

Exploring the impact of Peer Pressure, Emotion Regulation, Academic Stress, Internet Addiction and Substance Abuse among Adolescents of Raebareli District

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical period of life in which rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes occur. The present study attempts to examine the complex interactions among these variables, such as peer pressure, emotional regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse. For this study, 24 adolescents were selected by using the convenience sampling method. Present research was conducted by using a qualitative research design with a semi-structured interview method. Gathered data was analysed by thematic analysis; after critical evaluation, five potential themes were identified, i.e., peer pressure, emotional regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse. Final results demonstrate that all participants experienced complex challenges during this age. The influence of peer pressure, emotional regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse had a clear impact on their behaviour and coping methods. At this adolescent stage, they learn bad actions and behaviors like teasing girls, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, digital dependency, breaking rules, verbal aggression, risky behaviors, etc. These learned behaviors impact their psychosocial life. These behaviours led to stressful intrapersonal relationships, loneliness, depressive symptoms, an inability to manage time, physical and psychological issues, etc. The present study highlights the need for integrated, comprehensive strategies accompanied by active parental and teacher involvement, seminars and workshops related to these issues, practicing yoga, relaxation techniques, mindfulness practices, and how to be positive and assertive in life, etc., which will be helpful to promote adolescent mental health and resilience.

Keywords: Peer pressure, Emotion regulation, Academic stress, Internet addiction, Substance abuse and Adolescents

According to (WHO, 2007), “Adolescence is defined as the second decade of life (10–19 years of age).” This is a formative phase in a person’s life, during which many rapid dynamic transformations take place that shape the individual’s overall behavior. During this period, adolescents are often more susceptible to a spectrum of influences, incorporating peer pressure, academic stress, emotion regulation difficulties, Internet addiction, and substance abuse. All this defiance can profoundly debilitate adolescents’ psychological well-being. Young people are more influenced by their friends because they spend more time with peers. At this stage it’s very easy for them to learn bad habits and actions

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with their peers. (Singh & Chandel, 2022) state that adolescents often engage in bad behaviors such as viewing pornography and sexual content on mobile devices, showing defiance towards authority figures such as teachers and parents, bullying peers, teasing, stealing, cheating, destroying property, displaying invasive behaviour, involving themselves in risky activities or breaking moral rules, making unpleasant comments, and making fun of others. All of these negative behaviours and actions have been further reinforced by the rise of digital technology. Since 1983, the number of users using this device has grown exponentially and reached the latest figure recorded at the end of 2023, which is 5.4 billion users worldwide (approximately 67.4% of the total population) (Statista, 2024). Few studies have found a potent association between digital dependency and negative behaviors such as aggression, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Obeid et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2022; Soriano-Molina et al., 2025). In addition, Kormas et al., (2011) reported poor self-esteem and social maladjustment to be associated with Internet dependency. Zhang et al., (2021) concluded that psychological problems such as depressive symptoms have also been linked to increased screen time. In parallel, a pervasive factor that profoundly negatively impacts adolescent mental health is academic stress, which often leads to irregular sleep, decreased physical activity, and increased depressive symptoms (Wang et al., 2025). What further complicates these issues during adolescence is the onset of substance abuse, which is associated with academic decline, financial difficulty, mental health disorders, and criminal behavior (Chakravarti et al., 2013; Dhawan et al., 2017; Ambekar et al., 2024). Teenagers who take drugs face problems at the socio-cultural and psychological levels, and these effects manifest physically (Anyanwu et al., 2016). Some previous studies suggest that 13% of drug users in India are under the age of 20 (Jiloha, 2017). In today's modern era, alcohol consumption has become a common thing in all classes. Apart from reducing their stress, the general public consumes intoxicants to make themselves look more modern. They are more interested in adopting Western culture. Further, emotion regulation is an ability to effectively manage and express emotions. It helps in reducing these risk behaviours (Gross, 1998). (Gupta & Gehlawat, 2020) In their studies, adolescents face a number of psychological challenges due to a lack of emotional exchange. During adolescence, emotional regulation can effectively manage and regulate intense emotions like anger and anxiety, which can lead to depression or additional stress. These themes were identified, which were intensive in nature, and they are common in each and every student who belongs to this age group. The present study attempts to examine the complex interactions among these variables, such as peer pressure, emotional regulation, academic stress, Internet addiction, and substance abuse, to gain a comprehensive understanding of their collective and individual effects on adolescents. By examining these dimensions through a comprehensive approach, the presented research aims to provide valuable insights for educators, parents, and mental health professionals working towards promoting healthy developmental trajectories for adolescents.

METHOD

Research Question:

- Do Indian adolescents struggle with peer pressure, emotion regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse?

Research Design:

- Qualitative research with semi-structured interview method.

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Objectives:

- To understand whether Indian adolescents acknowledge peer pressure, emotion regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse.
- To evaluate the causes of peer pressure, emotion regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse in adolescents.
- To assess if their experience of peer pressure, emotion regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, and substance abuse is legitimized.

Sample

The final sample consists of 24 adolescents; they are students of government schools of Raebareli aged below 18 years.

Instruments

With the help of semi-structured interview method, data was gathered from the participants. The data was analysed by using the thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 77–101).

Procedure

The participants were selected using the convenience sampling method to identify the research participants. Subsequently, socio-demographic data and consent to participate in the research were collected through Google Forms. Responses were obtained using individual semi-structured interviews. These consisted of 25 questions related to the purpose of the interview, which participants were required to answer. With the consent of the participants, the interview responses were recorded. The obtained material was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101), which resulted in the identification of five unique themes. Informed consent was obtained from the participants as well as from their parents before data collection, and the participants were briefed on the topics and questions in advance and were assured that confidentiality of their answers would be maintained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Table presents the codes and themes extracted from the gathered data.

Codes	Themes
Peer validation Fear of rejection Group norms Self doubt group conformity Risky behavior	Peer Influence or Peer Pressure and causes
Career choices, academic pressure Excessive assignments Fear of failure Family expectations Peer competition Loneliness Conflict with personal goals	Academic and career stress and causes
Emotional overload Verbal aggression	Emotion regulation and causes

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Codes	Themes
low self-esteem Feel Inferiority Hormonal changes	
Excessive internet use sleep disruption social isolation Increase screen time Online shopping Online friendship Availability of Online Content Instant gratification	Internet Addiction or Digital Dependency and causes
Use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol Reduced quality of life Negative impact on academics and health Poor self image	Substance Abuse and causes

After analysing the gathered data, the five multifaceted challenges faced by adolescents are identified by from the qualitative codes i.e. peer influence or peer pressure, academic and career stress, emotion regulation, Internet addiction or digital dependency, and substance abuse. These themes are related to the behavioral and psychological patterns that emerge during adolescence.

Peer Influence or Peer Pressure

The codes peer validation, fear of rejection, group norms, self doubt, group conformity, risky behaviur converge under the theme of Peer Influence or peer pressure. All these emotional burdens are felt by adolescents due to the influence of peers. Being part of a group, students desire the respect and acceptance of their peers, for which they even start to behave immorally. One participant said, "My friend asked me to tease a girl to test my bravery; I had to do this to remain a member of the group." Such behavior has a negative impact on the psychological well-being of students. Because in such a situation, the teenager has to compromise his personal values. Which creates mental stress in them. In this developmental stage of life, teenagers want immediate gratification. Due to which appreciation by peers activates the brains of teenagers. But its results are not in the interest of the students. Some participants said that every society has some standards that everyone has to follow. If these standards are not followed, the teenagers are expelled from the group. A student said, "When I asked my friends to go to a night party every Saturday, they expelled me from the group." Due to not following such standards, teenagers have to face exclusion. Due to which they get deeply hurt, and their self-esteem also decreases. They start feeling guilty about themselves. Such responses were shared by all participants. Many participants admitted the puissant influence of unwritten group rules. Comments such as "If you are in our group, you have to drink; it is our group rule" demonstrate how normative behaviors are internalized, leading individuals to act in ways that align with the collective ethos regardless of personal comfort. Self-perception was deeply connected to group interactions. In the absence of group support, respondents often doubt their decisions. One participant stated, "Unless someone else agrees with my actions or answers, I am in doubt." Another stated, "I am in doubt about my career-related issues and whether what I am doing is right." This indicates that the presence of peers also plays a significant role in influencing self-confidence and autonomy.

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It was revealed that adolescents are forced to follow group pressure while ignoring personal values. It emerged as a recursive theme. As one participant admitted, "I was not in agreement with such antisocial actions, but everybody was doing it, so I did it too." One participant said, "My friend took science group, but I wanted to take arts, but I took science stream." This shows that group conformity deeply influences even important individual decisions.

The answers given by the participants also revealed that they were involved in risky actions and behaviors that were in line with the group dynamics. Examples included teasing girls in school, skipping classes, making risky bets, and consuming drugs. An important comment was, "I did not want to do such things, but I had to do them under pressure." Such actions were mentioned by many students as a way to back out but could not do so. A closer look at these statements shows how peer influence forces one to make compromised decisions.

Academic and Career Stress

The codes career choices, academic pressure, excessive assignments, fear of failure, peer competition, and conflict with personal goals are covered under the theme of academic and career - related stress. The theme of academic and career stress arises from conflicts with career choices, academic pressure, and personal goals. The tension between external expectations (from family, teachers, and society) and the individual's internal aspirations leads to academic stress. It can cause cognitive and emotional stress. Stress leads to a variety of psychological and physical problems, which can cause problems in the daily life of the individual. Participants reported that family and social expectations often increase career and academic stress. One participant said, "I am interested in sports, but my parents want me to become a doctor. I feel very suffocated." Such conflicts create confusion, dissatisfaction, and stress in adolescents that hinder them in their career path. A very common theme was excessive academic burden, which was common among all the participants. Many participants reported that "every day there is some project, assignment, or exam." Such pressure is psychologically exhausting. Many participants described intense workload and unrealistic academic expectations. Students said that even after submitting the assignment, there is pressure to do more homework and projects, which makes them mentally tired. Not being able to manage time was also reported to be a common problem. Fear of academic failure was the most important factor reported by all students. There is a fear of not reaching a standard score from family and society. Participants expressed constant worry about this problem. One student said that the fear of not getting good marks and the fear of disappointing his parents do not let him sleep at night. This kind of stress leads to a lack of confidence in students. Comparison with other students emerges as another type of stress. One student said that "No matter how well I do, it is less in comparison to others." Among all these students, some students also told about the right time management strategy, yoga, and ways to reduce their stress, like doing the most important work first.

Emotion Regulation

Under the theme of emotion regulation the codes emotional overload, verbal aggression, and low self-esteem indicate difficulties in managing emotional experiences effectively. Inability to display emotions appropriate to the situation is a common problem. During adolescence, students experience emotional turmoil caused by hormones. One variable said that "sometimes it happens that one gets angry very quickly over something and uses harsh language." Such emotional overload often results in stress in daily life. Adolescence is a stage where entities develop and refine their ability to manage emotions, but adversities in this aspect can be a significant concern, potentially leading to cognitive impairments like anxiety,

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depression, and lower self-esteem. These adversities can manifest in various ways, including challenges in perceiving and interpreting emotions, complications with emotional expression, and struggles with regulating intense or distressing emotions. One participant stated, I am unable to control my emotions when making critical or sensitive decisions, and I tend to exhibit undesirable behavior, which causes my self-esteem to decline and makes me feel subpar. Many students described feeling “always mentally exhausted” and “unable to cope with constant emotional imbalances.” Many students described feeling “always mentally overwhelmed” and “struggling to cope with frequent emotional imbalances.” This indicates that emotional regulation was becoming increasingly difficult in today’s times. Some participants emphasized how these emotional surges make it difficult to make rational decisions and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. The use of harsh language was common among interview participants as a means of venting their pent-up frustration. While other respondents said that such aggression led to a decrease in the quality of relationships in their lives. This increases psychological distress. This is seen as a cycle where emotional overload triggers verbal outbursts. One student said, “I lose emotional balance without even wanting to; I have a verbal outburst.” Some participants also pointed to a feeling of low self-esteem. Comparison with others is a normal human tendency that everyone does. But this comparative behavior has a deep emotional impact on the individual of any age group. One of the participants said, “I always feel inferior to others because my parents always compare me with my friends who are good in studies.” On hearing such critical and destructive behavior, students get emotionally devastated and face psychological burdens, which hinder their daily activities. Many participants noted physical changes that affected their emotional and psychological state. These hormonal changes were reported to increase emotional imbalances, which in turn increased their sensitivity to emotional overload and other themes such as verbal aggression.

Internet Addiction or Digital Dependency

The theme of internet addiction or digital dependency is supported by codes such as excessive internet use, sleep disruption, and social isolation. Digital dependency suggests a compulsive engagement, which often has a negative impact on physical health, social relationships, and academic functioning. Digitalization is at its peak due to the rise of modernity. The findings emphasize that digital dependency is becoming a psychological concern among adolescents, contributing to both behavioral and emotional imbalances. Participants often reported significant disturbances in their sleep patterns due to prolonged internet use, especially late-night scrolling for online classes. One participant mentioned, “I often wake up at 2 am watching reels or videos at night, and I don’t even realize it.” Some respondents reported that “screen time increases significantly due to schoolwork and online coaching.” Many participants reported “addiction to social media, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, etc.” Digital dependency has increased due to some participants. Some participants emphasized that “checking social media updates repeatedly even when I don’t want to” is also a common problem. This leads to eye and mental problems. Inability to get proper sleep disrupted the daily lives of the participants. Some expressed an increased dependence on mobile updates before going to bed, which delayed sleep and also affected the quality of psychological well-being. Another recurring theme highlighted was the feeling of social isolation. Many participants reported, as one respondent explained, “Even when I’m in a group or party, my whole attention is on my phone. At that time, I feel like I’m alone.” Participants acknowledged excessive use of online content as a major reason. “Searching for any information and getting instant gratification” also increased digital dependency, said one participant. The need for instant gratification emerged as an important psychological factor. One participant

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commented, “I feel excited when I get likes or comments on my posts on social media sites, and I keep checking my phone frequently.” Digitalization has emerged as a useful technology. But its excessive use creates serious problems for the general public.

Substance Abuse

This thematic report explores the perceptions and lived experiences of tobacco, drug, and alcohol use that students face during adolescence. The theme of substance abuse is supported by the code’s excessive use of alcohol and drugs, reduced quality of life, negative impact on academics and health, and poor self-image. The participants agreed that their quality of life had consistently deteriorated due to substance abuse such as alcohol, tobacco, etc. Many shared their experiences. Some said, “Our seniors consume drugs and force me to drink alcohol too.” Many participants said, “Ever since I have consumed such things, it has had a very negative impact on my body.” Others said, “My academic marks have dropped significantly, due to which my percentages are not good.” Relationships with family members have deteriorated, and daily routines have been disrupted. One student said, “It takes you away from things and people that once made life worthwhile.” “It was also difficult for the student participants to attend classes. Some participants said that they faced serious illnesses like chest pain, stomach pain, kidney infection, liver infection, etc., which also worsened the financial condition of their family. Students also started using drugs to reduce stress due to body image, ragging, etc. Some students were given school punishment for their addiction. One participant shared, “I wanted to quit drugs, but I was not able to.” Another said, “It started with curiosity, but it ended with self-hatred.” Ultimately it can be said that drug abuse leads to physical and psychological problems, spoiled interpersonal relationships, a spoiled social image, and overall destruction of the person.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study calibrates the multifaceted psychosocial defiance faced by adolescents and points out the intricate interplay between the major problems like peer dynamics, academic and career-related stress, emotional dysregulation, digital dependency, and substance abuse. The findings report that adolescents are facing challenges such as peer pressure, academic stress, difficulties in emotion regulation, substance abuse, and digital dependency. It has a substantial impact on their psychological reactions, including behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Peers have a deep influence on the entire personality of adolescents. Under this influence, they compromise their moral values and start doing risky behaviors. Apart from this, adolescents have to face many problems due to stress related to academics and career. Academic stress can have a range of consequences, including poor mental health, anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and reduced scholastic achievements. This stress can also reduce psychological resilience and increase the likelihood of terminating academic enrollment. Due to which students have to face cognitive, social, and physical problems as well, like depression, performance anxiety, perception of being less, emotional dysregulation, poor health, low self-esteem, and verbal aggression. Due to increasing dependence on internet addiction, its psychological effects are seen on adolescents due to lack of sleep, mental problems, and social isolation. Along with this, uninhibited use of drugs has become common among adolescents. Teenagers use drugs to reduce their psychological distress and to be a part of the modern environment, due to which they only get trapped in a cycle of guilt, poor health, and academic decline.

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Implications

These findings carry significant implications for educators, mental health professionals, policymakers, and caregivers. They are-

- **Holistic intervention program:** Emphasis on organizing workshops, seminars related to adolescents in schools. So that they become capable of evaluating and resolving their psychosocial problems themselves.
- **Curriculum integration:** Promote inclusion of emotional literacy, career guidance and psychological counselling in the school curriculum for encouraging self-awareness, right decision-making abilities among students.
- **Accessible mental health services:** Establishing support systems on prevention and early intervention for physical, psychological and social problems related to adolescents, especially targeting emotional regulation, digital dependency and substance use.
- **Community and parent involvement:** There is a need to reshape the parameters of family and society by promoting positive psychological traits such as empathy, compassion and unconditional positive regard.
- **Systemic, multi-level strategy:** A spacious approach must be developed to encourage ten life skills identified by WHO. As well as, promote concepts like patience, resilience, autonomy, empathy, growth mind-set, identity development and overall positive development.

Strengths

The notable aspect of the present study is that the adversities faced during adolescence, such as peer pressure, emotional regulation, academic stress, internet addiction, substance abuse, etc., have been studied in detail and their impact on the emotional well-being of adolescents. The perspectives and insights of the students were captured through semi-structured interviews, which revealed five major themes. The study emphasizes real-world applications, incorporating intervention techniques for school mental health problems that include students, teachers, and parents' well-being for educators, mental health professionals, and legislators, highlighting its advancements in scholarly research and practical solutions for enhancing adolescent well-being.

Limitations

The paper faced certain limitations:

- The sample size is too small(N=25).
- All the key findings are from male students and all are belonged to rural areas in a school setting. Thus, some researchers should try to study students/adolescents beyond school boundaries.
- The sample of the study was limited to one institution.
- The study was not generalized.

Future suggestions

This paper focused on the few adolescents (boys only) challenges like peer influence or peer pressure, academic and career stress, emotion regulation, internet addiction or digital dependency, and substance abuse. Further studies can delve into the other major issues of girls related to this age group. Further, in future studies, potential psychological variables should be found, and correlational studies should be conducted between the studied variables, and mediators or moderators who help reduce the impact of these variables should also be found.

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For Books

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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