



Analysis of Peer Influence on Adolescents and Adults

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Introduction

Peer influence can affect one's behavior. Whether it be positive or negative and whether it's based on social norms or gaining rewards. This study explored the findings of previous research that peer influence affects others differently by age and gender. In addition, this study explored the effects that negative or positive peer influence has on mental health.

Previous research found that males were more likely to do drugs, tobacco, and use marijuana. Researchers hypothesized that gender would play a role within depression or mental health (Conway et al., 2011).

Adolescents are being influenced by their peers through lifestyle choices, verbal messages, and drug usage, etc. A study conducted in 2007 discussed how adolescents change their behavior and actions to avoid rejection and receive approval from their peers (Steinberg, 2007). Researchers surveyed the participants and split them into three age groups to determine how positive and negative acts contribute to their mental health.

According to Dustin Albert and other researchers' study, they found adolescents are more prone to giving in whereas, older people have a tendency to have more resistance (Albert et al., 2013). There is a big difference in how age groups may respond to peer influence which is what this study hoped to determine.

Research Method

Researchers used online survey software called Survey Monkey to disseminate the survey.

Participants chosen for the survey were selected via snowball sampling. This study had a sample size of 39. It was conducted amongst three different age groups: 15-19 year olds (n=11), 25-29 year olds (n=18) and 35-39 year olds (n=10). 23 participants identified as female and 16 identified as males.

The survey consisted of 25 questions which consisted of both closed ended questions and the Likert scale. The questions focused on the participant's demographics, decision making, mental health, alcohol/drug use, behaviors, and activities they have participated in with their peers. The results from these questions were cross-tabulated for chi-square analysis and interpretative analysis.

Further Research

- Expand on different mediums and how often communication is with peers such as phone call, text, or face to face, etc.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does peer influence impact an adolescent's mental health based on their gender?

H1: Peer influence will have a significant impact on mental health based on gender. Males and females will have different impacts from peer influences.

RQ2: How do positive and negative verbal messages and activities affect lifestyle choices, mental health, drug usage and work/school performance?

H2: Peer influence in the form of positive verbal messages and activities will positively impact mental health, drug usage, and work/school performance. As well as negative verbal messages and activities will negatively impact mental health, drug usage, and work performance.

RQ3: How does peer influence differentiate between age groups?

H3: There is a significant difference within the relationship of three age groups (15-19, 25-29, & 35-39 years old) when comparing the effects and causes to participating in peer influence.

Results

Gender and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The chi-squared test was insignificant (p=0.663) meaning the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis at the 5% level of significance because there was not enough evidence to support the claim that the influence of peers positively increases an adolescent's emotional development.
Gender and alcohol consumption with peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The chi-squared test was insignificant (p=0.881) and so the alternative hypothesis had to be rejected. There was no evidence to support the claim that there's a relationship within gender and alcohol consumption with peers.
Gender and behavior/activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This chi-squared test was insignificant (p=0.211), in which the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis. There is not enough evidence to support the claim that there is a difference between gender and amount of positive/negative behaviors and activities.
Positive communication and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who experienced no symptoms of depression or hopelessness in the last two weeks, 93.33% of participants received moderate to great amounts of positive comments from their peers.
Negative communication and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who did not experience any symptoms of depression, little interest in doing things, and negative feelings about themselves in the last two weeks, 100% of those participants received little to no negative talk from peers.
Positive activities and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 86.86% of those who did not experience feelings of depression and hopelessness in the last two weeks participated in positive activities to a moderate and great extent.
Negative activities and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants who did not experience feelings of depression in the last two weeks, 73.34% of participants indulged in risky activities from a little amount to no amount.
Academic standing/good work performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 62% of participants strongly agreed that they and their peers have good academic standing/good work performance.
Alcohol consumption and risky behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 83.33% of participants who selected that they consume alcohol weekly agree that they are more likely to take risks with peers
	Age
Risky Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 63% of 15-19 year olds, 61% of 25-29 and 30% 35-39 year olds within this study agree that they are more susceptible to taking risks when they are with peers
Keeping up with trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45% of the 15-19 year olds, 22% of the 25-29, and 0% of 35-39 year olds agree that they try to keep up with the trends and activities that their peers are doing
Making decisions without peer influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 72% of 15-19 year olds, 89% of 25-29 year olds, and 90% of 35-39 year olds agree with the statement that their decision making is not influenced by their peers

Discussion

The following theories help to explain data regarding susceptibility among age groups.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model:

The peripheral route is the cognitive shortcut of paying attention to peripheral cues and decision rules which may shape a person's attitude (McNeill & Stoltenberg, 1989).

- Young people, depending on the peripheral cue of expertise/source credibility, attractiveness, or number of arguments, may have a weak positive or negative attitude change or ambivalence.

The central route is composed of critically thinking about information, resulting in a possible attitude change (McNeill & Stoltenberg, 1989)

- Older people may have stronger convictions of what they believe in and further persuasive communication may have a boomerang effect

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory:

- Due to the lack of similarity with others, peer influence can affect a person into feeling distressed and contradict their beliefs or behaviors
- This relates to how adolescents can do something they know that can affect their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors such as alcohol consumption or lifestyle choices.

Hypothesis:

Since cross-tabulations were utilized for many of the results, researchers were unable to reject the null hypothesis. However, the data suggests that:

- H2: Positive communication and activities decrease the symptoms of depression.
- H2: Good work/academic performance of peers slightly but positively has an effect
- H2: Those who consume alcohol with peers are more likely to indulge in risky behavior
- H3: Young people are more likely to be susceptible to peer influence and older people are more likely to be resistant.

References

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