

Peer pressure in young adults

Literature, Russian Literature



Introduction

Peers are basically the people of your age or close to it who have experiences and interests similar to yours. Peers form an integral part of our life. As we become more independent, our peers naturally play a greater role in your life.

Peer pressure is the influence on people by peers, or the effect on an individual who gets encouraged to follow their peers by changing their attitudes, values or behaviours to conform to those of the influencing group or individual. It's natural for people to identify with and compare themselves to their peers as they consider how they wish to be or think they should be, or what they want to achieve. People are influenced by peers because they want to fit in, be like peers they admire, do what others are doing, or have what others have.

Peer pressure may be in a direct way or an indirect way. Friends asking us directly to do something is direct peer pressure. This is a powerful form of peer pressure and is difficult to resist. Indirect peer pressure is when someone sees and hears what their friends are doing and gets influenced by it.

People from all age groups face peer pressure in some form or the other. Usually, school going children demand things from their parents, which their friends own. They want to participate in activities which their friends do. This is peer pressure for them.

As college and other activities take adolescents away from home, they may spend more time with their peers than they do with their parents and siblings. They probably develop close friendships with some of their peers, and they may feel so connected to them that they are like an extended family. Some common peer pressure-based situations for teenagers are academic pressure due to comparison with better performing students, wasting precious time on social media, consumption of alcohol, substance abuse.

Even adults aren't immune to peer pressure. Adults are just as subject to peer pressure as children and youth. Some forms in which adults face peer pressure are buying expensive and unwanted things like to match status with peers, pressure to work at a highly paying and reputed job, pressure to get married and to have children.

When talking about peer pressure everyone thinks that it would have a negative influence. We usually tend to ignore the positive side of peer pressure. If we take two friends out and we know that one who is more influential is going to set the tone for the influence. So, if the one who is more influential doesn't like to drink, the other friend might not drink. But if the influential friend likes to drink, we see the negative face of peer pressure. Teenage is the time when a person is most susceptible to peer pressure because peers become an important influence on behaviour during this period.

So, we interviewed some teenagers to know how peer pressure has affected them during this age. We also analysed some macro-level peer pressure issues for teenagers in India.

Interview-1

Have you faced peer pressure in any form? Has peer pressure stopped you from being you?

Yes, I have faced peer pressure. Sometimes it made me do things I didn't want to do.

Could you list down some instances when you faced peer pressure?

1. I consumed alcohol during a treat given by my seniors.
2. I started playing computer games because all my friends used to play them.
3. I used to hang out with my friends even if I had some important work left as they forced me.
4. I had to participate in various extra-curricular activities due to peer pressure by seniors.

Could you elaborate one event where peer pressure had negative effects on you?

I had consumed alcohol during a treat given by seniors. Even though I had a little urge to have it from my side, but due to constant nagging from seniors and my friends I had to drink so that I won't feel left out. Now, I am an occasional drinker and I have hidden this fact from my parents. I now find it very hard to resist alcohol.

How did you cope up with the pressure? What steps did you take to resist that pressure?

I still haven't found a way to avoid such peer pressure-based incidents. I have to control myself a few times but that was of no use.

Whom do you talk to when you are affected due to peer pressure? I usually talk to my close friends as they cheer me up. I avoid talking to my parents about such things.

Could you elaborate one event where peer pressure had positive effects on you?

Initially I didn't have seriousness during my JEE preparation days at FIITJEE, but my friends were studying very hard. I got inspired by them and started preparing well for JEE and managed to clear with a good rank.

What were your initial thoughts when you faced this pressure? Did you try to resist that pressure?

Initially I didn't study regularly and used to spend time watching TV series and playing sports. But when I actually started feeling the pressure, I didn't try to resist it as I knew that it is positive peer pressure.

How did you feel when that pressure brought good results for you?

I was very elated and grateful to my friends because of them I am here in IIT Bombay.

Have you created peer pressure on people you know?

Yes, I have done it. Even when some of my friends have quizzes and other important jobs and I want to do something else I pressurize them a bit to hang out with me.

How do you plan to face such peer pressure-based incidents in future?

I would choose my upcoming friend circle wisely and would make plans with people who always think of my good. If someone forces too much and if I could not resist that pressure, I will make sure that I don't hang out with that person too much.

Interview-2**Have you faced peer pressure in any form? Has peer pressure stopped you from being you?**

Yes, I have faced peer pressure. I have done things which I didn't want to do just because of peer pressure.

Could you list down some instances when you faced peer pressure?

1. I started to drink alcoholic drinks after I joined college just because my friends were doing it.
2. My friends eat at lavish restaurants and spend a lot of money there regularly. Even I started doing the same even when I didn't want to do it.
3. I tried weed and cigarettes under peer pressure.
4. I started going to the gym as many of my friends had joined.

Could you elaborate one event where peer pressure had negative effects on you?

I tried weed first time when I went on a trip with my friends when all my friends were doing the same. I did it 4-5 times after that partly because of peer pressure and also due to addiction. My energy used to drain out when I did that. I tried cigarettes just once when a school friend offered me.

How did you cope up with the pressure? What steps did you take to resist that pressure?

Initially I couldn't refuse my friends for anything. I thought that saying no would cause problems in our friendship. However, later on I observed that when I myself made any plans, many times my friends would refuse it saying that they have other priorities. So, one day I decided that from now on I won't get influenced much by anyone and I will do only what I want to do.

Who do you talk to when you are affected due to peer pressure?

I talk to my girlfriend and my close friends who I think will give me unbiased advice to deal with peer pressure.

Could you elaborate one event where peer pressure had positive effects on you?

I attended and participated in various workshops and sessions conducted in the institute which helped me explore various fields and enhanced my knowledge base. This happened mainly because some of my friends were also attending them.

What were your initial thoughts when you faced this pressure? Did you try to resist that pressure?

I was very lazy in the beginning and thought that I would rather spend that time enjoying, like watching TV series.

How did you feel when that pressure brought good results for you?

I had a feeling of satisfaction as I think I got really benefited by attending those sessions and now I know exactly which sessions will be useful for me before attending the session itself.

Have you created peer pressure on people you know?

Yes, I have done it. I have forced many people to hang out with me in spite of knowing that they have some important things to do. I have also encouraged my friends to bunk classes with me.

How do you plan to face such peer pressure-based incidents in future?

Having learnt from the past, now I have learnt the art of saying no. I will do only what I want to do and will set priorities accordingly. I plan to keep my thoughts rigid and maintain discipline so that I could avert such incidents in future.

Macro-Level Case Studies on Peer Pressure**Entrance Exams**

In the billion-dollar coaching industry, many uninterested children are still being enrolled by their parents to prepare for the entrance exams years before the actual exam just because their friend's child started preparing for that exam.

Gone are the days when going to coaching class was an added advantage, now not going to a coaching class is considered a disadvantage as almost every serious entrance exam aspirant is affiliated to at least one coaching class.

Parents have to pay hefty fees of those coaching classes for many years so as to ensure that their child isn't at any disadvantage during the exam.

Some parents are not in a financial situation where they pay the fees easily and they have to sacrifice something to pay the fees which in turn creates stress for the student.

Students are under a lot of stress to outperform their peers in the class. Not getting satisfactory results in the entrance exams and seeing their peer's good performance may lead to depression for a student, which in its extreme form may lead to suicide. Suicides are not very rare in Kota, the coaching capital of the country. These are some negative aspects of peer pressure in this case.

However, there are also positive effects of peer pressure here. For the students who are genuinely interested in the subject, the competition enhances their performance and they end up learning more about the subject. They also learn crucial life skills like stress management, time management.

Substance Abuse

One of the major cases that comes to mind while thinking about peer pressure is that of substance abuse. People start taking alcohol, cigarettes and drugs mainly when their peers ask them to do so. Let us take an example which is quite realistic: If a group of teenagers are discussing their plans for the weekend with the majority of them saying they are going to a party and are going to be drinking and when one person says he/she is going to stay at home to study instead, the others will roll their eyes or whisper among themselves. The student who was planning to study may then feel under pressure to go to the party and drink just to prove how cool he or she really is. Or it could be that everyone laughs when one teenager refuses to drink at a party. This individual may then feel embarrassed and will take the drink even if he or she really doesn't want it. The fear of missing out is the

reason why these people fall prey to peer pressure and fall into a deep well from which coming out becomes a daunting task.

Social Media

Social media has a severe impact on teens. Social media has given peer pressure the power to ruin the lives of teens who feel pressurized to do things mainly because all their friends are doing them. Nowadays, teens spend hours on different social media accounts, which may boost their social standing, but at the same time compel them to do things they shouldn't or even aren't too keen to do.

According to several studies conducted lately, viewing posts, images and statuses of friends indulging in inappropriate activities encourage teens to do the same. For instance, in one study, 75% of the teens accepted the fact that the pressure to blend in after seeing posts of their friends openly drinking alcohol and taking drugs forced them to repeat this behaviour. Going through the posts and stories of friends and seeing them going to late night parties, drinking alcohol, trying drugs, being in a relationship, make teens feel that everyone except them are enjoying their life.

The fear of missing out is so strong that they unintentionally start getting attracted towards these activities. This 'virtual peer pressure' has proved to be very dangerous. The social media platforms which were made with a motive to connect friends has this negative face as well.

Conclusion

Based on the interviews and the case studies done it can be understood that peer pressure plays a huge role in a teenagers' life. Many choices that

teenagers make in their day to day life are based on what their peers do. We observed that peer pressure has both positive and negative impact on teenagers.

The most common and serious effects of peer pressure on teenagers are:

1. Consumption of alcohol at parties when friends are doing it.
2. Smoking, using drugs and other addictive substances due to peer pressure.
3. Doing undesirable activities like the ones mentioned above after watching posts and stories by their friends on social media.
4. Constant comparison of academics with peers to build a good career leading to depression and suicides.
5. Picking up a particular career stream just because everyone is doing it without having any real interest for the same. This is one of the reasons why we have so many applicants for JEE and such a huge number of engineers in the country.

Situations where peer pressure has positive impact on teenagers are:

1. Comparison of academics with peers brings out better performance for many students.
2. Participation in sports, joining a gym, having healthier diets after watching their friends who have become fit and look good.

We noticed that negative effects of peer pressure are more prevalent than the positive effects of peer pressure in teenagers. People tend to get attracted towards doing the wrong thing more easily than doing something which benefits them.

C Wright Mills asserts that sociological imagination is about making connections between personal challenges and larger social issues. Substance abuse, consumption of alcohol, misuse of social media, suicides due to academic pressure in teenagers has become far more common to be termed as personal trouble. Peer pressure has played a huge role to promote these things as seen in the interviews and case studies. Efforts must be taken at the country level to reduce these awful activities that are destroying so many teenagers' lives. For instance, the government conduct awareness sessions on these topics in all the schools and colleges every 6 months and can ensure that schools and colleges have a team of professional counsellors to help students deal with such issues. Stricter laws can be imposed by government to restrict teenagers from getting alcohol, cigarettes, drugs. Unfortunately, no such measures are taken and the issue of peer pressure doesn't get much attention by the authorities which implies that the teenagers are left to themselves to deal with it. As seen from interviews and case studies, one's lack of self-confidence has led to peer pressure affecting the teenagers. One should be confident enough so that he/she can refuse doing something which will have a negative impact on him/her as suggested by their peers. One should also not ignore the good suggestions given by friends for their betterment, like we saw in the interviews where peer pressure had a positive effect.