Role of Peer Pressure in Decision Making Ability of Adolescents

Literature Review

Introduction to Adolescent Decision Making and Peer Pressure

Significance of Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a critical stage of development characterised by significant physical, social, and psychological changes, typically occurring between the ages of 13 to 18. During this period, individuals experience heightened emotions, uncertainty, and the desire for independence from authority figures. These changes can impact their attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making abilities, shaping their long-term development and relationships with peers.

Influence of Peers on Adolescent

"It seems like people accept you more if you're, like, a dangerous driver or something. If there is a line of cars going down the road and the other lane is clear and you pass eight cars at once, everybody likes that. . . . If my friends are with me in the car, or if there are a lot of people in the line, I would do it, but if I'm by myself and I didn't know anybody, then I wouldn't do it. That's no fun. — Anonymous teenager, as quoted in The Culture of Adolescent Risk-Taking (Lightfoot, 1997, p. 10)

During adolescence, individuals tend to seek independence from parental influence and authority figures, preferring to form relationships with peers. Peers become a significant source of emotional and social support, influencing various aspects of adolescents' lives such as behavior, preferences, and social interactions. Feeling accepted by their peer group can positively impact adolescents' self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Importance of Peer Relationships in Adolescence

During adolescence, peer relationships become extremely important, with teenagers showing a heightened interest in opposite-sex relationships and spending more time interacting with peers compared to children and adults. Adolescents prioritise peer norms for behaviour, report high levels of happiness in peer settings, and exhibit a peak in affiliation motivation that is observed across species, as seen in studies with adolescent rats.

Definition and Impact of Peer Pressure

Peer pressure involves conforming to group norms and showing loyalty to group members, significantly influencing adolescent behaviour and decision-making. It can be positive if it enhances their personality but negative if it leads to unhealthy beliefs or attitudes. Adolescents may feel compelled to adopt specific lifestyles due to pressure from their peer groups, thus impacting their individuality and choices.

Decision-Making Styles and Coping Patterns

Overview of decision coping patterns

Decision making involves evaluating and choosing among different options available to an individual. According to the conflict theory by Janis and Mann, there are four main decision coping patterns that teens use to manage decisional conflicts. These patterns are influenced by the situation, time pressure, optimism or pessimism about finding a solution, and the level of psychological stress experienced by them.

Vigilant, Panic, Evasive Avoidance and Complacent decision coping patterns

Vigilance. It is characterised by a thorough exploration of options and an objective assessment when time pressure is low and optimism is high.

Panic. On the other hand, the panic pattern is employed under high time pressure and stress levels, causing rushed decisions to reduce the stress.

Evasive Avoidance. It is used when pessimism prevails, and the teen tries to avoid conflict through procrastination or rationalisation

Complacency. It involves dismissing conflict and maintaining the status quo without change.

Previous Research on Adolescent Decision Making and Peer Pressure

Comparison of decision-making behaviors among different cultures

Researchers Isaac A. Friedman and Leon Mann (1993) compared how Israeli and Australian adolescents handle decision-making challenges. They found that Australian adolescents showed lower self-confidence and vigilance but higher evasive behaviour compared to Israeli adolescents.

Exploration of peer group dynamics and influence

In his paper "Peer groups and peer cultures," Brown, B. B. (1990) highlighted that high school students spend significantly more time with peers than with parents or other adults.

Impact of peer pressure on behaviours and attitudes

B. Bradford Brown studied how peer pressure affects high school students. He asked 297 college students to remember their experiences. The results showed that both males and

females felt pressured by their peers during high school. Females felt this pressure more strongly than males did. Peer pressure influenced how teenagers think about dating, whether they engage in sexual activities, and if they use drugs or alcohol.

Influence of peer pressure on consumer decisions

In 2014, Aditi Acharya and Guptain conducted a study on how peer pressure influences brand switching among Indian college students. They aimed to understand the factors influencing brand switching and the impact of peer pressure on choices related to mobile networks, ice cream, deodorant, and movie theaters. The research found a positive relationship between peers using or favoring a brand and students switching to that brand.

Study on decision making among adolescent mothers

Susan Lane's study focused on understanding the decision-making behaviours, stressors, and social support of adolescent mothers to prevent teenage pregnancy. By understanding how these young mothers make choices, Susan hoped to create programs that could stop teenage pregnancy from happening. These programs would be made specifically for teenage mothers and would help them make better decisions. The overall goal was to lower the number of teenage girls getting pregnant.

Measuring Peer Pressure

Tools to measure perceived peer pressure

V. Palani and S. Mani developed a scale to measure perceived peer pressure among high school students. The scale includes 30 items categorized into three dimensions: Yielding to Peer Pressure, Resistance to Peer Pressure, and Peers Encouragement. Their study

confirmed that the scale is a valid tool for assessing perceived peer pressure in this demographic.

The Adolescent Decision Making Questionnaire is a self-assessment tool with 30 items that evaluates self-confidence in decision-making and four decision-making styles: vigilance, panic, evasiveness, and complacency. Participants rate their agreement with statements on a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, with higher scores indicating stronger tendencies towards each decision-making style. Some items in the self-confidence subscale were reversed due to their negative wording. It assesses various aspects such as school performance, substance abuse, theft, dating, and sexual behavior.

Statistical analysis techniques employed

Descriptive statistical calculations, such as mean and standard deviation, along with Pearson's correlations, were conducted on the collected data using parametric statistical methods, which are considered robust even with a small sample size and Likert data.

Key findings

Relationship between self-confidence and peer pressure

Despite this, the majority of adolescents showed high levels of self-confidence, especially in making decisions that turn out well. Negative responses were more common for items framed negatively, indicating a generally positive outlook and high confidence levels among the adolescents.

Response to perceived peer pressure among adolescents

Adolescents showed varied responses to perceived peer pressure. While they mostly resisted yielding to peer pressure, they demonstrated solidarity by defending their friends when necessary i.e., a shift from mindless conformity to a supportive attitude towards peers. This is characteristic of late childhood development.

Impact of peer pressure on academic behaviours

Adolescents showed a strong tendency to resist peer pressure related to academic dishonesty, with 80% disagreeing with allowing friends to copy assignments. On the other hand, the majority of participants reported positive responses to peer encouragement, indicating that they received motivation to study and solve challenging problems from their friends.

Reluctance in participating in life saving training programs

Adolescents showed reluctance to participate in life-saving training programs due to peer influence. It may stem from them not perceiving themselves as vulnerable to life risks simply because their peers engage in such activities.

Adolescent Risk-Taking Behavior and Peer Influence

Adolescents are more prone to engaging in risky behaviours compared to children and adults, such as experimenting with substances, engaging in unprotected sex, and reckless driving. Despite having similar risk perception and reasoning abilities to adults, adolescents tend to make riskier choices, especially when in the company of their friends. Risk taking in young adults, aged 18-25, involves engaging in behaviors that offer potentially desirable

outcomes but also carry risks of harm or loss. Common risky behaviors in this age group include driving at excessive speeds, binge drinking, and engaging in unprotected sex.

Factors affecting the risk taking behavior

Social conformity, peer pressure, and the desire to fit in or gain social status as factors that could contribute to adolescents taking more risks in the presence of peers. Despite considering various factors like pubertal status, genetics, family background, and cognitive development, researchers have struggled to pinpoint a reliable predictor of susceptibility to peer influence. While there is evidence that males tend to engage in more risk-taking than females, research on sex differences in vulnerability to social influences remains limited. Prior life experiences, such as positive peer support or peer conflict, can influence an individual's sensitivity to social interactions. These experiences may impact brain development, shaping how individuals value peer opinions, perceive peer contexts, and make decisions influenced by peers.

Crime statistics and affiliation with delinquent peers

Crime statistics show that adolescents tend to engage in delinquent behaviours more often in peer groups, while adults tend to commit offences alone. Affiliation with delinquent peers is a strong predictor of delinquent behaviour in adolescence, attributed to peer socialisation and friendship choices where risk-taking adolescents naturally form connections. A study by Cavalca et al. (2013) found that adolescent smokers exhibited increased risk-taking behavior when they believed they were interacting with a peer, compared to non-smoking adolescents.

Experimental research on peer influence

To investigate the impact of peer influence on decision-making, experimental research compares the behavior of adolescents and adults when making decisions alone versus in the presence of peers. In a study by Gardner & Steinberg (2005), early adolescents (average age of 14), late adolescents (average age of 19), and adults (average age of 37) were tested on a computerised driving task called the Chicken Game. This task involved driving a vehicle on a course while avoiding a wall that could suddenly appear. It found that early adolescents took significantly more risks when tested with their peers compared to when they were alone, scoring twice as high on risky driving. Late adolescents also showed increased risk-taking behavior, about 50% riskier, in the presence of peers, while adults did not exhibit a difference in risky driving based on social context.

Cognitive and Emotional Factors in Adolescent Decision Making

Influence of emotions on decision making

Decisions are influenced by both cognitive and emotional factors, even when emotions are not directly related to the decision at hand. Emotions, such as anticipated feelings after making a choice, play a role in evaluating the value of different options. Puberty-related changes in hormones, such as gonadal hormones and oxytocin-receptor density, contribute to alterations in social behaviours observed during adolescence. These hormonal changes, along with concurrent modifications in dopaminergic function in neural circuits involved in incentive processing, play a role in shaping their social behaviours

Heightened emotional responses to social cues

Adolescents, compared to adults, show heightened emotional responses to social cues due to changes in brain development and hormonal activity during puberty. These changes lead to increased sensitivity to social stimuli, such as positive social interactions, which can influence decision-making and behavior during adolescence. The presence of peers can further amplify this sensitivity.

Role of digital communication

Digital communication, including social media and smartphones, has a notable impact on encouraging risky behavior among young adults and teenagers. These platforms often feature content related to risky activities like drinking, and peer pressure is frequently a driving force behind these behaviors. Even short interactions online can influence risky behaviors, such as increased smoking tendencies when exposed to peers who smoke heavily in a video chat. On the flip side, receiving a brief intervention via email from a doctor led to a significant decrease in mentions of sexual activity on the online profiles of at-risk young adults aged 18-20.

Young adults are more prone to taking risks when they receive information about risks from peers or electronic devices. Specifically, getting a short message that encourages risky behavior from a peer has a lasting impact on decision-making compared to simply observing risky content, highlighting how digital interactions affect the choices of young adults.

Positive Peer Pressure

Friends and peer groups have a big impact on how young people socialize and make decisions, especially teenagers. Research shows that decisions are influenced not just by close friends, but also by peers of the same age, and are influenced by factors like ability,

education, advice from teachers, discussions with peers, and cultural backgrounds. Peers can affect choices related to careers, education, lifestyle, and social activities, showing how important these relationships are in shaping behavior and decision-making. For example, when it comes to career choices, young people often turn to their peer groups for guidance on which subjects to study, which can have a big effect on their future.

Understanding how peer and friend groups influence decision-making can help individuals make smarter choices about their careers, considering the impact of social networks. Peers are key in shaping career decisions, affecting both opportunities and decision-making processes. Friends are also important for academic and career choices, helping with job selection, finding employment, and professional growth. They also influence decisions about education and career paths, showing their significant role in shaping career decisions.

The analysis found a strong link between peer influence and career decision-making, with most respondents confirming this connection. Statistical tests showed that there is indeed a significant relationship between peer influence and career decisions. Friends and peers were found to be crucial in socialization and behavior changes, affecting decisions about education and careers. The study highlighted that peer groups, formed for various reasons, have a big impact on the choices young people make about what subjects to study and which classes to take.

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