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Psychosocial effects of peer influence among adolescent girls in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala

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Abstract

Adolescence is a stage marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes, where peers strongly influence behaviour and psychosocial well-being. This study assessed the psychosocial impact of peer influence among adolescent girls in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. A descriptive design was adopted among fifty girls aged 13-19 years using a structured questionnaire containing 51 closed-ended questions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Chi-square test. The findings revealed that most respondents maintained healthy friendships, experienced positive peer encouragement, and showed improved confidence, emotional balance, and social participation. Peer networks promoted motivation to volunteer, overcome fears, and engage in supportive group activities. A few participants reported minor issues such as procrastination and emotional dependence. Chi-square analysis showed a significant association between peer encouragement and emotional well-being ($\chi^2 = 6.84, p < 0.05$). The study highlights the need for parental support and school-based guidance to help adolescents manage peer influence constructively.

Keywords: Adolescents, peer influence, psychosocial well-being, emotional development, peer relationships

Introductions

Adolescence represents one of the most dynamic periods of human development, where individuals strive for independence, self-identity, and social belonging. Peers form an essential part of this journey, providing companionship, emotional support, and opportunities for shared experiences. Peer influence, though often viewed negatively, can exert both positive and negative effects on adolescents' psychosocial well-being. Healthy peer relationships foster cooperation, empathy, communication skills, and confidence, whereas negative influences may lead to emotional stress, low self-esteem, or risk-taking behaviours. In the context of Kerala's education system, where academic competition and social interactions are intense, understanding peer influence among adolescent girls becomes crucial. Female adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer conformity due to their strong need for acceptance and belonging. Studies have indicated that peer groups can influence not only lifestyle and personality but also stress management and self-concept (Thomas & Joseph, 2022) [5].

The present study explores the psychosocial dimensions of peer influence among adolescent girls, with a focus on their social relationships, emotional adjustments, and behavioural outcomes. By identifying both positive and negative aspects of peer dynamics, the research aims to contribute evidence that will help educators and parents provide appropriate guidance to teenagers during this formative stage.

Objectives

1. To study the psychosocial impact of peer influence among adolescent girls.
2. To identify positive and negative behavioural changes related to peer interactions.
3. To examine the relationship between peer influence and emotional well-being.

Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The investigation was conducted among 50 adolescent girls aged 13 to 19 years, residing in rural, semi-urban, and urban areas

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of Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. Participants were selected through simple random sampling from schools and colleges that had adolescent programmes.

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising 51 close-ended questions, developed using Google Forms. The tool captured demographic details, friendship characteristics, parental insights, peer influence patterns, and emotional experiences. The questionnaire was pre-tested for clarity and consistency.

Data collection was conducted online to ensure convenience and reach. The collected data were classified and analysed using descriptive statistics-frequencies and percentages-to describe trends. A Chi-square test was used to determine the association between peer encouragement and positive psychosocial outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic profile of respondents

To understand the background characteristics of the participants, their age and family type were analysed.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	13-14	17	34
	15-17	31	62
	18-19	2	4
Family type	Nuclear	38	76
	Joint	10	20
	Extended	2	4

A majority (62 percent) of the respondents were aged between 15 and 17 years, representing the middle phase of adolescence. Most (76 percent) lived in nuclear families, suggesting that family size and interaction patterns may influence socialisation opportunities. This background is relevant to peer dynamics, as girls from smaller families tend to rely more on friends for emotional support.

Friendship patterns and parental perception

Social connectedness was assessed by analysing the respondents' friendship patterns and their parents' perceptions about those friendships.

Table 2: Friendship patterns and parental perception

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Number of friends	1-5	21	42
	5-10	5	10
	10-15	6	12
	More than 15	16	32
	None	2	4
Parental perception	Very positive	20	40
	Somewhat positive	12	24
	Neutral	14	28
	Somewhat negative	2	4
	Very negative	2	4

Nearly half (42 percent) of the girls reported having one to five close friends, while about one-third (32 percent) maintained larger friendship groups. This reflects the significance of peer companionship in adolescence. Most parents (64 percent) viewed their daughters' friendships positively, which indicates that parents acknowledge the role of healthy peer connections in emotional development. Only eight percent expressed concern, possibly due to the fear of negative social influence. These findings align with Joseph and Rajan (2021) [2], who observed that parental approval enhances adolescents' social confidence.

Positive psychosocial outcomes influenced by peers

Peers play a major role in emotional stability, coping behaviour, and participation in social activities. Table 3 summarises the respondents' experiences of positive behavioural and emotional outcomes due to peer interaction.

Table 3: Positive psychosocial outcomes influenced by peers

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Encouraged by peers to overcome fears	Always	7	14
	Often	7	14
	Sometimes	12	24
	Rarely	9	18
	Never	15	30
Learnt new information from peers	Always	14	28
	Often	12	24
	Sometimes	15	30
	Rarely	6	12
	Never	3	6
Volunteered with peers to help others	Always	7	14
	Often	16	32
	Sometimes	15	30
	Rarely	8	16
	Never	4	8

Over half of the respondents (52 percent) indicated that they had "always" or "often" learnt new information from peers, demonstrating a healthy exchange of knowledge within friend groups. Similarly, 46 percent actively participated in volunteering with peers, showing that group-based motivation fosters empathy and community spirit.

The responses regarding peer encouragement to overcome fears revealed that 28 percent experienced frequent support, while 30 percent did not. Using Chi-square analysis, a significant association ($\chi^2 = 6.84$) was found between peer encouragement and positive emotional well-being. This confirms that girls who received consistent peer support exhibited higher confidence and self-assurance.

Peer encouragement to overcome fear

The data in Figure 1 illustrate the variation in peer motivation across respondents.

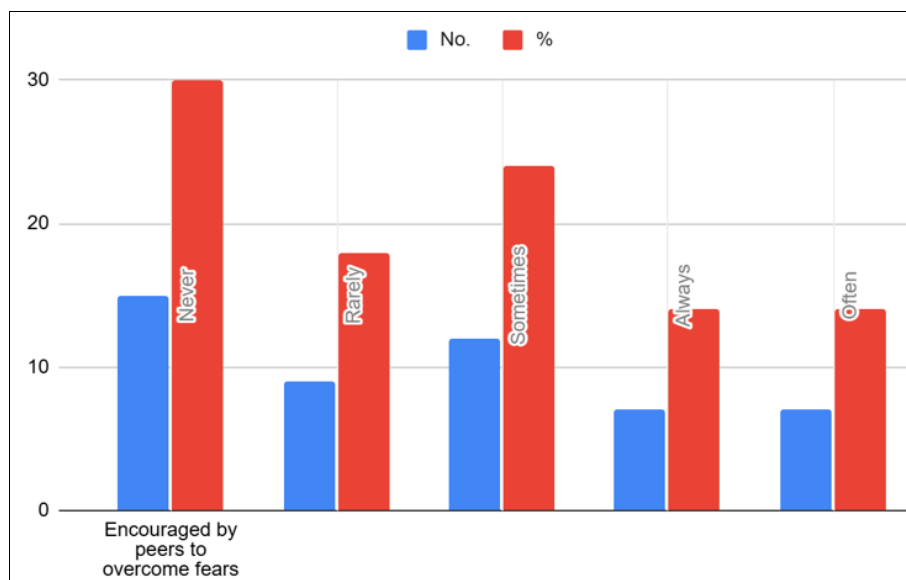


Fig 1: Peer encouragement to overcome fear among respondents

While nearly one-third of girls reported limited encouragement, a substantial proportion acknowledged strong moral support from friends. This pattern highlights the dual nature of peer impact - some adolescents benefit from consistent emotional reinforcement, while others lack positive peer environments.

Behavioural tendencies related to peer influence

Peer interactions also shaped general behavioural tendencies, such as opinion-seeking and risk-taking. 44 percent of respondents reported that they “always” or “often” sought opinions from peers before making decisions, indicating dependence on social validation. In contrast, 64 percent avoided risk-taking behaviour, showing cautious decision-making. Only ten percent reported frequent risk-taking. These results underline that while peer groups influence social learning, most adolescents maintain balanced judgement and emotional restraint.

Conclusion

The study concludes that peer influence plays a pivotal role in shaping the psychosocial development of adolescent girls. Most respondents experienced positive outcomes such as increased confidence, emotional support, and participation in social or altruistic activities. A few reported mild dependency and emotional vulnerability, indicating the need for structured guidance. The significant link between peer encouragement and emotional well-being highlights the importance of fostering cooperative, empathetic peer environments in schools. Strengthening life-skill education and parental communication can further help adolescents derive maximum psychosocial benefit from their peer relationships.

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