Peer Pressure in Adolescents - A Qualitative Study Exploring Perspectives of the Community about Peer Pressure in Adolescents

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Abstract: *Background: One of the most common yet most damageable aspects in an adolescent life is peer pressure. However, the outlook of peer pressure varies from community to community. This study aims to understand the outlook to peer pressure mainly by students and parents of adolescents. Materials and Methods: In this qualitative study, participants were asked to answer a scenario based semi structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using framework analysis method. Results: From the answers to the scenario, it was found that majority of the participants recognized that peer pressure played an active role in the lives of adolescents which if left unattended may lead them into drug or alcohol abuse, anti-social behavior and similar dangerous consequences. Conclusion: The community understands that peer pressure plays an important role in development of adolescents. The negatives of peer pressure must be curtailed with suitable steps to ensure that the confidence and productivity of an adolescent mind is not lost. Counselling, parental supervision, guidance and positive reinforcement should be the norm when dealing with an affected adolescent.*

Keywords: Peer pressure, adolescence, community outlook

1. Introduction

Adolescence is defined as a complex, multi- system transitional process involving progression from immaturity and social dependency of childhood into adult life with the goal and expectation of fulfilled developmental potential, personal agency, and social accountability [1]. This transition exposes the person to a multitude of issues such as peer pressure, emotional imbalances, stress, substance abuse etc.

Most previous research has focused on processes related to peer pressure and its negative effects on adolescent development[2,3,4.] However, very little is known about the characteristics that make teens more prone to it[5] andthe outlook of the community.

This study aims to explore the outlookof individuals on the influence of negative peer pressure and its effects on an adolescent in a challenged situation.

2. Methods

The study was done using an online survey of a scenario based questionnaire with open ended questions regarding the situation depicted in it. The scenario consisted of a regular, studious adolescent falling prey to bad company leading to academic and personal misconduct. The participants were asked answer the questions in their own words without a word limit to gain insight to their perspectives about peer pressure and its effects on adolescents, as well as their viewpoint on possible solutions to this problem.

Study Sample
Since the study was aimed at understanding the opinion of the collective community, we encouraged people of all ages, sex and backgrounds to take part in the study.

The questionnaire was to be filled online, hence the participants were recruited online via social networking sites and also by forwarding the questionnaire link to kith and kin. Those below the age of 21 were considered as adolescents in this study.

Data collection
Prior to answering the scenario based questionnaire, participants were asked to fill out a few personal details which included their age, gender, education level and current occupation.

They were then asked to proceed with the scenario and answer the questions that followed to gain insight to their views on the scenario given to them.

Data analysis
The answers were categorized based on their relevance and repetitive occurrence and were tallied to the number of responses given till no new concepts were obtained. The answers to the five questions were tabulated and illustrated in the form of charts for easier analysis and understanding.

3. Results

A total of 146 responses were received from participants of various ages and backgrounds in order to incorporate various outlooks to the scenario. Out of the 146 participants, 32.7% were males and 67.3% were females. There were no set criteria of age so the study includes participants of all age groups. Of the 146 participants, 37.2% were adolescents and 62.8% were adults. Participants from different fields, having various qualifications participated in the study. All participants were literate. 28% were graduates or in college, 53% were postgraduates, 9.8% were in Pre University and 9.2% were attending school.

4. Interpretation of the results

A scenario was given to the participants to assess and answer the open ended questions that followed. The scenario consisted of a regular, studious adolescent falling prey to bad company leading to academic and personal misconduct.

The charts given below illustrate the responses given by the participants to the questions asked.

Chart 1 gives the responses when asked to "identify the central problem highlighted in the scenario".
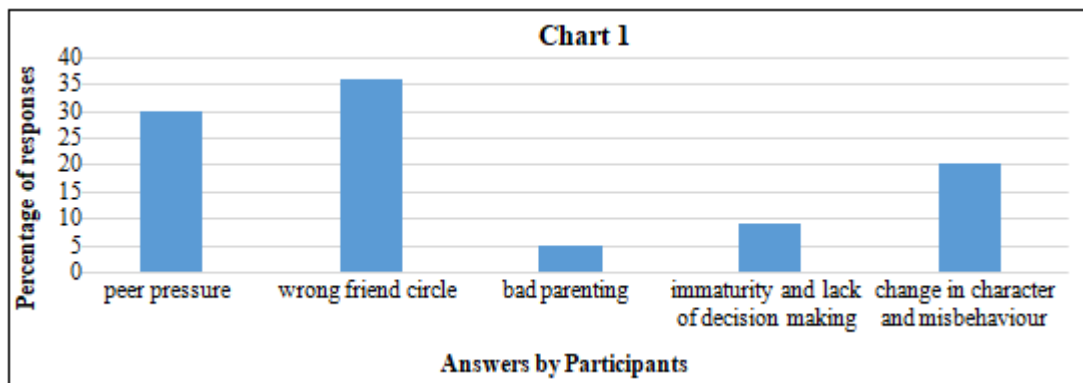

Chart 1: Identify the central problem

Majority of the participants identified two central themes- 36% quoted that the problem arose due to wrong friends' circle and 30% estimated that the problem was peer pressure. 20% were of the opinion that the problem was change in character and misbehavior, 9% identified it as immaturity and lack of decision making skills of the adolescent, while 5% suggested it was bad parenting.
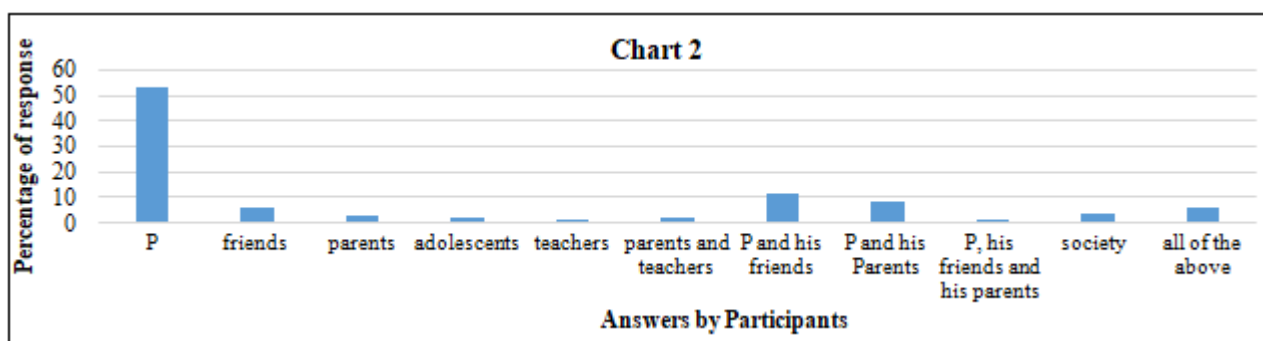

Chart 2 illustrates the responses given when asked to "identify the problem causer in the scenario"

More than half the respondents (53%) declared that the adolescent in the scenario was the sole culprit. 11% stated that it was the adolescent and his friends' circle, 8.5% claimed it was the adolescent and his parents, 6% said it was the fault of only his friends, 3.18% urged that it was the society, 3.1% attributed it to solely the parents, 2.3% blamed the adolescent phase of life and another 2.3% said the parents along with the teachers should share the blame. 1.5% said it was the fault of the adolescent, his teacher, his friends as well as his parents, while 6.2% decided to include all the above reasons in their statement.
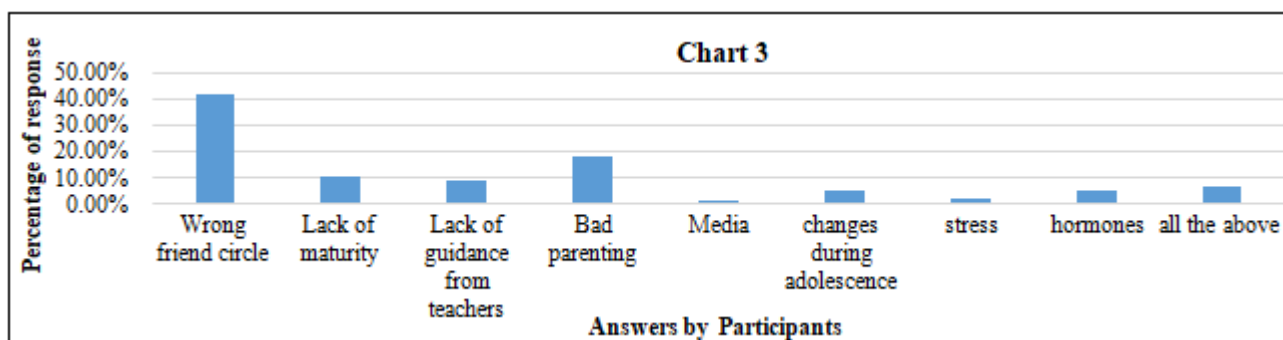

Chart 3 illustrates the responses given when asked to "identify the cause for the problem in the scenario"

About 41% held the friends' circle responsible while 18% blamed it on bad parenting. And 10% declared that it was the lack of maturity that was to be accounted, with 9% stating it was the lack of guidance from teachers and parents that led to this unfortunate scenario. 5% claimed it was due to the hormonal imbalances and adolescent changes that lead to this. 2.6% and 1.3% of the participants claimed it was due to stress and media respectively. About 6.5% of them responded that it was multifactorial and all the above causes should be taken into consideration.
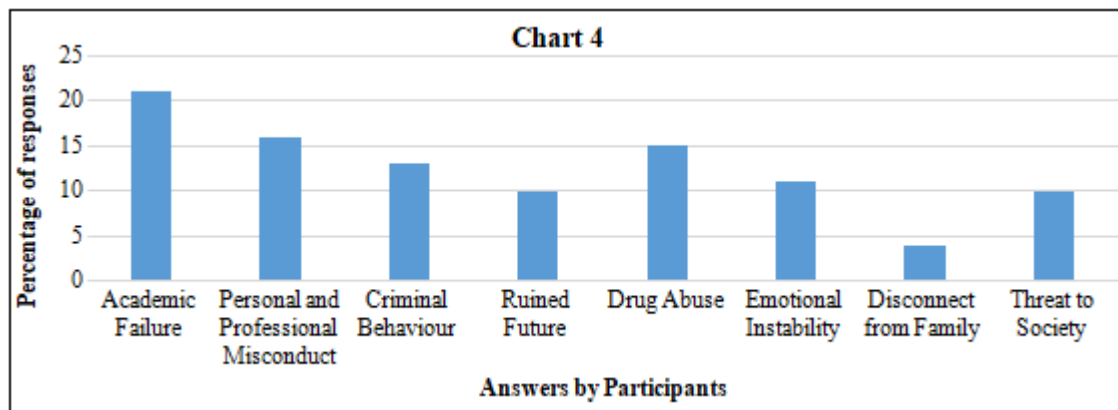
Chart 4: illustrates the responses given when asked to "state the consequences for the problem in the scenario"

When asked about the consequences, 21% said it would lead to academic failure and likely drop out, 16% stated that it would cause personal and professional misconduct, 15% deduced that the adolescent would give into drug abuse and addiction. About 13% claimed that the adolescent would exhibit criminal behavior in the future while 11% reported that it increases risk of emotional instability. 10% predicted a hazardous future for the adolescent and another 10% expected him to be a threat to society while 4% claimed he would be disconnected from the family.
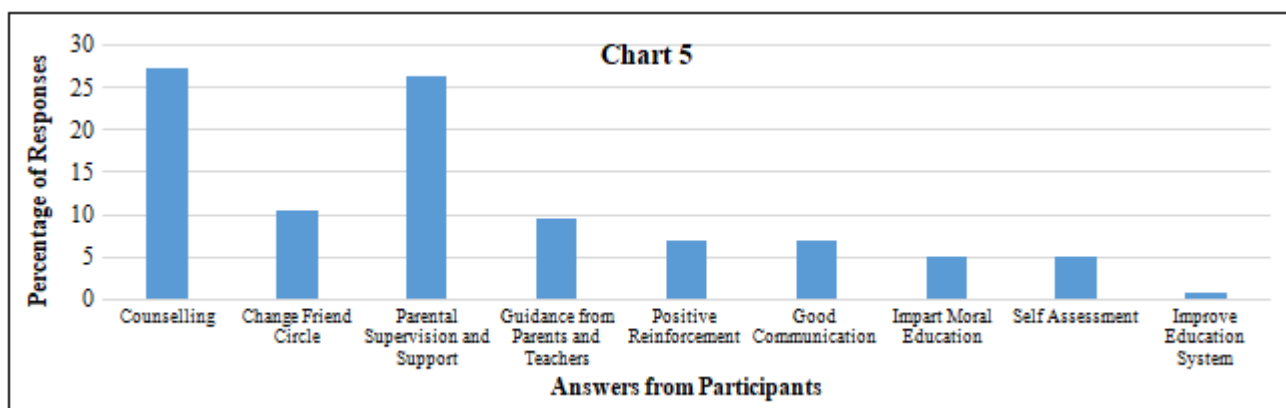

Chart 5: illustrates the responses given when asked to "suggest solutions for the problem in the scenario"

Most of the participants advised counselling (27%) and parental supervision and support as the best solution. Other solutions include change of friend circle (10%), guidance from parents and teachers (9.7%), positive reinforcement (7%), good communication from teachers and parents (7%) imparting of moral education (5.3%), self-assessment (5%) and improve the existing education system (0.8%).

5. Discussion

Adolescence is a phase distinguished from both childhood and adulthood. UNICEF has deemed adolescence as a transitional period that requires special attention and protection. Physically and mentally, adolescents go through a number of transitions while they mature.Social influence is the effect others have on an individual or a group with respect to their attitudes and behaviour[6]. There are different mechanisms of mutual influence process, and one of the most frequently referred to mechanisms is youth peer pressure. Peer pressure is often used to transmit group norms and foster loyalty to the group[7]. However, there is the negative aspect of peer pressure that leads adolescents into harmful vices. Because they want to be acknowledged by their peers, teenagers may willingly disregard many of the norms, values, attitudes, and behaviours learned previously from their parents, siblings and teachers [8]. Empirical research has shown an increase in risk factors, such as peer pressure[9], for substance abuse by adolescents. Hence it's an emerging problem that the community needs to aware of.

The study aims to determine the opinions of the community about peer pressure faced by adolescents. The result shows that majority are aware of the negative peer influence teenagers face. They recognize the delicate nature of the adolescent mind which is susceptible to the negative influences that they might face and also the willingness to disregard the lessons learnt by them from parents and teachers in order to gain acceptance from their peer group. They not only blame the child alone but also acknowledge that parents and teachers play an important role to prevent this.

Some studies showwith indirect relevance that inclination for violence[10], aggression levels[11,12], and delinquency[13] increase with age in adolescents. Hence the right approach would be to identify and assess the situation at the earliest to avoid them maturing into antisocial adults.

Our study found that counselling as well as positive reinforcement with supervision from the parents and

teachers was one of the most common suggested solutions by the community members. Other studies have showed that the adolescents who participate in social activities were found to have lower peer pressure levels[14]. Participation on the part of adolescents in sports, social, and artistic activities at school does not only increase the positive notions of school life, but it also makes it easier to rectify behavioural issues[15]. It is of paramount importance to change a student's negative social and cultural environment[16] and provide all of them with the facilities and opportunities to participate in noncurricular activities at school. Thus, thestudents are given a segue to add positivity to their life, which could help reduce negative peer pressure behaviours. It would also be useful for school management and counsellors to conduct various events encouraging students to perform sports, cultural, social and artistic activities[17] and to cooperate with social institutions for this purpose.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to analyze the perspectives of the community to peer pressure faced by adolescents and to explore their solutions.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this study was that the society recognized peer pressure as a cardinal issue that may lead adolescents to misbehavior and misconduct, and have been able to identify the causative factors without completely blaming the adolescent. They have also stated reasonable solutions to this obstacle, of which counselling and parental intervention are foremost. Adolescents have a developing and delicate mind that needs to be dealt with patience and care which have been strongly emphasized by the community.

Declaration

7. Conflicts of interest - Nil

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