced by adolescents in relation to sex. The analysis revealed that males were more likely to report moderate peer pressure (53%), while females exhibited a more even distribution across the peer pressure levels, with 43% reporting low pressure, 43% reporting moderate pressure, and 14% reporting high pressure. This indicates that males experience more moderate peer pressure compared to females, who experience a broader range of peer pressure levels. Thus, sex appears to play a significant role in how peer pressure is experienced.

Table 3: Chi-square test measuring peer pressure in relation to sex

	Value	df	p
χ^2	19.5	2	<.001
N	400		

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

A chi-square test revealed a significant relationship between sex and the degree of peer pressure ($\chi^2 = 19.5$, $p < .001$). Male participants (N = 200) were more likely to report moderate peer pressure (53%) compared to female participants (N = 200), who showed a more balanced distribution across peer pressure categories (43% low, 43% moderate, and 14% high). This suggests that sex may influence the experience of peer pressure, with males potentially facing greater pressure to conform to peer expectations.

Table 4: Scoring of Peer Pressure in relation to age

Age	Low	Moderate	High	Total
13-16	51 (35.20%)	65 (44.80%)	29 (20.00%)	145 (100%)
17-21	81 (31.80%)	127 (49.80%)	47 (18.40%)	255 (100%)
Total	132 (33%)	192 (48%)	76 (19%)	400 (100%)

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

Table 4 summarizes the findings of peer pressure experienced by adolescents in relation to age groups. In the 13–16 age group, a total of 145 students were surveyed, with 65 students (44.5%) experiencing moderate peer pressure, 51 students (35.2%) facing low peer pressure, and 29 students (20%) reporting high peer pressure. In the 17–21 age group, 255 students participated, with 127 students (49.8%) experiencing moderate peer pressure, 81 students (31.8%) facing low peer pressure, and 47 students (18.4%) reporting high peer pressure. This indicates that moderate peer pressure is the most commonly experienced level in both age groups.

Table 5: Chi-square test measuring peer pressure in relation to age

	Value	df	p
χ^2	0.922	2	0.631
N	400		

Source: Field Study 2024

A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between age groups (13-16 vs. 17-21) and peer pressure levels (low, moderate, high). The results showed no significant association between these variables ($\chi^2 = 0.922$, $p = .631$). Both age groups exhibited similar distributions of peer pressure, with approximately 35% reporting low, 45% moderate, and 20% high levels. This suggests that age does not significantly affect the amount of peer pressure students experience; both younger and older individuals feel peer pressure in similar ways.

Table 6: Scoring of Peer Pressure in relation to Education Institutes

Education Institute	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Private	67 (35.50%)	91 (45.50%)	42 (21.00%)	100 (100%)
Public	65 (32.50%)	101 (50.50%)	34 (17.00%)	255 (100%)
Total	132 (33%)	192 (48%)	76 (19%)	400 (100%)

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

Table 6 summarizes the peer pressure experienced by adolescents in private and public education institutes. The data reveals no significant difference in peer pressure levels between the two groups. In private institutions, 45.5% of students experienced moderate peer pressure, 35.5% reported low pressure, and 21% felt high pressure. Similarly, in public institutions, 50.5% of students experienced moderate peer pressure, 32.5% reported low pressure, and 17% felt high pressure. Although private institution students

reported slightly higher peer pressure, the overall trend is consistent across both types of institutions, suggesting that the type of institution does not significantly affect peer pressure levels.

Table 7: Chi-square test measuring peer pressure in relation to education institution

	Value	df	p
χ^2	1.39	2	0.498
N	400		

Source: Field Study 2024

A chi-square test was conducted to analyze the correlation between the type of educational institution (private vs. public) and peer pressure levels. The results showed no significant difference in the distribution of peer pressure between the two groups ($\chi^2 = 1.39$, $p = .498$). Both private and public school students exhibited similar patterns, with roughly 33% reporting low, 45% moderate, and 20% high levels of peer pressure.

Table 8: Descriptive analysis of Peer Pressure between Male student of Public and Private Education Institution

	Education Institute	N	Mean	SD	SE
Male Students Peer Pressure Score	Private	100	62.1	12.9	1.29
	Public	100	65.9	13.8	1.38

Source: Field Study 2024

Table 8 shows that male students in public institutions report experiencing higher average levels of peer pressure compared to those in private institutions. Public school students also display slightly greater variability in peer pressure. With equal sample sizes, these comparisons are significant. The higher standard errors for public institutions suggest more uncertainty in the peer pressure estimates. Overall, the data indicates that male students in public schools perceive greater peer pressure than their counterparts in private schools.

Table 9: Descriptive analysis of Peer Pressure between Female student of Public and Private Education Institution

	Education Institute	N	Mean	SD	SE
Female Students Peer Pressure Score	Private	100	61	13.4	1.34
	Public	100	56.4	12.7	1.27

Source: Field Study 2024

Table 9 reveals that female students in private institutions report higher average levels of peer pressure compared to those in public institutions. The peer pressure scores for private school students also display slightly more variability. Additionally, the mean peer pressure estimates for private institutions show greater uncertainty, reflected by the higher standard error. Overall, the data suggests that female students in private schools tend to experience more peer pressure than their counterparts in public schools.

Table 10: Scoring of Peer Pressure in relation to Education Level

Education Level	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Secondary	45 (44.10%)	42 (41.20%)	15 (14.70%)	102 (100%)
Higher Secondary	17 (41.50%)	21 (51.20%)	3 (7.30%)	41 (100%)
Bachelor 1st year	70	129	58	257

	(27.20%)	(50.20%)	(22.60%)	(100%)
Total	132	192	76	400
	(33%)	(48%)	(19%)	(100%)

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

Table 10 summarizes peer pressure levels among 400 adolescents across different educational stages. Among secondary students (102 total), 44.1% reported low, 41.2% moderate, and 14.7% high peer pressure. In the higher secondary group (41 students), 51.2% experienced moderate, 41.5% low, and 7.3% high peer pressure. For Bachelor 1st Year students (257 total), 50.2% reported moderate, 27.2% low, and 22.6% high peer pressure.

Overall, moderate peer pressure was the most common across all groups, representing 48% of the total, followed by low (33%) and high (19%). As students' progress through educational levels, peer pressure tends to increase slightly, but moderate levels remain the most prevalent across all stages.

Table 11: Chi-square test measuring peer pressure in relation to education level

	Value	df	p
χ^2	14.3	4	0.006
N	400		

Note: Source, Field Study 2024

A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between educational level (Secondary, Higher Secondary, and Bachelor 1st Year) and peer pressure. The results showed a significant association ($\chi^2 = 14.3$, $p = .006$). Secondary students reported higher levels of low (44.1%) and high (14.7%) peer pressure, while Bachelor 1st Year students experienced more moderate peer pressure (51.2%). Higher Secondary students had a balanced distribution with 27.2% low, 50.2% moderate, and 22.6% high peer pressure. These findings suggest that educational attainment influences peer pressure levels, with the highest pressure observed among Higher Secondary students.

5. CONCLUSION

The study found that overall, adolescents experienced a moderate level of peer pressure, with no significant difference between public and private institutions. However, male students were more susceptible to peer pressure compared to female students, and students at the higher secondary level experienced higher levels of peer pressure than those at the secondary and bachelor's 1st-year levels.

In line with these results, previous studies by Lou (2023) also found that girls tend to be more resilient to peer pressure than boys. Furthermore, females are less influenced by antisocial peer pressure (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). This aligns with the current study's findings that female students are less vulnerable to peer pressure compared to their male counterparts. Peers account for a significant portion of the daily interactions and stimulation that teenagers experience. Adolescents appear to be biologically prepared to focus on and learn from their peers (Allen et al., 2022). The findings indicated that, while peer pressure does exist, its intensity is moderate among the respondents.

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