

Impact of Peer Pressure in Decision-Making among Adolescents

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Abstract: *Adolescence is a period when friends become central to young people's lives, and the wish to fit in can shape how they make decisions. This study examined the impact of peer pressure on the decision-making styles of adolescents and the role of age and gender in this relationship. A cross-sectional quantitative design was used with 100 adolescents aged 13 to 19 years from schools and colleges. Peer pressure was measured with the Peer Pressure Scale and decision-making styles with the General Decision-Making Style inventory, which assesses rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant and spontaneous styles. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, linear regression and two-way ANOVA. Peer pressure was positively correlated with the dependent ($r = .32$) and spontaneous ($r = .35$) styles and was not significantly related to the rational style ($r = -.07$). Peer pressure explained 10.5% of the variance in the dependent style. Neither age group nor gender significantly influenced peer pressure. The findings are discussed in relation to the dual systems model, and implications are drawn for counselling and life skills programmes that help adolescents make independent, reasoned decisions.*

Keywords: Peer pressure, Decision-making styles, Adolescents, Age and gender, Counselling psychology

1. Introduction

Adolescence, the period between 10 and 19 years of age, is a time of rapid physical, emotional and social change [1]. Young people are working out who they are, where they belong and what kind of choices they want to make. Erikson described this as the stage of identity versus role confusion [2]. During this phase the social world shifts: the family steps back a little, and friends and peers move to the centre. This shift is a normal part of growing up, but it also exposes adolescents to the influence of the people around them, commonly called peer pressure.

Peer pressure is not always loud or obvious. Besides open dares and invitations, it often appears as an unspoken expectation, a need to fit in or a fear of being left out [3]. In whatever form, it can influence how adolescents think and act, including the decisions they make. The dual systems model explains why adolescents are especially open to this influence: the brain systems that respond to social and emotional rewards mature earlier than those that support planning and self-control, which continue to develop into the twenties [4], [5].

People also differ in how they usually approach decisions. Scott and Bruce defined decision-making style as the learned, habitual way a person responds when facing a decision, and identified five styles: rational (a thorough search for information and logical evaluation of options), intuitive (reliance on hunches and feelings), dependent (seeking advice and direction from others), avoidant (postponing or avoiding decisions) and spontaneous (a sense of urgency and a wish to get through the decision quickly) [6]. These styles are partly shaped by the environment in which a person grows up, including the peer group [7]. The dependent and spontaneous styles in particular seem likely to give way when friends are pushing in one direction.

Most research on peer pressure has looked at what adolescents end up doing, such as taking risks, rather than at how they arrive at their decisions. The present study therefore examined how peer pressure relates to the decision-making styles of adolescents aged 13 to 19 years in India, and whether age and gender affect this relationship. Understanding this link can help counsellors and school psychologists design programmes that teach young people to think independently and make choices that are genuinely their own.

2. Literature Survey

2.1 Peer influence on adolescent decisions

In a well-known experiment, Gardner and Steinberg asked 306 participants from three age groups (13 to 16, 18 to 22 and 24 years and older) to play a driving game alone or with two friends present. Adolescents took more risks and made riskier decisions when peers were present, while adults changed little [8]. Brain imaging later showed that peer presence increased adolescents' risky choices along with activity in the brain's reward regions, an effect not seen in adults [9]. A meta-analysis of 60 longitudinal studies with 47,423 young people confirmed that peers' behaviour predicts later change in adolescents' own behaviour, with a small but consistent effect [10].

2.2 Age, gender and resistance to peer influence

Steinberg and Monahan developed the Resistance to Peer Influence scale and used it with more than 3,600 participants aged 10 to 30 years. Resistance changed little between 10 and 14 years, increased steadily between 14 and 18 years and then levelled off, a pattern they linked to the gradual maturation of brain systems for self-control [11]. Girls generally report greater resistance than boys [12]. A study of more than 5,000 people in 11 countries, including India, found that sensation seeking peaks in late adolescence while self-regulation keeps

improving into the mid-twenties, with similar patterns across cultures [13].

2.3 Decision-making styles

Scott and Bruce developed the General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) inventory to measure the five styles and noted that, although the styles are relatively stable, they are also influenced by the situation [6]. Later studies have supported the five-factor structure of the GDMS in different samples [14], [15], and have linked the styles to individual characteristics such as self-esteem and self-regulation [7]. Among 427 high school and university students, the avoidant and spontaneous styles were the significant predictors of decision-making competence, the avoidant style was a risk factor for poorer mental health and the intuitive style was protective [16]. A review of decision-making under stress found that stress tends to shift people away from careful, deliberate analysis towards quicker, more automatic choices [17]. Since peer pressure is one of the most constant sources of social stress for adolescents, it is likely to influence which decision-making style they use.

2.4 Studies in India

Indian studies have found that peers play a large role in adolescents' decisions. A survey of 200 adolescents from classes VII and XII found that they consulted their parents on almost every matter, but that parents shaped their final decisions in only a few areas [18]. Decision-making ability was negatively correlated with peer pressure, and adolescents under high peer pressure showed poorer decision-making than those under low pressure [19]. Among 200 pre-university students, peer pressure was negatively correlated with career decisions ($r = -.341$) and predicted them better than parental career behaviour did [20]. A study of 110 adolescents found a negative correlation between peer pressure and decision-making ($r = -.528$) and a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and decision-making ($r = .744$) [21].

2.5 Research gap

Taken together, these studies show that peers matter, that resistance to peer influence grows with age and that decision-making styles respond to social stress. However, Indian studies have mostly treated decision-making as a single ability. The specific link between peer pressure and each of the five decision-making styles, and the role of age and gender in that link, has not been examined in depth among Indian adolescents. The present study addresses this gap.

3. Problem Definition

Peer pressure is widely believed to push adolescents into poor choices, but little is known about how it shapes the way Indian adolescents typically approach decisions. Without this knowledge, counsellors cannot tell which adolescents are most at risk of handing their decisions over to the group, or which skills to strengthen. The study therefore set out to answer the question: how is peer pressure related to the decision-making styles of adolescents, and does this relationship differ by age and gender?

Objectives

- 1) To assess the level of peer pressure and the predominant decision-making styles among adolescents.
- 2) To examine the relationship between peer pressure and the five decision-making styles.
- 3) To find out whether peer pressure predicts particular decision-making styles, especially the dependent and spontaneous styles.
- 4) To examine the effect of age and gender on peer pressure and decision-making styles.

Hypotheses

H1: Adolescents will differ significantly in their levels of peer pressure and in their predominant decision-making styles.

H2: There will be a significant relationship between peer pressure and decision-making styles among adolescents.

H3: Peer pressure will significantly predict the dependent and spontaneous decision-making styles.

H4: There will be a significant interaction effect of age and gender on peer pressure and decision-making styles.

4. Methodology / Approach

4.1 Research design

A cross-sectional quantitative design was used. This design gives a snapshot of the relationship between peer pressure and decision-making styles at one point in time across a varied group of adolescents.

4.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 100 adolescents aged 13 to 19 years studying in schools and colleges in Ranipet, selected by convenience sampling. Participants were drawn from different age groups and educational levels so that comparisons could be made (Table 1). Adolescents with a diagnosed psychological disorder or who did not complete all questionnaires were excluded.

4.3 Tools

Peer Pressure Scale (PPS): Developed by Singh and Saini and published by Prasad Psycho Corporation, New Delhi, the PPS measures the pressure adolescents feel from their peers and was designed for Indian adolescents [22]. It has 25 items, and higher scores indicate greater peer pressure. The scale has reported adequate reliability and validity.

General Decision-Making Style inventory (GDMS):

Developed by Scott and Bruce, the GDMS has 25 self-report items, five for each of the rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant and spontaneous styles, rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree [6]. Each style is scored separately, and its psychometric properties have been supported in later studies [14], [15].

Background information schedule: A short form recorded each participant's age, gender, class or course and type of institution.

4.4 Procedure

Permission was obtained from the heads of the participating schools and colleges. The purpose of the study was explained to the institutions and the participants. Written informed consent was obtained from participants aged 18 and above; for those under 18, consent was obtained from a parent or guardian along with the adolescent's own assent. The questionnaires were administered individually or in small groups and took about 15–20 minutes. Participants were told that taking part was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential and used only for research.

4.5 Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using Python (version 3.13) with the pandas, SciPy and statsmodels libraries. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were calculated for all variables, and normality was checked with the Shapiro–Wilk test. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between peer pressure and the decision-making styles, simple linear regression to test whether peer pressure predicted the dependent and spontaneous styles, and two-way ANOVA to test the effects of age group and gender. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Sample Profile and Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the sample is shown in Table 1 and the descriptive statistics in Table 2.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants (N = 100)

Variable	n	%
Age group		
13–15 years	38	38
16–17 years	33	33
18–19 years	29	29
Gender		
Male	50	50
Female	50	50
Education		
School	71	71
College	29	29

The mean peer pressure score was 76.52 (SD = 17.55). Among the decision-making styles, the highest mean was for the rational style (M = 15.23, SD = 2.85) and the lowest for the spontaneous style (M = 14.46, SD = 3.80). The style means were close to one another, and this does not support H1.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of peer pressure and decision-making styles

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Peer pressure	76.52	17.55	36	118
Rational	15.23	2.85	9	22
Intuitive	14.76	3.79	7	24
Dependent	14.88	3.54	7	22
Avoidant	14.89	3.7	7	24
Spontaneous	14.46	3.8	5	24

5.2 Relationship between peer pressure and decision-making styles

Table 3: Correlation between peer pressure and decision-making styles

Decision-making style	r	p
Rational	-.07	0.476
Intuitive	0.2	0.044
Dependent	0.32	0.001
Avoidant	0.28	0.005
Spontaneous	0.35	< .001

As shown in Table 3, peer pressure was significantly positively correlated with the dependent style ($r = .32$, $p = .001$) and the spontaneous style ($r = .35$, $p < .001$), and was not significantly correlated with the rational style ($r = -.07$, $p = .476$). The correlations with the intuitive ($r = .20$) and avoidant ($r = .28$) styles were significant and positive. H2 is therefore partly accepted.

Table 4: Peer pressure as a predictor of dependent and spontaneous styles

Outcome	R ²	F	β	t	p
Dependent	0.105	11.5	0.32	3.39	0.001
Spontaneous	0.119	13.28	0.35	3.64	< .001

Regression analysis (Table 4) showed that peer pressure significantly predicted the dependent style ($R^2 = .105$, $\beta = .32$, $p = .001$) and the spontaneous style ($R^2 = .119$, $\beta = .35$, $p < .001$). H3 is accepted.

5.3 Effect of age and gender

Table 5: Two-way ANOVA: effects of age group (A), gender (G) and their interaction (A×G)

Variable	A: F	A: p	G: F	G: p	A×G: F	A×G: p
Peer pressure	0.62	0.538	0.06	0.813	1.72	0.184
Rational	2.75	0.069	0.54	0.464	0.77	0.467
Intuitive	1.56	0.215	0.07	0.797	2.13	0.125
Dependent	0.16	0.85	0.02	0.889	1.37	0.258
Avoidant	1.3	0.278	0.13	0.721	1.22	0.301
Spontaneous	0.05	0.95	5.9	0.017	0.33	0.723

Two-way ANOVA (Table 5) showed that age group had a non-significant effect on peer pressure ($F = 0.62$, $p = .538$), although the 16–17 year group reported slightly higher peer pressure (M = 78.97) than the 13–15 (M = 74.66) and 18–19 (M = 76.17) year groups. The effect of gender was non-significant ($F = 0.06$, $p = .813$), and the interaction of age group and gender was non-significant ($F = 1.72$, $p = .184$). Among the decision-making styles, the only significant effect was that of gender on the spontaneous style ($F = 5.90$, $p = .017$), with girls (M = 15.38) scoring higher than boys (M = 13.54); no age group × gender interaction was significant. H4 is rejected.

5.4 Discussion

The positive link between peer pressure and the dependent style means that adolescents who feel more pressure from friends are more likely to rely on others' advice and direction when deciding. This fits the dual systems model, in which the social and emotional pull of peers is strong while self-control is still developing [4], and agrees with experimental evidence

that the mere presence of peers changes adolescents' choices [8], [9]. The link with the spontaneous style, the strongest in this study, suggests that peer pressure also pushes adolescents towards quick, unconsidered choices, consistent with the finding that stress shifts decision-making away from careful analysis [17]. Peer pressure was also positively related to the avoidant and intuitive styles, suggesting that adolescents under greater pressure tend to put off decisions or go by their feelings rather than weigh their options carefully.

Contrary to expectation, peer pressure was not significantly related to the rational style. Indian studies have reported poorer decision-making among adolescents under high peer pressure [19], [21]; the present findings suggest that this may reflect a greater use of dependent, spontaneous and avoidant ways of deciding rather than a weakening of rational deliberation itself. Peer pressure also did not differ across age groups or between boys and girls. This differs from evidence that resistance to peer influence grows between 14 and 18 years [11] and that girls are generally more resistant [12], and may reflect the modest size of the age subgroups or the fact that the PPS measures perceived pressure rather than resistance to it. The only demographic difference was in the spontaneous style, on which girls scored higher than boys.

These results have clear implications for counselling. Life skills education recommended by the World Health Organization includes decision-making, critical thinking and interpersonal skills [23], and skills-based programmes that teach refusal and decision-making have reduced risk behaviour in adolescents [24]. Counsellors can use the decision-making style profile of a student to identify those who depend heavily on others or decide impulsively, and can help them practise a step-by-step, rational approach, build confidence in their own judgement and rehearse ways of saying no to friends.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how peer pressure relates to the decision-making styles of 100 adolescents aged 13 to 19 years. Peer pressure was positively related to the dependent, spontaneous, avoidant and intuitive styles but not to the rational style, and it significantly predicted the dependent and spontaneous styles, explaining about 11% and 12% of their variance. Peer pressure did not differ by age group or gender, the only demographic difference being a higher spontaneous style score among girls, and no interaction of age and gender was found. The findings help counsellors, teachers and parents understand not only whether adolescents give in to peers, but how peer pressure changes the way they decide. Programmes that build independent, reasoned decision-making can help adolescents make choices that reflect their own values rather than the wish to conform.

7. Future Scope

The study has some limitations. Its cross-sectional design does not allow conclusions about cause and effect. Both measures were self-report questionnaires, which may be affected by socially desirable answers. The sample of 100 adolescents from Ranipet limits how far the results can be generalised. In addition, the PPS was developed for

adolescents aged 16 to 19, so the scores of younger participants should be interpreted with caution.

Future research could follow adolescents over several years to see how peer pressure and decision-making styles change together, use larger samples that include rural adolescents and different regions of India, and add measures of protective factors such as self-efficacy and parental support. Experimental tasks in which peers are present could be used alongside questionnaires. Finally, school-based counselling and life skills programmes aimed at strengthening the rational decision-making style could be developed and tested in controlled trials.

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Author Profile

Aisha Siddiqua is pursuing an M.Sc. in Psychology at Jain University, Bengaluru. Her research interests include adolescent development, peer pressure, and decision-making. She is particularly interested in understanding how peer influence affects adolescents' choices and behaviours. Through her research, she aims to promote healthy peer relationships and responsible decision-making among adolescents.