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Research Paper

Gender and Peer Influence in Adolescence: A Study of Family, School, and Social Engagement Patterns

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a pivotal stage of development marked by identity formation, emotional growth, and heightened responsiveness to peer influence. Gendered socialization processes shape how males and females respond to peer norms, influencing behaviour in domains such as school, peers, and family. This study investigated gender differences in family involvement, school participation, and peer involvement among 60 adolescents (33 males, 27 females) in Kolkata, West Bengal, using purposive sampling. Data were collected through the Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including the Mann-Whitney test. Findings revealed significant gender differences in peer and school involvement, with males and females engaging differently in these contexts, while no significant difference was observed in family involvement. These results highlight the need for gender-informed approaches in adolescent research and interventions to support healthy social development.

Keywords: *Peer Influence, Peer Group, Family Involvement, Peer Involvement, School Involvement*

Past research suggests; that adolescents' social behaviours, particularly in peer and school contexts, are significantly shaped by gendered responses to social influence. Peer acceptance partially mediates self-perceived gender typicality and self-worth. Sample size 229 adolescents. Identified 4 clusters based on gender typicality, conformity pressure, and peer acceptance. Emphasizes challenges of gender-nonconforming youth (Smith, T. E., et.al., 2006). Resistance to peer influence increases steadily between ages 14–18. No significant change from ages 10–14 to 18–30. Sample size 3,600+. Middle adolescence is a key developmental period (Steinberg, L., et. al., 2007). High peer pressure negatively impacts math performance in 14-year-olds. Sample size 1,700 students from Germany, Canada, and Israel. Girls underperform to avoid exclusion; boys often the perpetrators. Recommends single-gender math classes (Boehnke, K., 2008). Resistance to peer influence increases with age. Sample size 464 adolescents aged 10–18. Girls show greater resistance than boys in mid-adolescence (Sumter, S. R., 2009). Internet addiction positively associated with peer pressure; negatively associated with parental and teacher support. Sample size 558 Turkish high school students. Boys had higher addiction scores; no

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link found with peer support (Esen, B. K., 2010). Identity commitment reduces substance use; identity exploration buffers general deviancy. Sample size 1,070 adolescents (Mage = 15.45). Strong identity moderates peer pressure's effect on risk behaviour (Dumas, T. M., et. al., 2012). Peer pressure in social networks promotes cooperation and regulates behaviour more cost-effectively than subsidies/taxes. Applies to large societies using localized externalities (Mani, A., et. al., 2013). Socio-cultural distance affects peer pressure in group consensus. Data from 15 real-world networks. Academic effort declines due to peer norms. Performance leaderboard led to 24% drop, 40% for top students. Peer pressure influences SAT prep sign-ups based on classroom culture (Bursztyn, L., et. al, 2015). Prosocial peer feedback boosts prosocial behaviour; antisocial feedback increases antisocial behaviour. Sample size 197 adolescents (ages 12–16) in public goods game (Van Hoorn, J., et. al., 2016). Stronger deviant peer influence in 16–18 age group; no gender difference found (Deepika, K., et. al., 2017). Children (ages 7–9) conform to robot peer pressure; adults resist. Study used the Asch paradigm to examine conformity to humanoid robots (Vollmer, A. L., et.al., 2018). Peer pressure linked to binge eating and drinking. Sample size 570 Italian high schoolers. Binge eating mediated by need frustration and coping; drinking linked directly (Inguglia, C., et. al., 2019). Peer influence significantly affects career decision-making. Sample size 1,010 students and 20 teachers in Zimbabwe. Peer education and advice matter, though students deny needing validation (Mtemeri, J., 2020). Peer pressure widespread in college due to competition. Impacts both academics and well-being. Review explores gender, family, and grade-level effects; calls for more diverse studies (Chen, Z., et. al., 2022). Team size does not reduce performance due to peer effects. Peer pressure in large teams enables positive spillovers; small teams with skilled peers may unintentionally lower output (Chadi, A., et. al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis:

This study examines how gender and peer influence jointly shape adolescent behaviour particularly across family, peer, and school involvement. Drawing on Social Learning Theory, Social Identity Theory, Conformity Research, and Developmental Psychology, it highlights key psychosocial mechanisms underlying adolescent behaviour. Social Learning Theory posits that adolescents model peer behaviours reinforced by approval Collectively, these frameworks justify the investigation of gendered differences in adolescent risk involvement. Theories like: ***1. Social Learning Theory:*** Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory emphasizes that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and modelling within social contexts. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to this process, as they often look to peers as behavioural models. Behaviour that is socially rewarded—such as peer approval or inclusion—is more likely to be adopted, while the fear of social punishment (e.g., ridicule or rejection) inhibits deviation from group norms. Reinforcement and perceived self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to replicate a behaviour) further determine whether observed behaviours are internalised. Adolescents tend to model behaviours that are seen as normative within their peer group. Thus, observational learning through peer modelling explains both the reinforcement of maladaptive and adaptive behaviours across academic and social domains. ***2. Social Identity Theory:*** Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), explains that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-worth from their membership in social groups. During adolescence, peer groups become highly influential in shaping self-concept. To maintain a favourable social identity, adolescents align with in-group norms and behaviours, even when these conflict with personal values or institutional expectations. This process is especially pronounced in adolescence, a developmental period marked by identity exploration, peer affiliation, and

increased sensitivity to social comparison. Gendered peer group norms often lead to distinct behavioural patterns between male and female adolescents. Boys may adhere to in-group expectations that de-emphasize academic effort, while girls may conform to appearance-related norms or avoid outperforming peers to preserve social harmony. These findings reflect how adolescents internalize and perform behaviours that align with peer group expectations to maintain social identity and status. *3.* ***Conformity Research****:* Conformity research, most notably advanced by Solomon Asch (1951), demonstrates how individuals often align their perceptions and behaviours with those of a group, even when the group is clearly incorrect. Asch's line judgment experiments revealed that participants conformed to incorrect group responses in order to avoid social rejection or appear aligned with majority views. This foundational work distinguishes two critical drivers of conformity: normative social influence, where individuals conform to be liked or accepted, and informational social influence, where they conform believing the group has superior knowledge. In adolescence, conformity becomes particularly salient due to heightened social sensitivity and identity formation. Young individuals are more likely to align with peer norms and group expectations in academic, social, and risk-taking contexts, often at the expense of personal judgment. Peer rejection or social disapproval acts as a potent deterrent to individual deviation.

METHODOLOGY

Present study aims to find out whether there are significant differences between male and female adolescents in terms of family and school involvement, peer involvement. It investigates gender-based differences across these psychological and behavioural variables.

Objectives:

1. To find out if there is any difference between male and female adolescent in terms of family involvement.
2. To find out if there is any difference between male and female adolescent in terms of peer involvement.
3. To find out if there is any difference between male and female adolescent in terms of School involvement.

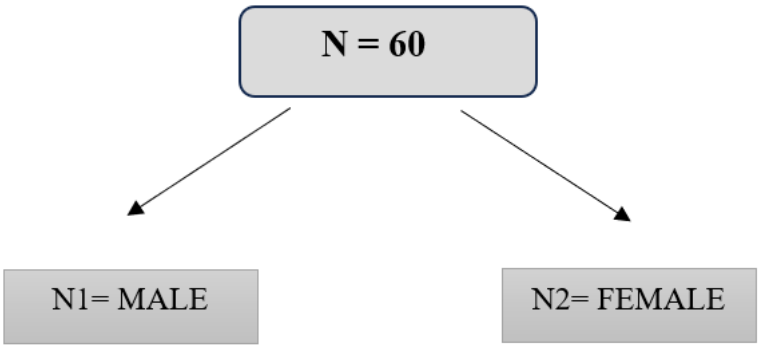
Hypothesis:

- **H1.** There is significant mean difference between male and female adolescent in terms of Family involvement.
- **H2.** There is significant mean difference between male and female adolescent in terms of peer involvement.
- **H3.** There is significant mean difference between male and female adolescent in terms of school involvement.

Methods:

Sample:

The purposive sampling technique was used for the present study. A total no of 70 participants were approached among which 60 participants signed a consent form and filled up the questionnaire booklet. Out of 70 participants, 6 participants did not return the questionnaire and 4 participants submitted the filled-up questionnaire (who belong above 18 years). From this pool of data, 60 usable data were selected for the present study. The total sample was divided based on male and female. All the participants were selected from different school and college freshers.



The participants were selected on the basis of the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- Age range between 12 to 18 years.
- Male female both genders.
- Educational Qualification at least 6th grade
- Family Type: nuclear, joint, single parent
- Socioeconomic Status: low to high
- Peer Group Size: 2 to 8 members
- Time Spent with Peers Per Day: 2-8 hours
- No history or presence of psychological/mental illness

Exclusion criteria:

- Age below 12 or above 18 years.
- Educational qualification below 6th grade
- Family type other than nuclear, joint, or single-parent (e.g., institutional care, foster care)
- Socioeconomic status not falling within low to high range (e.g., extreme poverty with no stable living conditions)
- Peer group size less than 2
- Time spent with peers per day below 2 hours or more than 8 hours (e.g., extreme isolation or excessive socialization)
- History or presence of any psychological/mental illness

Procedure for data collection:

All the participants were contacted personally and rapport were established. Consent forms were signed. They were given a briefing about the aim of present study. Instructions were given according to the used questionnaire. The tool used for this study Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) by Brown, B. B., Clasen, D. R., & Eicher, S. A. (1986). They were assured that their information would be kept confidential and used only for research purpose, so they were requested to be open and honest in their responding, after that scales were administered and data were collected.

Statistical analysis:

For the data analysis purpose of the present study, Jamovi 2.4.66 was used, in which descriptive and inferential analysis were made according to the decision rules for testing the

null hypothesis. In the ***first phase*** Shapiro Wilk W and Shapiro Wilk P were calculated, found that the Shapiro-Wilk p-value is significant at the 0.01 level, and the distribution deviates significantly from normality.

In the ***second phase*** Mean and SD were calculated (Table 1).
In ***third phase***, the data were subjected to Mann-Whitney t test to find out the significant mean difference between male and female adolescent in terms of Peer and School Involvement (Table 2).

RESULTS

Table: 1 Results of Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive	Gender	family involvement	peer involvement	school involvement
N	**F**	27	27	27
	M	33	33	33
Mean	**F**	7.19	7.26	10.3
	M	5.03	12.1	6.12
Median	**F**	10	6	10
	M	4	13	7
Mode	**F**	10.0[a]	8.00	11.0
	M	0.00	3.00	11.0
SD	**F**	9.18	9.89	4.05
	M	6.26	8.13	7.05

Table 1 Represents descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode and SD) of family involvement (F), peer involvement (P), school involvement (S).

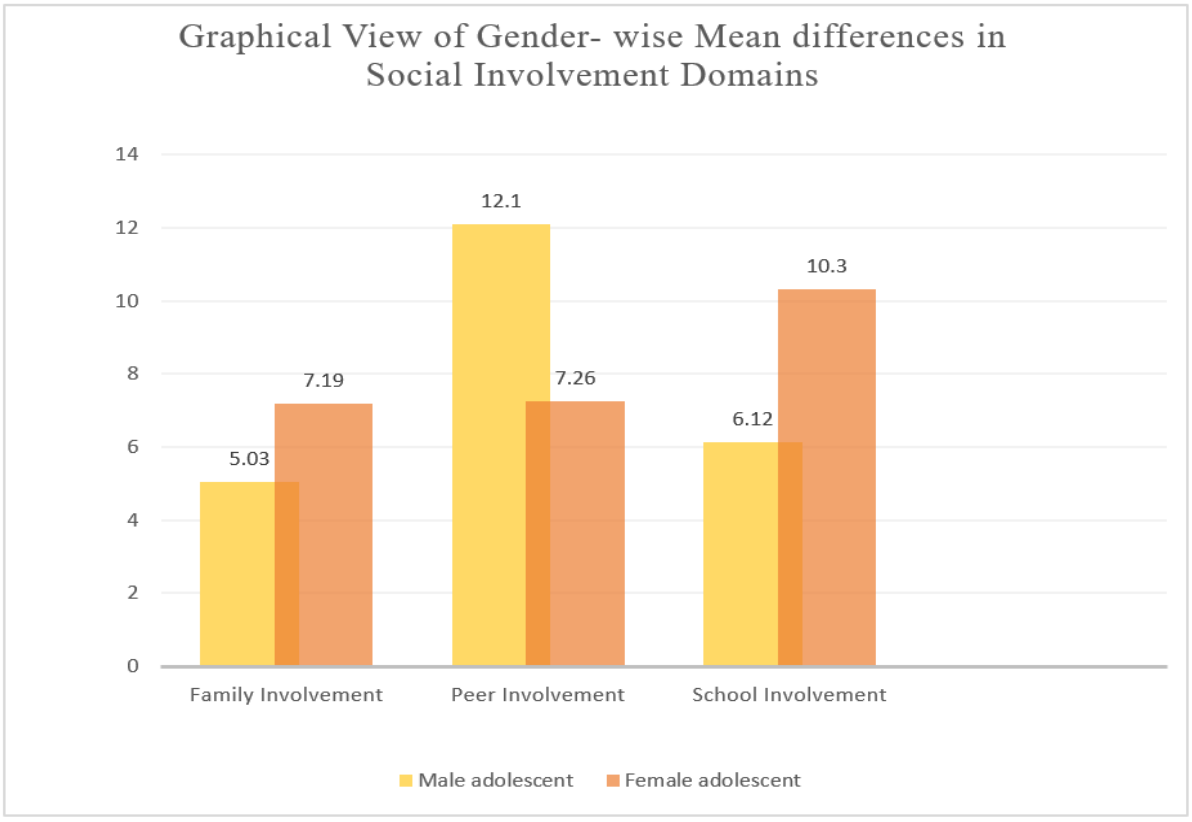


Table:2 Results of Inferential Statistics

VARIABLES		STATISTICS	P-VALUE
FAMILY INVOLVEMENT (F)	Mann-Whitney U	357	0.190
PEER INVOLVEMENT(P)	Mann-Whitney U	314*	0.050
SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT(S)	Mann-Whitney U	306*	0.038

**Significant at 0.05 level*

Table 2 Represents the result of the Mann-Whitney t test. P value is significant at 0.05 level for Peer involvement and School Involvement. Thus, H2 and H3 are accepted at 0.05 level. There is a significant mean difference between male and female adolescent in terms of Peer involvement and School Involvement. This indicates that there is no significant mean difference between male and female adolescent in terms of family involvement, so H1is rejected.

General Discussion and Theoretical Contributions:

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for family involvement, peer involvement, and school involvement among adolescents, disaggregated by gender. Females showed a higher mean in family involvement (M = 7.19) than males (M = 5.03), while males reported higher peer involvement (M = 12.1) and school involvement (M = 6.12) compared to females. The standard deviation was highest in peer involvement for females (SD = 9.89), indicating greater variability. These results suggest gendered patterns of engagement across social domains during adolescence. Theories like, Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977). This theory suggests that individuals, especially adolescents, learn behaviour by observing and imitating others—particularly those they admire or relate to. If a behaviour (such as risk-taking) is seen as rewarded or socially accepted, it is more likely to be adopted. Relation to Peer Influence and Gender: In adolescence, peers become powerful behavioural models. A high mean score of peer influence indicates that adolescents are frequently exposed to peers engaging in risk-taking behaviours. Boys, in particular, may be more likely to imitate these behaviours because they align with traditional masculinity norms that value boldness, defiance, or dominance. These results reflect varying patterns of adolescent engagement across social domains.

Table 2 presents the results of inferential statistical analysis conducted to examine gender-based differences in adolescents' social domains using the Mann-Whitney U test. The analysis focused on three key areas: family involvement, peer involvement, and school involvement. The findings revealed statistically significant gender differences in peer involvement (U = 314, p = 0.050) and school involvement (U = 306, p = 0.038), while no significant difference was observed in family involvement (p = 0.190). These suggests that male and female adolescents engage differently with their peer groups and academic environments, potentially due to differential sensitivity to external social expectations and approval. The findings align with Solomon Asch's (1951, 1955) Conformity Theory, which demonstrates how individuals may conform to group norms under social pressure, and Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that behaviour is acquired through observation and modelling of others, particularly peers.

Practical Implications:

The findings of this research hold important practical implications for educators, school counsellors, policymakers, and NGOs working with adolescents in the Indian context. Given the significant gender differences found in peer and school involvement, targeted

intervention strategies can be developed to address these areas specifically. Male adolescents, who demonstrated lower school involvement and higher risk in domains like health/safety and recreational behaviour, may benefit from programs that promote academic engagement through mentorship, peer-led study groups, and structured extracurricular activities that channel sensation-seeking tendencies into safe, prosocial outlets. NGOs and community-based youth organizations can play a vital role in this process by designing gender-sensitive risk education campaigns and school reinforcement programs. For example, peer-led initiatives that showcase positive male role models actively engaged in academic or leadership roles can challenge prevailing masculine norms that associate academic disinterest or risk-taking with status. Simultaneously, ensuring that female adolescents, who show greater school involvement but are not immune to peer influence, have access to emotional support networks can help mitigate social risk pressures, particularly in relational contexts. The lack of significant gender differences in peer conformity, misconduct, or social and financial risk-taking suggests that general interventions to promote healthy peer relationships and decision-making can be universally applied across genders. Educational institutions may consider integrating life-skills curricula that focus on resisting peer pressure, critical thinking in risk scenarios, and awareness of gender role expectations. Also, adolescent-focused NGOs can partner with families and schools to implement holistic programs grounded in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), recognizing that adolescent behaviour is shaped not only by individual traits but by interlocking systems of influence—peer, family, school, and community. Training school personnel to identify early signs of risky behaviour and implementing peer support frameworks will foster a protective social climate. By incorporating psychological theory into real-world adolescent programming, these findings contribute to building culturally appropriate, sustainable strategies to reduce risky behaviour and improve developmental outcomes.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research:

While the present study offers meaningful contributions to understanding gendered peer influence in adolescent risk-taking, several limitations warrant consideration, and they highlight promising directions for future research. First, the sample size was modest (N = 60), with a slightly imbalanced gender distribution (33 males, 27 females), limiting generalizability and statistical power. The data were collected from a specific urban region in West Bengal, which may not capture the heterogeneity of adolescents across rural and semi-urban India. Future research should aim for larger, demographically diverse samples across multiple states, allowing for comparative analyses across regional, cultural, and linguistic subgroups. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-report data, which may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as misconduct or risk behaviour. To overcome this, future studies should incorporate multi-informant approaches—including teacher, peer, and parental ratings—as well as behavioural tasks (e.g., the Stoplight Game or Balloon Analogue Risk Task), which have demonstrated ecological validity in prior research (Defoe et al., 2020; Lloyd & Döring, 2019). Longitudinal designs would also allow for the investigation of causal pathways between peer influence and behaviour over time. Third, the current study conceptualised gender as binary, thereby excluding adolescents who identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming. With growing awareness of gender diversity, future research should adopt inclusive methodologies and tools to capture the full spectrum of adolescent gender experiences. Doing so would align with global best practices and recommendations by organisations such as Save the Children India (2021), which has called for LGBTQIA+ inclusive education and support systems.

Additionally, future studies can benefit from partnerships with NGOs that already operate in this space. For instance, Breakthrough India (est. 1999) runs the "Taaron ki Toli" program in schools to engage adolescents on gender equality, peer pressure, and violence prevention. Similarly, Child in Need Institute (CINI) has implemented adolescent peer educator models since 2008, particularly in Eastern India, which focus on life skills, reproductive health, and decision-making. Partnering with such organisations can help researchers conduct field trials of peer-led interventions in naturalistic settings, improving both reach and cultural relevance. International NGOs like Plan India and Room to Read have also integrated peer mentorship in their gender and education initiatives, offering platforms for testing gender-responsive frameworks in diverse settings. Methodologically, future research should also explore advanced statistical techniques, such as structural equation modelling or multilevel analysis, to assess the interaction between individual, peer, and contextual variables—especially in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). These models can help unpack how macro-level influences (e.g., school policy, media exposure) interact with peer dynamics and gender to shape adolescent development. In sum, while the present study lays important groundwork, expanding the scope of inquiry through inclusive sampling, mixed-methods, and NGO partnerships will deepen both theoretical understanding and practical application in future adolescent-focused research.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the central role of peer influence in adolescent development, demonstrating that while both male and female adolescents are susceptible to peer influence, the ways in which they engage with peers differ significantly. Notably, gender differences were observed in peer and school involvement, suggesting that social expectations and group dynamics shape adolescent participation in distinct ways. These findings reinforce the importance of addressing peer influence in educational and psychosocial interventions, particularly during adolescence—a developmental stage marked by identity formation and increased reliance on peer relationships. Integrating peer-focused strategies in schools and community programs may enhance social support and promote positive developmental outcomes.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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