

Peer Pressure: A study of how teenagers in Delhi are affected by peer pressure

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Abstract: At school, it's common for teenagers to go through peer pressure. Often, peer pressure can affect individuals in multiple ways including academic performance. This paper attempts to explore how peer pressure unfolds for teenagers in an urban city like Delhi. The researcher conducted a survey of 110 students to understand how peer pressure affects them in multiple ways and particularly analyse the impact of peer pressure on academic performance.

Keywords: Peer pressure, Delhi, academics, performance, achievement, grades

Introduction

Schools are considered to be safe spaces for children. It is assumed that students learn immensely in educational institutions, they build their life on these experiences and learn various life skills. However this is true that children build upon their experiences in school, we also need to comprehensively understand the kinds of experiences that children have in school. Various social factors impact children. The environment at home and school, the kinds of interactions they have with adults and peers and the relationships they form in the process. In such a case, children are also bound to be influenced by a lot of these factors in both positive and negative ways. It is very common for teenagers especially to feel different emotions about their social experiences. Peers can affect fluent individuals in different manners. One might get encouraged or completely discouraged to do certain things in various social settings. The way children perform in academics is not just an individual process. This is also in contrast with how the modern world is perceived. While we focus on the individualistic ideas of modern learning, the collective and social aspects are equally important. They are affected by multiple things and the people around them. The academic performance of students in schools is also much affected by their peers. While there is no one dimension of looking at how these aspects impact academic performance, this research particularly looks at the impact of peer pressure.

Literature Review

To be able to understand how teenagers are affected by peer pressure in schools, it is first extremely important to look at what exactly a peer group is and it ends up exerting pressure on the teenager in school. Castrogiovanni (2002) has tried to define a peer group by arguing that it consists of people belonging to a small group with similar interests in certain activities, close to the same age bar and can also be a group of friends. It is very common to see people functioning in groups in general as it is a human tendency to seek support be it emotional, mental or physical. A Peer group may also be that supportive group of people that one has in life. However, a peer group is not merely limited to that.

Sometimes, we may not be very good friends with people of the same age, area or interests but are bound together through some institutional or formal obligations. It is interesting to see how these peers end up building pressure on a person. In a society, people are bound to look up to, judge or get influenced by other people. What is important to note is that other people's performance, their attitude and their ways of ending up create a certain impact on our minds. As a result, a person ends up doing something that the peer is doing without any personal interest. If we want to define peer pressure more technically, we can argue that it is that attribute which influences and encourages people belonging to more or less similar age groups to do anything that the person might not have done if he/she did not belong to this peer group(Santor, Messervey&Kusumakar, 2000).

There are various ways in which teenagers are influenced by their peers. As people start looking up to others in the peer group, they become conscious of what they are doing. There has been enough circumspection on the fact that one way in which people take peer pressure is that they become extremely worried and conscious of what their peers would think of them if their actions do not end up being desirable (Burns and Darling, 2002). In such a scenario, the decision-making of the teenagers is also impacted by the peer group. When they are more concerned about what others would think, the individualized approach to decision-making is completely lost. A peer group can be extremely influential. It can determine various behavioural aspects of teenagers. However, how peer group affects a person has drastically changed over time (Steinberg, 2005). To put it in a more contextual sense, while the growing modern practices emphasize the individual approach to learning, looking at the causes and impacts of peer pressure depicts a very different story. There is absolutely no

doubt that in the more globalized world today, the focus has been on individualized learning and individualism has grown tremendously, yet the collective nature of learning cannot be ignored.

To have a better understanding of what we have been arguing, we would try to look at the impact that peer pressure has on the academic performance of a person. The academic performance of a child is considered to be the most individualized way of looking at their progress. However, research shows that there are various factors which impact the performance of a child in any field. If a child has been able to live through school experiences, we analyze the academic performance of the child. To be able to understand this aspect, one also needs to be mindful of what exactly we mean by academic performance. It is not just the competitive scoring of students in schools but also their future achievements in terms of financial dependency, living and building with the community and taking up adulthood in a most flourishing way (Hodgkinson, 1991). While students are influenced in various social settings, they are mostly subjected to a lot of influence in schools and due to various other social aspects, their academic performance is also affected (Juvonen, 2006).

While sometimes the situations in one's household or life have a deep impact on their academic performance, peer groups end up influencing a person very powerfully (Rowe, 1994). Now, this happens because people around a person start associating various expectations with teenagers. While it is argued that most of the time, parents expect certain things from their children, it is not the entire case. The peer group and other people also start expecting certain things from a person. Whatever the expectations from a person and their intrinsic motivation are something that keeps the person moving. But if any of these are not very positive, then there may be chances of poor academic performance.

Another important thing that we need to look at is the types of peer pressure. Since we live in a diverse society and encounter a diverse range of people in the society, our experiences tend to differ which means that peers don't need to affect a person in only a particular way. To better understand this, we need to look at the types of peer pressure. Many researchers also suggest that peer groups influence academic and social performance so deeply that it ends up changing into initiations of formal education also (Anthony Pellegrini, 1992).

Peer pressure can be positive. This is, in a sense, one type of peer pressure. Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison (2004) argue that sometimes peers might be encouraged to take part in certain activities, point out your mistakes to encourage you to work upon them and do certain things which are good for your self-development. This kind of peer pressure is positive. However, peer pressure may not always be positive. It can create a negative impact as well. So, another major type of power pressure is negative peer pressure. Peer pressure is negative when the power group influences a person into doing something that is not right for them or something that they would not normally do if they did not belong to a particular group of peers, examples of drug addiction with friends or bullying can be used to understand this better (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison 2004).

We have already discussed that peer pressure impacts the academic performance of a person along with multiple other aspects related to one's social life. The various types of behaviours by peers leave a long-lasting and deep impact on the person. When the peers are not avidly accepted among their group, they even stop attending school, the attendance rates fall drastically and there is a massive behavioural change (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, and Patterson, 1994). It is very simple to understand that one needs to feel accepted in society to remain actively engaged in it. The elections end up creating a gap between people and sometimes they are not able to do good in life. Especially in the teenage years, people are more inclined towards their peer group. They are more influenced by people of their age while others seem very indifferent. Fuligni (2001) sharply points out that academic performances have sharply gone down when the peers show higher inclinations towards their peer group, ignorance of parents and other work and they end up doing things only to be popular in their peer group.

However, as we discussed that peer pressure can also have positive impacts, we need to consider that academic performance can also be good if the peer pressure is positive. One common perception amongst parents is that when teenagers spend more time with their peers they end up screwing their lives. But spending more of their time with the power group does not necessarily mean that it is going to have a negative impact only (Lingren, 1995). When the peers spend time together, they are also able to share their experiences, plans, problems, doubts and sometimes even the things that they are not able to share with their parents. Moreover, peers also learn from each other's experiences. In such a case, the peer group must be accepting and supportive. Being constantly rejected by peers can have a severe impact on the mental health of a person causing issues like anxiety also which leads to a lack of connectedness and concentration in the classroom (Sharp, 1995).

We have repeatedly envisaged the importance of peer support for better academic performance. Teenagers who can seek emotional support from peers and other people in society, tend to be motivated and driven toward valuing learning in school (Roeser, Eccles & Strobel, 1998). They can enhance various skills when positively supported by peers. When the interaction with peers has an optimistic impact on a person, they acquire various skills be it academic or practical which also boosts their self-esteem (Kuh 1993). Apart from learning certain things and having an impact on mental structures, there is an impact on well-being too. There

has been enough evidence to support that peers who are active within their group tend to be more healthy (Vilhjalmsson, 1994). Active engagement in the lower group is extremely important to learn and positively affect and get affected in a peer group. Researchers suggest that Lees who are very less active in various activities in a peer group score lower marks than the ones who are actively engaged (Manski, 1993).

Peer group serves various purposes in one's life. They can act as a companion one needs, a person to have fun with, get entertained, seek validation and support each other mentally and emotionally (Hamm & Zhang, 2010). This is important to understand that students' relationships with peers play an extremely important role in various aspects. There has been a consensus in the development of psychology that relationships that peers play a key role in child development (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). The psychological impacts of peer pressure and peer learning also need to be understood very deeply. The interaction with peers is looked at as the most crucial aspect of the cognitive development of a child and his/her identity formation in the growing years (Wentzel, 2005). How a child perceives himself is not independent of the society around him. The way peers and teachers motivate and support a child also plays a key role in building a self-identity for a child. The various concepts related to motivation form their basis on how the children engage and affect, how motivation exists in a classroom and it is disseminated to the teachers, parents, and peers (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

For a positive peer interaction, there needs to be a certain connectedness and closeness amongst the peers. However, this does not mean entering someone's personal space but merely interacting and approaching healthily. When there is a certain nearness and approachability in a classroom, students can interact more freely (van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2012). One important aspect that arises from this point is that the kinds of interaction one have with the peer group and relationships they form also have a certain value in their experience. People have tried to look at the varying influence arising from the dynamic nature of peer relations (Rodkin & Ahn, 2008). One thing is that a child may belong to various peer groups and might have relations outside these peer groups as well. Then, the influence of peers changes and varies according to different relations of one person with people in different groups, be it internal or external to the peer group.

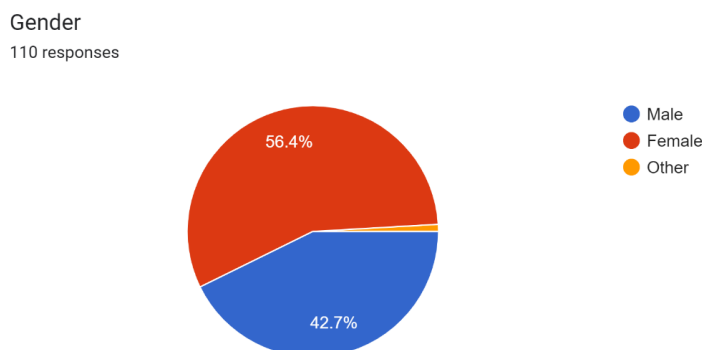
Moreover, peers also worry about their social status and end up creating pressure. Studies resulting in acceptance in peers suggest that the status held by a person within a classroom relates immensely to the feeling of belongingness with the school, how children engage actively in academics and also their achievements (Ladd, Herald-Brown, & Kochel, 2009). However, we need not mix the idea of popularity with peer acceptance and social status. If the children strive to become popular amongst their peers, they end up jeopardising their academic achievements (Kiefer & Ryan, 2008).

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research methodology. Through extensive literature review, a questionnaire was prepared that was put on a google form and then circulated among students of different age groups, particularly targeting teenagers. There were 110 students who responded. The responses were then analyzed to understand the impact of peer pressure.

Data Analysis

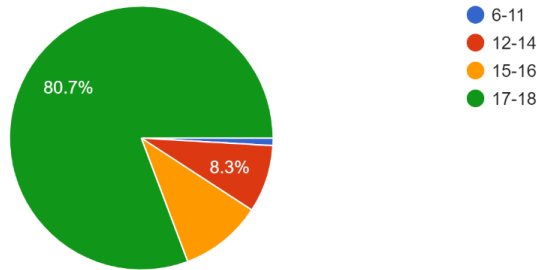
Gender Distribution



56.4% of the students who participated were females, 42.7% were males and 1 student belonged to the third gender.

Age

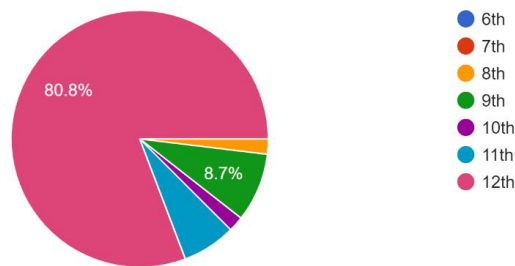
Age (Years)
 109 responses



80.7% of the students belonged to 17-18 years of age. 10.1% of the students were in the age group of 15-16 years. 8.3% students were of 12-14 years of age and 1 student belonged to the 6-11 years age group.

Grade

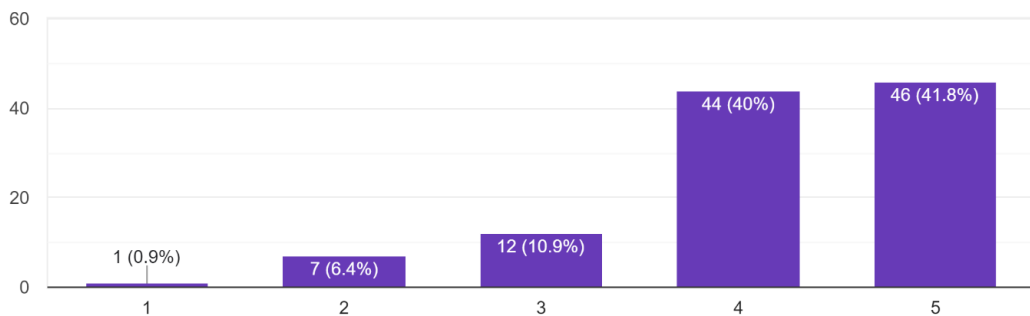
Grade
 104 responses



80.8% students were from 12th standard. 6.7% students were from 11th standard. 1.9% from 10th standard. 8.7% students were from 9th standard and 2 students from 8th standard.

How comfortable are you with your friends?

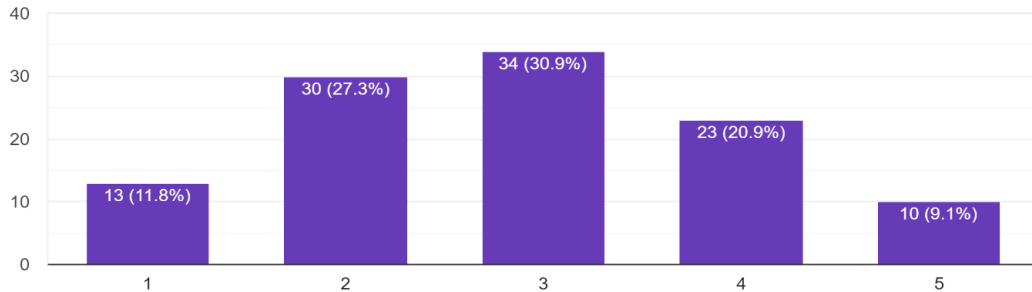
110 responses



Pressure from Peers

How often do you feel pressure from your peers?

110 responses

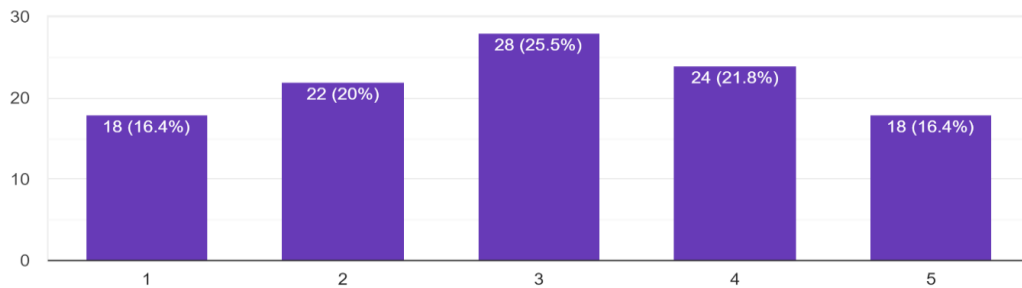


11.8% students said that they hardly felt peer pressure. 27.3% of the students felt little bit of peer pressure. 30.9% of students were neutral. 20.9% of the students felt there was peer pressure and 9.1% students felt enormous amount of peer pressure.

Effect of peer pressure on studies

Do you think peer pressure affects your studies?

110 responses

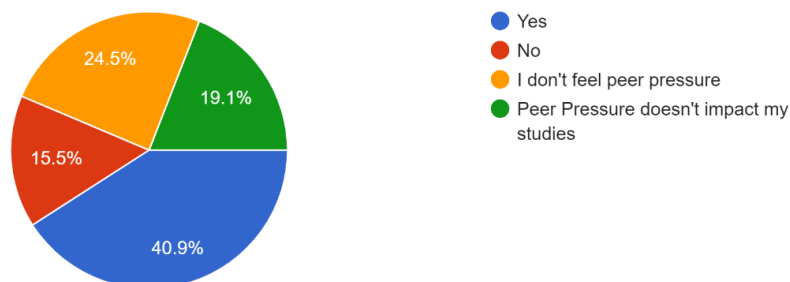


16.4% students admitted that peer pressure highly affects their studies. 21.8% students felt that peer pressure mildly affected their studies. 25.5% students were neutral about. And rest of the students were hardly affected by peer pressure.

Impact of lack of peer pressure

Do you think if you didn't have peer pressure, it would helped you perform better in studies?

110 responses

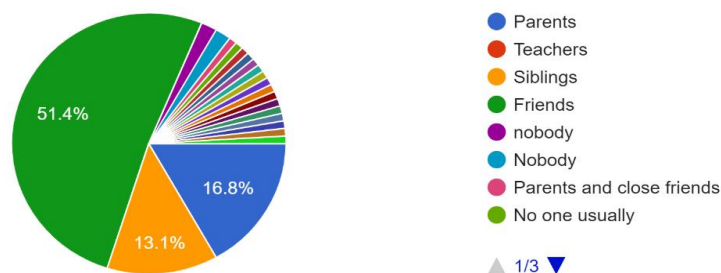


A whopping 41% students admitted that they would perform better in studies if there was no peer pressure. 19.1% of the students said that peer pressure doesn't impact them. 24.5% students said that they don't feel peer pressure. And only 15.5% students said that lack of peer pressure will not impact their studies.

Peer pressure – Whom to approach?

Whom do you approach when faced with peer pressure?

107 responses

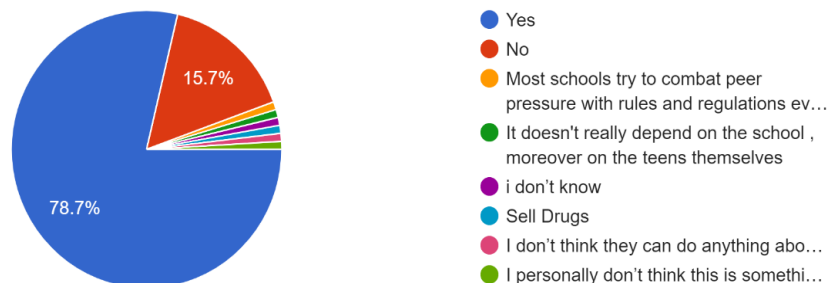


Most of the times, students don't even realize that they are facing peer pressure and fail to acknowledge it to someone else. This is patent through the above graph. More than half of the students don't approach anyone when faced with peer pressure. 16.8% approach parents and 13.1% students approach siblings.

Should school take steps to combat peer pressure

Do you think your school should take more steps to combat peer pressure?

108 responses



78.7% of the students felt the need that schools should take more stringent steps to combat peer pressure. This signifies how students are facing peer pressure in schools often and school management should do due diligence to curb the peer pressure. Only 15.7% of the students felt that schools need not take more steps.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates how peer pressure is still a widespread issue among teenagers. It reflects how students feel the need for more steps required by the school authorities and how deeply peer pressure impacts them and their academic performance. In light of National Education Policy 2020, a cohesive environment is important for students to prosper and excel, and hence school management and stakeholders should take due adherence of the impact of peer pressure and take necessary action. This study can serve as the basis for doing more rigorous research for understanding different facets of peer pressure.

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