

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

PEER PRESSURE ON YOUTH FOR SUCCESS IN LIFE AND CARRIER

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ABSTRACT



The peer pressure often overshadows the benefits, as many young people feel compelled to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, reckless spending, or unhealthy competition just to prove their worth or avoid rejection. In academic and career-related contexts, peer pressure can push youth to pursue courses or professions they have no genuine interest in, leading to dissatisfaction, stress and underperformance later in life. The fear of being left behind socially or professionally often drives young people to imitate others without critically evaluating their own strengths, weaknesses and aspirations.

Objective of Study: To access the peer pressure on youth to excel n life academically and carrier wise.

Area of Study: The study was conducted on adolescent youth of District Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh by conducting interview of 200 higher education students.

Keywords: Youth, Peer Pressure, behavior, aspirations, ambitious, entrepreneurial, creative opportunities.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Peer pressure is one of the most significant social influences shaping the lives, decisions and future directions of todays youth, as it operates in both subtle and direct ways to mold behavior, aspirations and identity. During adolescence and early adulthood, individuals experience a heightened need to belong, to be accepted and to conform to the values of their peer group, making them especially vulnerable to external pressures. On the positive side, peer influence can encourage students to work harder academically, participate in extracurricular activities, develop good habits and strive for excellence when surrounded by ambitious and goal-oriented friends. For example,

a group of peers that values education, discipline and innovation can inspire its members to set higher career goals, choose competitive courses and explore entrepreneurial or creative opportunities. However, the negative side of peer pressure often overshadows the benefits, as many young people feel compelled to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, reckless spending, or unhealthy competition just to prove their worth or avoid rejection. In academic and career-related contexts, peer pressure can push youth to pursue courses or professions they have no genuine interest in, leading to dissatisfaction, stress and underperformance later in life. The fear of being left behind socially or professionally often drives young people to imitate others without critically evaluating their own strengths, weaknesses and aspirations.

This conformity reduces individuality, curbs creativity and creates mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Moreover, the rise of social media has intensified peer pressure, as youth are constantly exposed to curated images of success, beauty and wealth, making them feel inadequate and pressurized to replicate unrealistic lifestyles.

Such pressures influence decision-making not only in education and careers but also in personal choices like fashion, relationships and consumption patterns, gradually shaping the overall trajectory of a young person's life. From a sociological perspective, peer groups act as secondary agents of socialization, second only to family, but unlike family, they often promote short-term popularity over long-term stability, which can derail career planning and personal growth. Yet, it is also important to recognize that peer pressure is not inherently destructive; when channeled in constructive ways, it can foster resilience, teamwork, social awareness and leadership qualities. For instance, youth movements, community initiatives and innovation hubs often emerge because a group of peers collectively motivates one another to pursue social change or technological progress. The challenge lies in equipping young people with the ability to critically analyze peer influence, to embrace positive encouragement and to resist destructive demands.

Educational institutions, families and policy-makers play a vital role in nurturing such resilience by promoting life-skills education, mentorship programs and mental health awareness. When youth learn to balance individuality with collective belonging, they are better prepared to make decisions that align with their long-term goals rather than short-term acceptance. In the broader context of national development, the kind of peer pressure that dominates youth culture will significantly influence the future workforce, leadership and civic responsibility. If peer groups prioritize consumerism, material success and shortcuts, the future may see higher rates of burnout, unethical practices and disillusionment. On the other hand, if young people are encouraged through peer networks to value hard work, integrity, creativity and social contribution, they will drive societies toward innovation, inclusivity and sustainable development. Therefore, understanding and addressing the dynamics of peer pressure is essential not just for the individual well-being of youth but also for shaping the collective future of communities and nations. Ultimately, peer pressure is an inevitable part of youth life, but its impact whether constructive or destructive depends on the values reinforced within peer groups and the capacity of young individuals to make conscious, informed choices about the directions they take in life.

REVIEW OF SELECT LITERATURE

Laursen et al. (2021): Laursen et al. (2021) proposed the Influence-Compatibility Model, showing peer influence in adolescence can aid identity, affiliation and achievement but may be harmful when promoting deviance or conflicting with goals. Outcomes depend on context, timing and alignment, highlighting the need to foster positive, pro-social peer influence.

Shao et al. (2024): Shao et al. (2024) studied 717 Chinese junior high students and found that supportive peer relationships boost intrinsic motivation, which increases engagement and improves academic performance. Structural equation modeling confirmed peers' indirect influence via motivation and engagement. The study recommends fostering peer support, collaboration and socio-emotional learning in schools.

Jiang et al. (2022): Jiang et al. (2022) found that excessive academic stress in Chinese adolescents increased loneliness, withdrawal and aggression, while peer support protected against these effects. Using structural equation modeling, they highlighted the need to balance academic demands with social-emotional support, urging schools to promote peer relationships, counseling and collaborative activities.

Schellenberg et al. (2022): Schellenberg et al. (2022) studied peer-based career readiness programs like Empower Peers for Careers and Positive Peer Culture in U.S. and European schools. Using mentoring, role-modeling and discussions, these interventions improved students aspirations, confidence, social-emotional skills, attendance and engagement, underscoring peer mentoring role in enhancing career education and employability.

Kashif, Shaheen & Amjad (2021): The study by Kashif, Shaheen and Amjad (2021) surveyed 528 undergraduates in Lahore, finding that peer attachment significantly affects career decision-making. Strong peer bonds offered emotional support, career information and validation, often influencing choices more than family. The authors recommended integrating peer dynamics into counseling and interventions.

Amandeep Kaur (2020): Amandeep Kaur's (2020) study found peer pressure significantly influences Indian adolescents and young adults career choices, often steering them toward popular fields like engineering or medicine over personal interests. While positive influence encouraged higher aspirations, negative pressure caused unsuitable decisions, emphasizing the need for career guidance to foster independent, informed choices.

U K Chakraborty (2019): Chakraborty's study examined peer pressures impact on adolescents career maturity in Indian government schools. Using surveys and inventories, it found peers shaped persistence, planning and awareness but also caused conformity-driven misaligned choices. Boys were more affected by competition, girls by approval, highlighting the need for counseling and structured peer discussions.

Marcionetti et al. (2023): Marcionetti et al. (2023) found that Italian adolescents career development is shaped by both peers and adults. Teachers and parents enhanced resilience and stability, while peers influenced confidence, motivation and aspirations. Gender differences emerged: boys were more affected by competition, girls by approval. The study urges integrated peer-adult career guidance.

Knox (2024): Knox (2024) found that supportive peer relationships significantly boost academic motivation and college/career readiness in U.S. high school students, while negative influences hinder progress. The study highlights gender and socio-economic differences, showing peers protective role for disadvantaged youth and urges schools to foster positive peer networks, mentoring and collaboration.

Fudolin & Dioso (2025): Fudolin and Dioso (2025) found that peer pressure significantly impacts Filipino junior high students academic performance. Positive peer influence fostered discipline, collaboration and success, while negative influence led to distractions and poor achievement. They recommended promoting supportive peer culture through group study and cooperative learning to improve educational outcomes.

DISCUSSIONS

Influence on Career Choices: Peer influence plays a major role in shaping youths career choices. Many young people often rely on their friends opinions or follow popular trends rather than exploring their true interests and abilities. This can lead them to select career paths that do not align with their passion or strengths, potentially causing dissatisfaction in the long run. While group approval provides comfort and a sense of belonging, it may overshadow personal ambition. Making decisions based solely on peers influence can limit opportunities for growth and success. Therefore, balancing peer advice with self-awareness is crucial for long-term career satisfaction.

Academic Performance: Positive peer pressure can significantly enhance academic performance by motivating students to adopt disciplined study habits, set higher goals and remain focused on learning. With peers value education and hard work, individuals are inspired to follow similar practices, leading to improved results and personal growth. On the other hand, negative peer influence can harm academic achievement by promoting distraction, laziness, or prioritizing

social activities over studies. Such pressure may lead students to neglect their responsibilities, underperform, or lose interest in academics. Ultimately the type of peer influence constructive or destructive plays a crucial role in shaping students educational outcomes.

Risk-Taking Behaviors: Peer and social pressures often drive youth to engage in risky behaviors as they strive to fit in or gain acceptance. This desire may push them toward experimenting with substances such as drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, despite knowing the harmful effects. Similarly, the pressure to appear bold or independent can lead to reckless driving, ignoring road safety in favor of thrill-seeking or peer approval. In relationships, the need for validation may result in unsafe choices, including unprotected intimacy or unhealthy attachments. Ultimately, such behaviors can have serious emotional, physical and long-term consequences, underscoring the importance of guidance and support.

Loss of Individuality: The loss of individuality occurs when people feel pressured to conform to societal norms, group expectations, or external standards at the cost of their authentic selves. This constant need to fit in can suppress unique thoughts, personal choices and creative expression. Individuals may hide their true beliefs, talents or perspectives, fearing rejection or judgment. Over time, this diminishes self-confidence and blurs ones sense of identity. While conformity can create unity and social harmony, excessive pressure erodes diversity and stifles innovation. Preserving individuality is essential for personal fulfillment, creativity and the progress of both individuals and society as a whole.

Mental Health Issues: Fear of rejection and constant comparison with peers can deeply affect mental health, especially among young people. These feelings often create self-doubt, low self-esteem and insecurity, making individuals feel inadequate or unworthy. Over time, such negative thoughts and experiences may lead to high levels of stress, persistent anxiety, or even depression. The pressure to meet societal or peer expectations can intensify emotional struggles and harm overall well-being. Without coping strategies or support, individuals may withdraw socially, lose motivating and struggle in personal or academic life. Addressing these issues early promotes resilience, confidence and positive mental health development.

Development of Social Skills: Positive peer groups play a vital role in developing important social skills. By engaging with supportive peers, individuals learn teamwork, effective communication and leadership. Working together fosters cooperation, problem-solving and respect for diverse opinions. Communication skills improve as members express ideas clearly, listen actively and resolve conflicts. Leadership abilities develop when individuals take responsibility, guide group activities and motivate others toward shared goals. Such interactions boost confidence, empathy and adaptability, helping individuals succeed in both personal and professional relationships. Ultimately, positive peer groups create an encouraging environment that nurtures social growth and prepares individuals for real-life challenges.

Financial Pressure: Financial pressure among youth often arises from the desire to match their peers lifestyle, which includes the latest gadgets, trendy fashion and frequent outings. To keep up, many overspend beyond their means, leading to financial strain. Some resort to borrowing, excessive use of credit, or depend heavily on their families for support. This behavior can create long-term financial instability, stress and a lack of savings. Additionally, it fosters unhealthy competition and materialism, shifting focus away from genuine personal growth. Managing finances wisely and resisting peer pressure is essential to avoid debt and maintain a balanced, sustainable lifestyle.

Moral and Ethical Values: Friends play an important role in shaping moral and ethical values, especially during decision-making. Positive friendships promote honesty, integrity and responsibility, encouraging good choices. However, peer influence can also pressure individuals into unethical or even illegal actions, such as lying, cheating, or breaking rules, for the sake of acceptance. The desire to fit in may cloud judgment and weaken personal values. Recognizing this influence is essential to building self-awareness and moral strength. Choosing friends wisely and standing firm in ethical principles helps individuals stay true to their values while resisting negative peer pressure.

Self-Confidence Building: Self-confidence is strongly influenced by the people around us. Supportive peers encourage personal growth, offer reassurance and help individuals believe in their abilities, which strengthen self-esteem. Positive reinforcement motivates people to take risks, overcome challenges and trust in themselves. On the other hand, constant criticism and negativity can weaken confidence, create self-doubt and discourage individuals from trying new things. A nurturing, respectful and encouraging environment is essential for building resilience, independence and a strong sense of self-worth. Therefore, surrounding oneself with uplifting peers plays a vital role in developing and sustaining self-confidence throughout life's challenges.

Future Opportunities Habits formed under peer pressure can shape future opportunities in powerful ways. Positive influences, such as adopting study discipline, time management, or pursuing skill development, often translate into long-term academic and professional success. These habits build resilience, confidence and adaptability, opening doors to greater career growth and personal achievement. On the other hand, negative peer pressure leading to harmful addictions or poor lifestyle choices can limit potential, damage health and restrict opportunities. Ultimately, the choices made under social influence during youth leave lasting impacts, determining whether peer pressure becomes a stepping stone toward success or a barrier to progress.

CONCLUSION

Peer influence plays a significant role in shaping the lives of young people, often affecting their choices, behaviors and overall development. In terms of career decisions, many youth tend to follow their friends' interests or popular trends rather than identifying their true passions, which may lead to future dissatisfaction. Similarly, peer groups greatly impact academic performance. While positive influence encourages discipline and focus, negative pressure can cause distractions and a decline in learning outcomes.

Peers also strongly affect risk-taking behaviors, where the desire for acceptance may push youth toward experimenting with harmful substances, reckless driving, or unsafe relationships, all of which carry long-term consequences. Alongside this, excessive need for approval often causes a loss of individuality, suppressing unique thoughts and talents in favor of conformity. Such struggles frequently contribute to mental health issues like anxiety, stress, or depression.

On the positive side, supportive peer groups promote the development of social skills such as teamwork, leadership and communication. However, many youth also face financial pressure caused by the urge to match their peers' lifestyles, which can lead to debt and instability. Peer influence further extends to moral and ethical values, where friendships can either foster honesty and responsibility or encourage unethical behavior.

Importantly, peers impact self-confidence, either nurturing belief in one's abilities or creating self-doubt through criticism. Ultimately, the habits and values shaped by peer influence determine future opportunities, making it either a path to growth or an obstacle to success.

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