

Adolescence and peer influence

[Life](#), [Adolescence](#)



Adolescence is identified as a stage when an individual undergoes a process of growing up in order to become an adult. It involves a process when adolescents experience changes that occur physically and emotionally. Likewise, the whole process could become confusing and uncomfortable for the individual who is at the said phase (de Guzman, 2007).

It is believed that many of the younger people who are moving towards the process of adolescence are expanding their ranges in the social life.

Likewise, complexities of social involvement also expand. Majority of the teenagers or adolescents are geared towards total independence.

As such, the relationship and time of the teenager at home are less frequent (Smetana, 1988; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Noller & Callan, 1991 cited in Jackson & Rodriguez-Tome, 1995, p. 1). Adolescents become more engaged in activities that they think represents who they really are. Through this, there is an increase in the awareness of teenagers in their social surroundings.

During the time of adolescence, peers play a substantial role in the lives of young people. Peers become the focus of the teenagers' lifestyle and most of the activities that they carry out are affected by the peers that they have (Berndt, 1989; Hartup, 1983 cited in Jackson & Rodriguez-Tome, 1995).

It was observed that teenagers begin to build friendships that are intimate in nature, sometime exclusive which often becomes constant unlike the friendships that they have during their younger years. The friendship that teenagers establish serves as an important way for them to develop because

for majority of adolescents, peers are avenue where they could freely explore themselves.

It is also with their peers that they feel they are accepted and secure. Likewise, the peers that the youths have allow them to exercise things that could uplift there skills which they could later on use for their success (de Guzman, 2007). It was also posted that the social activities that adolescent have could affect their decisions and interest in participating with sexual relationships (Miller & Simon, 1980; Zani, 1991 cited in Jackson & Rodriguez-Tome, 1995, p. 1).

Peer influences are said to be complex in nature. Various studies were carried out in order to understand the influences of peers during the period of adolescence and it was found out that adolescents could acquire positive and negative influences from the peers that surrounds them. In order to further understand the changes that adolescents undergo, it is an imperative to know what peer pressure is and the role that the peers play in the life of young adults (de Guzman, 2007).

Peer pressure is identified as the pressures and influences that young adults feel from their social mates (Atwater, 1988 cited in Foreman, 2001, n. p.). It should be noted that peers are those people that adolescents look up to for support and sometimes for approval. Peers are also considered as factors that are inevitable and necessary during the adolescence stage. Interaction with peer groups enable adolescents to exercise behaviors that are new to them and serves as a tool for them to develop there social skills which in turn could be used in future interactions (Steinberg, 1996 cited in Foreman, 2001, n. p.).

Peer pressure could be present in different domains. While many people tend to believe that peer influences are the reasons why teenagers engage in behaviors that are unhealthy and unsafe, there are many cases when peers influence teens to engage in activities that are positive.

According to studies regarding peer pressure, it was reported that many teens are pressured by their friends to engage in activities that are productive. Positive pressures from friends tend to motivate teenagers to engage in activities where they could excel such as athletics, music, community services, various extracurricular activities and other efficient endeavors.

In fact, many of the teens claimed that the pressures they get from friends are more positive rather than engaging in the usage of drugs and sexual conducts. It was also supported by many parents that influence from peers posted a positive effect in the school performances of teenagers. Likewise, peers also augment the strengthening of family values. As such, this is a perspective of peer influence that drives adolescents to become well rounded persons and expand their domains in a positive manner (de Guzman, 2007).

According to researches, influences from peers are a process where the teens are active recipients. The teens become friends with their peers because of the fact that they already have a lot of things in common which means that peers who enjoy doing things that are similar with their interest tend to gravitate towards each other (de Guzman, 2007). Although there are many instances where diversity could be seen among certain groups, researches also indicate that teenagers are more likely to group themselves according to their similarities.

Likewise, it was suggested that teenagers tend to reject people who are different from themselves. These differences could range from physical impairments, or different sets of educational motivation and interests. Nonetheless, the similarities among individuals appear to be an important factor during the socialization process because it serves as a connection for the young adult to create a bond with other people.

Due to this, it is believed that teenagers who are not able to have a positive connection with other young adults during the time of adolescence could be at great risk of involving themselves with negative influences from different peer groups. It was perceived that adolescents who fail to establish positive bonds with their contemporaries become more distant and different which make them feel that they are not welcome.

In this event, young individuals who received low standards of acceptance are more likely to engage themselves with peer groups who share the same issue. Thus, it is easier to join peer groups that have less positive perspectives. In a greater sense, such groups are often contemplated as those who engage in activities that are anti-social and self-destructive (Pledge, 2003).

The point has been made that peer influences could be positive despite of the negative connotations attached to this process of socialization. However, it should be noted that just like positive influences, peers could also brought about negative influences that could reinforce the adolescents decision of engaging in risky behaviors.

Risky behaviors were identified as actions that could produce outcomes that could be damaging physically, mentally and socially (Jessor, 1992 cited in Smith, 2001). Several types of risk behaviors include engagement in sexual activities, substance abuse, cigarettesmokingand crime activities. Adolescent behaviors could be altered by peer group influences through verbal and non-verbal means.

Verbal pressure that is done directly is the most common way of getting compliance from the young adult. For example, a certain peer group may not impose an adolescent to smoke; however, the members of the group may say things like “ you are such a baby,” “ just try it nothing wrong is going to happen” which could insinuate the adolescent to smoke in order for him or her to look better in the eyes of his or her peers.

Meanwhile a non-verbal persuasion could be done by staring at the adolescent for a long time until he or she feels uncomfortable which in the end is more likely to succumb in performing the behavior (Duryea, 1985 cited in Smith, 2001).

Aside from verbal and non-verbal methods, peer pressure could also be seen in different forms. The pressure could take the form of challenges or dares, social acceptance and coercion and the influences could also vary depending on the age and gender of the adolescent (Hayes and Hofferth, 1987, p. 105).

Sexual activities

There are limited researches that link peer influences in the early acquaintance with sexual activity. However, it was consistently presented

that peer influence is an important factor that greatly affect the initiation of sexual activities among adolescents.

It was also suggested that the major source of sexual information are from same sex-peers (Libby and Carlson, 1973; Miller, 1976; Thornburg, 1978 cited in Hayes and Hofferth, 1987, p. 105). Likewise, an adolescent who believes that their same-sex peers are sexually experienced and the liberal approach of his or her peers regarding sex are indicators that the teenager is more likely to engage with sexual activities.

Thus, it was contemplated that majority of the teenagers actually engage in activities based from the perception of his or her peers attitudes and behaviors even if it is correct or not (Newcomer et al., 1980 cited Hayes and Hofferth, 1987, p. 105). Some findings indicate that white male teenagers choose their peers in accordance to sexual activities that were carried out by the individuals within the circle while their black counterparts were neither influenced by the behavior of their friends or choose peers on such particular basis (Billy and Udry, 1983 cited Hayes and Hofferth, 105).

Meanwhile, female adolescents could be persuaded to some extent based from their knowledge of what her female friends are engaging into yet it was manifested that adolescent girls are strongly influenced to practice the sexual act by their “ best male friends” and sexual partners (Miller and Simon, 1974; Herold, 1980, Cvetkovich and Grote, 1980; Billy and Udry, 1983 cited in Hayes and Hofferth, 1987, p. 105).

Moreover, it was found out that among adolescents age 10 to 14, the pressure in sexual involvement could be done through challenges and dares

to the extent of fondling, kissing or even intercourse. Such occurrence is prevalent among girls (Lewis and Lewis, 1984 cited in Hayes and Hofferth, 1987, p. 105) while only minor peer influences were recorded among black teenage boys and girls (Billy and Udry, 1984 cited in Hayes and Hofferth, 1987).

Generally, white girls are more at risk of involving themselves with sexual activities due to peer pressure (Hayes and Hofferth, 1987).

Substance abuse

Aside from sexual activities, it was reliably demonstrated that peer groups also play an important role in influencing the decisions of adolescent to initiate the usage of drugs and alcohol. Likewise, it was also recorded that peers also affect the decision of the teenagers to reject, continue experimentation or augment the usage of drugs and other substances (Bauman & Ennett, 1996; Darling & Cumsille, 2003 cited in Hankin and Abela, 2005, p. 366).

As adolescent marks the development shift of young individuals towards the path of maturity, it is within the same period that adolescents tends to increase their involvement with peers and is the beginning of the experimentation stage with drinking and smoking (Flory, Lynam, Milich, Leukfeld & Clayton, 2004; Sutherland & Shepherd, 2001 cited in Hankin and Abela, 2005, p. 366).

As such, this strongly manifest that the involvement of an adolescent with a peer group is a substantial factor that contribute to the initial experimentation of drugs and other substance use. Moreover, various

theories also point out that there is a strong relation with peer influence and initiation and escalation of substance abuse.

Two notable theories are the Peer cluster theory (Oetting & Beauvais, 1998 cited in Hankin and Abela, 2005, p. 366) and the Primary socialization theory (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998 cited in Hankin and Abela, 2005, p. 366) indicates that normative and deviant social behaviors are the results of the interaction of characteristics that are cultural, social and psychological in nature. Thus, behaviors like smoking, drinking and drug usage are learned from the adolescent's interaction with their peers.

Crime activities

As it was said, the formation of peer groups is an important part in the development process of a young adult. Such formation may be viewed as a way of an individual to attach themselves with people whom they think they could share who they really are. One of the peer groups prevalent nowadays are adolescent gangs. Although adolescent gangs are considered as peer groups, it is contemplated as a group comprised of young individuals whose behaviors are perceived negatively by the society.

As such, adolescent members of gangs tend to engage in activities that are violent and anti-social (Geldrauld K. and Geldrauld D., 2004, p. 36). Based from researches, adolescent gangs are accounted for a large number of crimes in the urban setting. Many adolescent tend to engage themselves with this type of peer groups because they believe that this is an avenue for them to be accepted and freely express themselves.

Because of these reasons adolescents see gang membership as an option for them to build their identity in any way possible whether it is wrong or right without thinking of the consequences.

This is when peer pressure could be viewed as extremely powerful because adolescents who are members of gangs are more likely to engage themselves with risk like poor reputation, death, delinquency, substance abuse, infliction of transmitted diseases and early parenthood (Snyder, 2001).

According to researches the very reason why many adolescents are vulnerable from the negative influences from their peers is because of the feeling of the need to belong in a particular group. Such needs lead many adolescents to take part in activities that could put them at risk. For majority of adolescents the need to belong to a particular peer group is an achievement of self-actualization and an attainment of the so called “maturity” and establishment of identity (Benthin, Slovic & Severson, 1993 cited in Smith, 2001).

Conclusion

Based from the facts that were presented in the study, it is apparent that peers play a significant role in the lives of adolescents. Peer groups provide teenagers the feeling of belongingness and security. The influences of peers among adolescent could bring about positive end results which are actually important for the development of young individuals. Such positive influences from peers create a ground for adolescents to become well rounded people.

Nonetheless, peer could also encourage negative influences among adolescents. The negative influences of peers may take the form of risky behaviors such as engagement in sexual activities, substance abuse and crime activities. It is also important to note that adolescents who are vulnerable to the negative influences of peer groups are those individuals that are not able to form connection with positive peer groups.

Therefore, it is suggested that young individuals who encounter failures with forming bonds with peer groups should be taken into consideration in order to know the factors that affect their social involvement with other individuals. Moreover, it is also suggested that further analysis regarding the impact of peer influences should be investigated in order to further understand some of the points that were not presented in the study.