

Peer influence on risk taking, risk preference, and risky decision making



Peer Influence on Risk Taking, Risk Preference, and Risky Decision Making in Adolescence and Adulthood: An Experimental Study

Summary:

Gardner and Steinberg (2005) designed a study to measure risk preference, risk taking and risky decision-making behaviors among 306 individuals divided into three age groups; adolescents (13-16), youths (18-22) and adults (24 and older). This was measured by having the participants complete two different types of questionnaires. Participants in each age group were randomly assigned to complete these measures either alone or with two same aged peers.

An experimental research method was used in this study because it involves the random assignment of group condition and manipulated the independent variable. In this study, there are two independent variables which are elements in the study that the experimenter controls. The first independent variable is when the participants are divided into three different age groups; adolescents (13-16), youths (18-22) and adults (24 and older). The second independent variable was whether the participants in each age group were randomly assigned to complete the tasks either alone or with two peers of the same age. These independent variables were used to determine how the dependent variable would be affected, which is what the experimenters are trying to measure. In this study, the dependent variable is measuring risk-taking behavior among adolescents, youths and adults; this was measured in two ways, by having the participants play game and complete two questionnaires.

The experimenters proposed three different hypotheses in relation to this study; the first hypothesis proposed that risk taking, risk preference and risky decision making will decrease with age, the second hypothesis proposed that individuals will demonstrate more risk taking, greater risk preference, and more risky decision making when in the company of their peers than when alone and the third hypothesis proposed that the difference between the levels of risk taking, risk preference, and risky decision making with and without the presence of peers will decrease with age; group effects on risk orientation will be greater among adolescents than among youths etc. Each hypothesis was measured differently and required the participants to be randomly assigned to either a solo or group condition to perform the different measures. For the first hypothesis, the participants were assessed by playing a video game called “ Chicken”, this game is played on a computer and required the participants to make decisions whether to stop a moving vehicle once the light turned from green to yellow. The game is played from a third person point of view and consists of fifteen trials. The participants in the group condition took turns playing the game while the participants in the solo participant condition performed the measure alone. For the second hypothesis, the participants were given five hypothetical scenarios involving risky behavior. After reviewing them, the participants were asked to rate the scenarios on a 4-point scale starting at 1 (more cons than pros) to 4 (more pros than cons). The instructions for the solo and group condition were the same except the group condition were allowed to discuss their thoughts from each question with each other. For the third and final hypothesis, the participants were given five hypothetical problems involving making a risky decision. Each decision made by the participants were made <https://assignbuster.com/peer-influence-on-risk-taking-risk-preference-and-risky-decision-making/>

with the knowledge that there's three different outcomes for each scenario; the first stated that there's no consequences, the second stated that if the risky choice was chosen, a negative outcome might happen, and the last and final scenario stated that if the risky choice was chosen, the negative outcome will definitely happen. The participants were asked to rate each problem on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being they would choose the risky behavior and 4 being not choosing the risky behavior. Participants in both solo and group conditions were given the same instructions except the group condition was allowed to discuss each problem with their peers and given the choice not to respond immediately. The experimenters recorded all the responses of the participants in this study.

The three hypotheses proposed by the experimenters were confirmed by the results of this study. According to the results, the experimenters found that during the measures that younger participants would more often choose the riskier choice on the risky decision-making questionnaire compared to the older participants, participants that performed the measures in the group condition took more risks during the risk taking game compared to the participants in the solo condition and the effect of performing the measures in a group were significantly higher among the younger participants than the older ones.

Critique:

In this study, different age groups were tested to measure their risk-taking preference and risky decision-making skills. In my opinion, the method used by the experimenters was well designed in order to test the hypotheses. The

experimenters used a video game and two questionnaires involving multiple scenarios where the participants would have to logically think about their response and weigh their options to make the best choice. I think this method was the best choice for this study because by providing the participants scenarios where they would have to choose between the safe or risky option, it allowed the participants to think about how they would react in those situations and pressured them into making logical choices plus the experimenters were able to test their hypotheses based on their choices and reactions. Other methods may have not provided the same results.

These methods not only helped the experimenters with their results, it also provided validity towards this study meaning that the study measured what it was supposed to. The methods the experimenter used such as the game and questionnaires helped measure the variables the experimenters were testing and assisted to confirm their hypotheses. Even though I agree that the study is valid, I don't agree that it's reliable meaning it can be replicated. The experimenters were able to collect data and confirm their hypotheses, but I don't agree that any other experimenter could replicate this study and get the same exact results. Mainly because they might not be able to collect data from the same sample, they would have to find a new sample of participants and their mentalities and risk decision making wouldn't be the same. The mentalities and the upbringing of the new participants could affect the way they respond to certain situations and could alter the results of this study.

In this study, the experimenters were able to establish appropriate ethical safeguards when it came to recruiting their participants in the adolescent
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control group. The experimenters required parental consent for the participants but found it difficult to get the predetermined groups of 3 to appear for their scheduled appointments and for all participants to provide the consent form. Because of this, the experimenters adjusted their study to make sure they were able to obtain all the consent forms all at once. The experimenters set up recruitment sites at local schools, camps and after school programs to be able to recruit large numbers of participants and this made it easier to obtain a signed parental consent forms.

Based on the findings of this experiment, I would design a follow up study that closely replicates and builds on the findings of the original experiment except I would implement a series of changes that I believe would lead to more accurate results. In the original experiment, the groups of participants were composed of different ethnicities but of the same gender. In my follow up study, I would add more gender diversity in the participant groups. I believe that once these changes are implemented, the results would more accurate in representing both the mentalities and decision making of both genders.

Brief Summary:

Gardener and Steinberg (2005) conducted a study in which they hypothesized that risk taking, risk preference and risky decision making would decrease with age and be greater in the company of peers rather than alone and the levels of risk taking in-between adolescents, youths and adults will decrease with age. In order to test their hypotheses, they selected three age groups that consisted of adolescents, youth and adult participants and

had them complete a game to assess risk taking and two questionnaires to assess risk preference and risky decision making either alone or with two same aged peers. The results concluded that younger participants would more often choose the riskier choice on the risky decision-making questionnaire compared to the older participants, participants that performed the measures in the group condition took more risks during the risk taking game compared to the participants in the solo condition and the effect of performing the measures in a group were significantly higher among the younger participants than the older ones.

References

- Gardner, M., & Steinberg, L. (2005). Peer influence on risk taking, risk preference, and risky decision making in adolescence and adulthood: An Experimental Study. *Developmental Psychology, 41*, 625-635. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.41.4.625