

Positive impacts of peer pressure: A systematic review

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This paper is a view to understand how positive peer pressure can be instrumental towards promoting healthy social and emotional developments in adolescents, define the extent to which positive peer pressure is associated with healthy behaviour and emotional well-being and identifying different ways by which positive behaviour is encouraged by peer pressure. Peers play a very important role in the overall social and emotional development of children and adolescents. Peer pressure is a very common phenomenon that most of us are familiar with. Peer pressure often appears to be negative, but not necessarily. When one's peer influences an individual to think and act in ways that changes an individual's thoughts, actions and lifestyle for better, it is called positive peer pressure. There is a huge pool of research on the negative influences of peer pressure; however, the extent of literature on positive peer pressure is quite limited even though it has potential for positive development. Research paper published between January 2000 to December 2015 has been taken from Jstor & Google scholar and 12 relevant articles were selected for review. The present study throws light at the fact that peer pressure can exert positive influences in the development of individuals, especially during adolescence when peer acceptance becomes an integral goal of their lives. Hence, by paying equal attention to the positive aspects of peer pressure in addition to the negative aspects we will be able to explain how positive peer pressure can be influential in their overall social and emotional development.

Keywords: peer pressure, peer and behaviour, healthy emotional and social development, adolescents

Human beings are social creatures and they cannot live separated from the society. In this sense we all need some or other people that suit us. So, being a social being the role of peer is something that cannot be ignored. Generally speaking, peer means a group comprising of two to many members. It refers to a small group of same aged closed friends usually sharing the same activities (Castrogiovanni, 2002). Peer plays an important role in overall social and emotional development of a person. Both peer and peer pressure are the phenomenon goes hand in hand. As we already know "peer" means the social group and "peer pressure" can be described as the pressure exerted by a peer group in influencing a person's attitude, behaviour, morals and many aspects of life. The 'pressure involves expectations or demands one to behave in a definite way'. Pressure can be of two types the one to perform and also to confirm. And the power of pressure is such that it can make a person violate his/her personal standards in order to be liked and accepted by other members of the group. (Weiten & Lloyd, 2004). This is something that cannot be denied. According to Elliot (2001), peer pressure is defined as the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitude, values, behaviour in order to conform the group norms. Ryan (2000) defined peer pressure as when people of your own age encourage or insist on doing something or to keep from doing something else, no matter if you personally want to do it or not. The more subtle form of peer pressure is known as peer influence, and it involves changing one's behaviour to meet the perceived expectations of others (Burns & Darling, 2002)

Peer more or less has a role to play in a person life all throughout but it becomes more integral part of the adolescents' life and even plays more influencing role than familial influences. Living in a society people feels obligated to conform to the norms and perceived

expectations of the groups to which they belong (Baumeister, 1990) and it is more evident among adolescents (Berndt, 1996). When children enter adolescence, friends take a more prominent role in their lives. Although children are also confronted by peer pressure but in the adolescent period it becomes particularly evident. Adolescent period as being the phase of transformation where they undergo extensive physical, intellectual, emotional and social changes and thus these changes makes young people commit to take serious task of becoming autonomous individuals. They try to accelerate their developing independence from family and they find a sense of security and a feeling of belongingness and also find their freedom to explore and form their own identities through their peer group (Clasen & Brown, 1985).

Adolescence spends most of their times in school and in other activities which requires them to spend much time with their peers and as such socialization may impact later social and emotional outcomes, it is very important to understand how their peer affiliation is affecting their development.

Different researches over the years have shown the importance of peer influences on the adolescents. It is well aware that direct and primary social influences occur mainly within individuals' proximal social content, which includes peer groups. Peer influences adolescents' involvement with their families and their involvement in school (Clasen & Brown, 1986). Kameda et al. (2005) found that peer is one powerful socializing experience and people often change their perceptions, opinions and behaviours to be consistent with the standards or expectations of the peer group.

Interesting enough adolescence are also aware about the fact that they influence each other. In a survey done by Lashbrook (2000) on American teenagers 40 percent of them have blamed themselves for tragedy like Columbine high school shooting on themselves rather on their parents, gun laws or media violence. Even they find the need to foster better communication among them and to break down the barriers that causes hostility. Thus peer influences can be an intimidating thing for them which cannot be denied.

It is well known act that “peer influence” is something that mostly will remain an integral part of human beings and it is especially in case of adolescence. It is not that knowing that peer group is not good and so the parents or teachers can ask an adolescent that he should avoid them. During adolescence period, peer acceptance and attachment becomes more important. Reisman (1985) reviewed a number of studies and concludes that “adolescents who have poor peer relationships are more likely to have adjustment difficulties in adulthood.” Moreover, while talking about peers' role in the adolescence period the term “peer pressure” is often used which is more like a negative connotation. Thus it makes us think that peer pressure is always negative that affects adolescents in a negative and harmful way. But pressure in itself is neither positive nor negative. If it encourages positive attitude, good values, healthy behaviour and emotional well-being then it is positive too. Only if it encourages negative attitude, unhealthy and harmful behaviour and negative emotions then it is negative. Thus, peer can also provide many positive elements in an adolescent's life. Educators and parents should be aware that peer groups provide a variety of positive experiences for adolescents. Castrogiovanni (2002) cited the following: (1) the opportunity to learn how to interact with others; (2) support in defining identity, interests, abilities, and personality; (3) autonomy without control of adults and parents; (4) opportunities for witnessing the strategies others use to cope with similar problems, and for observing how effective they are; (5) involved emotional support and; (6) building and maintaining friendships.

Peer pressure is an important issue that need to be addressed by the researcher for understanding the complex nature of the peer group and its influences on adolescents. And most of the researches talk about the negative peer influences, so the present paper tries to bring forth how peer influence can also be instrumental in bringing positive attitudes, healthy behaviour and emotional well-being among adolescents.

Objective of the study

The objective of the present paper is to study the existing literature on the positive impacts of the peer pressure. To be more specific, is a view to understand how positive peer pressure can be instrumental towards promoting healthy social and emotional developments in adolescents, define the extent to which positive peer pressure is associated with healthy behaviour and emotional well-being and identifying different ways by which positive behaviour is encouraged by peer pressure.

Method

Participants

A systematic review of literature has been conducted. The search was done mainly on JSTOR and GOOGLE SCHOLAR and papers published in English language between January 2000 and December 2015 has been selected. The keywords used for the search includes term peer pressure, positive peer influence, peer pressure and adolescence, peer and behaviour, peer emotional and social development. Among the papers that came up on searching 12 relevant papers has been selected for the review.

Review

The review of this paper aims to find out the positive impacts of peer pressure on different aspects of adolescents life. It is already been discussed that peer groups are the most significant social forces

affecting adolescents behaviour from mundane decisions concerning dressing, lifestyles, career choices to social and emotional developments. However, talking about peer pressure most literature available so far is on the negative influences of peer pressure and a handful of literature can only be found regarding the positive impacts. The present review tries to put forward some aspects where peer pressure has played an influential role and they are discussed as follows.

Peer pressure and behaviour

Peer pressure plays a significant role in the behaviour of adolescents. Several studies show the important role played by peers in adolescents' behaviors (Glaser, Shelton & Bree, 2010; Simões, Matos & Foguet, 2006). They learn about what is acceptable in their social group by understanding their friends' reactions to how they act, say, wear and does. The peer group provides the potent feedback by their words and actions and does encourage and discourage certain behaviours. However, positive peer pressure can foster healthy and constructive behaviour too.

Peer pressure on eating and physical activities: There is growing evidence that adolescents are influenced by what their peers eat and whether their peers are physically active or not. Peers and friends are likely more significant on eating and physical activities among adolescents. Indeed it is during this time only that adolescents spend most of their time in the company of peers and positive peer relations plays a critical role for pro social behaviour and adjustment. Most studies talks about peer influence on unhealthy eating and obesity but in one study, it was found that overweight adolescence ate more when alone than when in the presence of unfamiliar peers. Due to the strong association between overweight status and social stigma, it is possible that overweight youth are particularly motivated to make a good positive impression on unfamiliar others. (Salvy et al, 2007) Thus, understanding of such situations can be helpful to facilitate healthy eating behaviours.

Positive peer pressure will leads to involvement in physical activities. The adolescents who reported of having greater presence of peers in their lives also engages in greater physical activities (Beets et al., 2006) while lonely children who are often friendless and isolated from peers report the least amount of physical activity (Page et al., 1992). Moreover the presence of peers has been found to increase various physically active options, subsequently increasing the amount of adolescents participating activities (Barkley et al., 2012) as most of the games played during this stage are social, typically involving some form of organized or spontaneous active play with more than one. It can be suggested that peer pressure are an important precursor to physical activities during childhood and adolescence.

Positive peer pressure and protective behaviour: In one study by G Tome, 2012 it has been found that though peers have a direct influence in adolescents' risk behaviours still the positive influence is more connected with protective behaviors too. Peers play a prominent role in promoting health during adolescence as well their perceptions and quality of life and subjective well-being. Further, the study says that a lower involvement in risk behaviors is yet identified as the variable, which positively influences adolescents' health, together with feelings of well-being; and the variable with influences positively, adolescents' feelings about school. It shows a positive correlation with communication with friends and in friends with a stronger involvement in protective behaviors, which

enhances the friendships' role in maintaining a positive influence. So, the friends with more protective behaviors and more lenience in communicating; with a strong bonding have higher probability to put a positive impact on their peers. Health promotion interventions targeted at adolescents should take into account the important and positive role that peers may have in the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

Peer pressure and prosocial behavior of adolescents: Peer pressure has been known usually for a wide range of maladaptive behaviors. However, peer socialization is not inherently venomous and it can also influence each others' prosocial behaviors. Prosocial behavior can be defined as "voluntary behavior planned to profit others" and involves a broad multidimensional domain of behaviors such as altruistic helping, sharing and cooperation (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014). It includes interpersonal helping behavior, but also cooperation that benefits one's group (Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). Studies have found that with regard to developmental patterns of prosocial behaviors, adolescents usually show more pro social behavior than younger children in the domain of sharing and donating (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Studies that employed self-report or hypothetical situations suggested that friends or acquaintances can influence prosocial behavior either directly such as the urge to perform a prosocial act or indirectly through expectations or closeness with a friend (Black, & Bean, 2014). Thus, peer influence creates not only vulnerable and risk taking behaviors but also opportunities for healthy prosocial development and social adjustment learning.

Peer pressure in school engagement, academics and achievement motivation

The knowledge and understanding about the magnitude of peer pressure in schools is vital for the productivity of the educational processes and organizational designs of the school systems. The knowledge about peer pressure and its impacts is as important as other inputs like teacher quality and other resources in order to improve the student outcomes. Several studies done by educational economists have also highlighted the relevance of peer group to student performance (Hoxby, 2000). Many research studies were conducted to investigate the peer pressure and its relationship with the academic and social factors. In one study by Carman and Zhang (2008) on "classroom peer effects and academic achievement" on the 7th to 9th grade students of China, the peer effect on the achievement of Mathematics, Chinese and English was observed. The linear in mean model was used to control the individual and teacher interaction by test fixed effects where the findings were the significant positive peer effect on the mathematics test score and positive though not significant effect on Chinese test score has been found.

In another study Tope (2011) investigated the influence of peer group on adolescent's academic performance on 150 randomly selected students from four secondary schools. The findings were the peer group could either positively or negatively influence the academic performance in school.

Research has also shown that academic achievement is related to the level of student engagement. School engagement means the effort students put forth in learning opportunities to their sense of belonging within the school culture (Finn et al., 1995) and peer plays an important role in it. Thus positive peer pressure will leads to higher levels of engagement which will provide a sense of belonging

to the adolescence and motivates them in learning and academic achievements (Spiegel, 2003). The peer relationships and experiences comprise an important developmental context for adolescents (Ryan, 2000).

A study by Sukkyung You (2011) came up with the results that even perceived support from peer can motivate adolescents to develop a sense of competency and autonomy, and that these self-regulatory processes positively affect their future behavior in the long term. It is possible that some adolescents, in wanting to belong or similar to their peer group, will have thoughts and behaviors in accordance with peers' values and expectations. In another study Ryan (2000) found that peer groups can influence regarding changes in students' intrinsic value for school (liking and enjoying school) as well as achievement (grades).

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that peer influence may substantially affect students' academic outcomes.

Peer pressure in healthy social and emotional development

Positive peer pressure as social support: Adolescents put a greater emphasis on peer relationships, and when the peer pressure is positive it can be the primary source of social support (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). The adolescents without close peer relationships are less likely to receive emotional support in times of stress (Hussong, 2000). The one without such support may be more susceptible to the negative effects of conflict. According to the stress buffering model of social relationships, social connection and support provide individuals with the psychological resources necessary to cope with stress, thereby decreasing the likelihood of engaging in risky behavior as a means of coping (Cohen et al., 2001). Thus, high levels of peer support may buffer adolescents from engaging in risk-taking behavior as a response to high levels of peer conflict. Research has found that adolescents who have lower levels of positive peer support are the one experiencing greater risk taking behavior following stressful events, where which have high positive peer support are buffered from this effect (Brady et al., 2009).

The peer helps to share experiences and feelings and which help to solve various conflicts of adolescents. On the other hand, those without presence of positive peer pressure will leads to social isolation and limited social contacts and will have fewer opportunities to develop new relations and social skills. Friendship is also positively associated to psychological well-being (Ueno, 2004), whilst a conflicting relation with peers is negatively associated with health (Laftman & Östberg, 2006). Stronger friendships may provide adolescents with an appropriate environment to development in a healthy way and to achieve good academic results. Adolescents with reciprocal friendships mention high levels of feelings of belonging in school; at the same time, reciprocity and feelings of belongingness have positive effects in academic results (Vaquera & Kao, 2008). The peer pressure when positive also helps to promote self-esteem and a harmonious development between adolescents.

Positive peer pressure and psycho-social development & emotional well-being: The peer relationships play an important role in different aspects of adolescent development. Among them, psychosocial development is the major part where peers have a important role to play (Dekovic, 2002). Peers relationships are very significant aspects of the social environment for adolescents. Adolescents have strong needs to be liked and accepted by friends and the larger peer

group, which can result in pleasurable feelings when they are accepted or extreme stress and anxiety when they are excluded and criticized by peers (Santrock, 2010). Therefore, positive peer pressure can help in maintaining well being of adolescence. While talking about well-being, it is not only absence of diseases or illness but it is a complex combination of physical, mental and social health factors. Healthy social development is possible with a sense of involvement with other people. Many researchers believe that well being is not just about being happy or content, but also about being actively engaged with life and with other people (Kehily, 2007) which peer can provide. Research have also recognized that role of social group and peer relationships helps in the establishment and maintenance of social perceptions an social values, including concept about self and about others (Fletcher et al., 2012). In adolescence period, peers are the one with whom they can identify, learn, fight, discover new enterprises and learn about them. Positive peer pressure is important aspects of well-being. Hence, understanding this important influence in adolescent's behavior and emotional health is crucial in developing accurate assessment and in appropriate intervention (Kerns, 2000).

Conclusion and recommendations

Thus the present study throws light at the fact that peer pressure can exert positive influences in the development of individuals, especially during adolescence when peer acceptance becomes an integral goal of their lives. Although "peer pressure" is mostly viewed as a serious problem that slowly poison the mind and negatively hampers the adolescents. But "peer pressure" does not necessarily have to be something to be dreaded of. It potentially has as many positive factors too. It can encourage positive behaviour, a constructive, goal-setting, positive-thinking, academic achievement and healthy social and emotional development. By accentuating the positive impacts the myth regarding peer pressure to be primarily "destructive" can be changed. Hence, by paying equal attention to the positive aspects of peer pressure in addition to the negative aspects we will able to explain how positive peer pressure can be influential in their overall social and emotional development. Administrators, researchers, teachers and parents should be encouraged to consider ways in which they can capitalize on constructive peer pressures and involve

adolescents for the same.

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