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Peer Influence on Lifestyle Behaviors among Undergraduate Students of Professional Colleges

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Abstract

Introduction Adolescence is a stage of companionship during which young people choose to spend time with their peers rather than their families. It is a period of learning new ideas and the development of overall personality. Peer influence affects positively and negatively on everyone's life. The study examines the impact of peers on lifestyle behaviors such as nutrition, physical activity, fashion, and habit among undergraduate students from various professional colleges.

Objectives of the Study To assess the peer influence on lifestyle behaviors among undergraduates and find its association with selected baseline variables.

Materials and Methods The study design was descriptive survey design. The tool consisted of a baseline proforma and a structured rating scale to assess the peer influence on lifestyle behaviors among undergraduates. Using a proportionate stratified simple random sampling technique based on inclusion criteria, 325 undergraduate students were chosen. SPSS version 16 software was used for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

Results Our study revealed that the majority 211 (65.3%) of undergraduates had a moderate influence on peer pressure, 95 (29.4%) had low influence, 16 (5.0%) had a strong influence, and 1 (0.3%) had no influence. The highest mean percentage of peer influence was in personality and communication (79.3%), and the least was in smoking and alcoholism (36.6%). The mean percentage of other areas was of healthy mind (74.8%), exercising (71.1%), food choices (68.2%), buying choices (64.9%), social media, and use of gadgets (45.7%). The mean percentage of the total score was 64.58. However, there was a significant association between the peer influence and baseline variables such as gender and approachable person in need, but no such relationship existed for other variables.

Conclusion The study reveals remarkable evidence of peer influence among undergraduate students. However, the data reflect on positive peer influence rather than negative influence, which shows that the undergraduates rely on each other to improve their overall personality.

Keywords
- habits
- peer behaviors
- peer effect
- peer influence
- peer pressure
- and peer status

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Introduction

Peer influence is a phenomenon where an individual follows his friends. Adolescence tends to follow it blindly than any other age groups. They even share their secrets with their classmates and strive to believe them as role models. *Adolescence* is a delicate stage that must be handled with caution because it is such a pivotal time in everyone's life. During this time, the individual is bursting with energy and passion. It is a period of growth and development in all streams of life. It is a period where one can transform into a better self by molding their character and personality that influences a person's destiny. At the same time, it is a time when people are more likely to engage in nefarious behaviors such as drug misuse and other habits. Teachers in schools and colleges could play an essential role in detecting role shifts in their pupils and guiding them in the proper route[1].

The study focuses on how undergraduates' attitudes and behaviors develop over time. Youth can have a beneficial or harmful impact on their peers. The study focuses on the extent of peer influence on undergraduate's lifestyle behaviors. As a result, the study may raise awareness among youngsters about the positive and negative impacts of peer influence[2].

Peers are the ideal people with whom one may readily talk and interact. They are critical in the lives of all young people. As they spend most of their time together during the day, they would like to observe and imitate each other's activities, character, behaviors, and so on.[3] Adolescence is when one's personality is still developing; peer influence would aid in physical and mental growth by assisting one another. However, it could have a detrimental effect on them at times. They may be prone to vices such as drunkenness, smoking, and drug misuse. As a result, maintaining a balance in peer influence is critical. According to the Social Learning Theory, teenagers do not need to see and adopt a particular behavior; instead, they need to believe that their peers approve it to pick similar acts. Peers can significantly impact how an adolescent looks, speaks, eats, acts sexually, utilizes social media, adopts and accepts violent, anti-social behavior, and many other elements of their lives.[4]

According to various research findings, peers play a critical role in various areas of adolescence lives positively or negatively. It is nearly impossible to get through adolescence period without being impacted somehow.[5]

Aims of the Study Include

1. To assess the influence of peer pressure on lifestyle behaviors among undergraduate students.
2. To find an association between the influence of peer pressure on lifestyle behaviors and selected baseline variables.

Materials and Methods

The study design was a descriptive survey design to assess the peer influence on lifestyle behaviors among undergraduate students in selected professional colleges. The target population of the study comprised four professional colleges. The sampling technique used in the study was proportionate stratified simple random sampling technique. The investigator divided the population into strata based on the year of the study of their course and the 323 subjects were selected through simple random technique proportionately from each strata. The required sample size was calculated using the below mentioned formula.[6]

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{Z^2 * (p) * (1-p)}{c^2}$$

where

Z = Z value (e.g., 1.96 for 95% confidence level)
p = percentage picking a choice from the previous literatures, expressed as decimal
c = confidence interval, expressed as decimal

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{1.96*1.96 * (70) * (1-.70)}{0.05*0.05} = 323$$

After obtaining their written consent, 323 undergraduate students were included in the study group. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee before starting the project. The tool used for the survey was the structured rating scale to assess the peer influence on lifestyle behavior along with the baseline proforma were formulated by the investigator and validated by seven experts in the field. There was 100% agreement for most of the items. Appropriate corrections were done and tool was finalized. Baseline proforma consisted of seven items seeking information about age, gender, hostellers or day scholars, parent's occupation, enjoy being in the peer group, place of residence, whom do you like to approach when you are in trouble and area of permanent residence. The structured rating scale to assess the peer influence on lifestyle behaviors consisting of 22 questions related to buying choices, exercising, personality, and communication, food choices, healthy mind, social media, and use of gadgets, and smoking and alcoholism. Each correct answer has a "1," and the wrong answer "0." The maximum score of the rating scale is 22. The scores were categorized as "High Influence" (88–110), "Moderate Influence" (66–87), "Low Influence" (44–65), "No Influence" (43–22). The reliability of the tool was determined using the Split half method and the Karl Pearson correlation coefficient calculation, which was found as 0.89. As a result, the instrument was regarded as reliable.

The data collection was done through an online survey using Google forms after obtaining the permission to conduct the study from the respective authorities. The investigator sent the online link of the informed consent, instructions to the participants and the rating scale to assess the peer influence on lifestyle behaviors through class coordinators of each batch to obtain the data from the students, and then it was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Statistical Analysis

The grading of the peer influence was done with frequency and percentage distribution, and the sub-domains of the

rating scale to assess the peer influence were computed by mean, SD, maximum, minimum, and mean percentage. The association of peer influence with baseline variables was examined using the Chi-square test.

Results

Section 1: Description of Baseline Characteristics

►**Table 1** depicts the distribution of baseline variables of the subjects. Out of 323 subjects, majority of 52.3% (169) were from the BSc Nursing and the least 9.3% (30) from MLT.

Among the age group, the majority of 58.8% (190) belonged to 19–20 years.

In gender, females constituted the vast percentage of 88.2 (285) and 73.4% (237) of the subjects were hostellers.

Most of the subject's father's occupation were in private sectors (194, 60.1%), and the majority of (228, 70.6%) their mothers were homemakers. A high majority (299, 92.9%) of subjects enjoyed being in the peer group. Most subject's approachable person in their need was family and friends 53.2% and 41.2%, respectively. Among the subjects, 163 (50.5%) undergraduates belonged to an urban area, and ~160 (49.5%) belonged to rural areas.

Section II: Description of Peer Influence on Lifestyle Behaviors

The data show that 65.3% of undergraduates had moderate peer influence, 5% had strong peer influence, 29.4% had low peer influence, and 0.3% had no influence (►**Table 2**).

The data presented in ►**Table 3** shows the area-wise analysis of peer influence on lifestyle behaviors. The most significant percentage of peer impact (79.3%) was found in personality and communication, while the lowest in smoking and alcoholism (36.6%). Other sections with the highest mean percentages were healthy mind (74.8%), exercising (71.1%), food choices (68.2%), buying choices (64.9%), social media (45.7%), and use of gadgets (45.7%), respectively. The mean percentage of the total score was 64.58. Though the peer influence was much evident in the data, the highest percentage of influence was reflected in positive behaviors such as personality and communication, healthy mind, and exercising.

Section III: Association between Peer Influence on Lifestyle Behaviors among Undergraduates with Selected Baseline Variables

►**Table 4** shows the association between peer influence on lifestyle behaviors and selected baseline variables using the chi-square test. To test the significance, the following hypothesis was used.

H1: There will be a significant association between peer influence on lifestyle behaviors among undergraduates with selected baseline variables.

The test findings suggest that the '*p*' value of majority of variables were more than 0.05 (at 5% level of significance) and thus it was not significant except in gender (0.005) and approachable person in need (0.03), which clearly states that

Table 1 Frequency and percentage distribution of subjects according to their baseline variables: $N = 323$

Sl. No.	Baseline variables	*f*	Percentage
1.	**Program**		
	BSC Nursing	169	52.3
	BPT	91	28.2
	MLT	30	9.3
	BASLP	33	10.2
2.	**Year of studying**		
	2nd year	124	38.4
	3rd year	105	32.5
	4th year	94	29.1
3.	**Age in years**		
	17–18	19	5.9
	19–20	190	58.8
	21–22	101	31.3
	23–24	12	3.7
	≥ 25	1	0.3
4.	**Gender**		
	Male	38	11.8
	Female	285	88.2
5.	**Place of stay**		
	Hosteller	237	73.4
	Day scholar	86	26.6
6.	**Father's occupation**		
	Private sector	194	60.1
	Government sector	32	9.9
	Agricultural sector	62	19.2
	Retired	25	7.7
	Not applicable	10	3.1
7.	**Mother's occupation**		
	Private sector	21	6.5
	Government sector	73	22.6
	Homemaker	228	70.6
	Not applicable	1	0.3
8.	**Enjoy being in peer group**		
	Yes	299	92.6
	No	24	7.4
9.	**Approachable person**		
	Family	172	53.2
	Friends	133	41.2
	Teachers	1	0.3
	Others	17	5.3
10.	**Area of residence**		
	Urban	163	50.5
	Rural	160	49.5

Table 2 Frequency and percentage distribution of subjects according to the grading of peer influence

Sl. No.	Grading	Score	*f*	Percentage
1.	High influence	88–110	16	5.0
2.	Moderate influence	66–87	211	65.3
3.	Low influence	44–65	95	29.4
4.	No influence	22–43	1	0.3

there is no significant association between peer influence and selected baseline variables.

Discussion

According to the findings, of 323 subjects, the majority (52.3%) belonged to the BSc Nursing program, while the least (9.3%) belonged to the MLT program. Among the age group, the majority (58.8%) of students were from 19–20 years. A vast number (285, 88.2%) were females, and 73.4% of subjects

Table 3 Area wise analysis of Peer Influence on lifestyle behaviors by using Mean, Standard Deviation and Mean Percentage: $N = 323$

Area	Mean	SD	Maximum	Minimum	Mean percentage
Buying choices	9.74	2.04	15	3	64.9
Exercising	14.23	2.43	20	4	71.1
Personality and communication	11.90	1.91	15	3	79.3
Food choices	10.24	2.06	15	3	68.2
Healthy mind	11.23	2.09	15	3	74.8
Social media and use of gadgets	8.21	2.45	15	3	54.7
Smoking and alcoholism	5.49	2.63	15	3	36.6
Total score	71.04	10.67	110	32	64.58

Table 4 Association between peer influence and selected baseline variables: $N = 312$

Sl. No.	Baseline variables	≤70 (median)	>70 (median)	χ^2	*p*-Value
1.	**Program**			6.39 (Fisher's exact test)	0.429
	BSC Nursing	82	87		
	BPT	43	48		
	MLT	16	13		
	B.ASLP	16	17		
2.	**Year of Studying**			2.98 (Fisher's exact test)	0.567
	2nd year	56	67		
	3rd year	56	49		
	4th year	45	49		
3.	**Age in years**			10.32 (Fisher's exact test)	0.699
	17–18	7	12		
	19–20	97	92		
	21–22	47	54		
	23–24	5	7		
	≥ 25	1	0		
4.	**Gender**			9.47 (Fisher's exact test)	0.005***
	Male	10	28		
	Female	147	137		
5.	**Place of stay**			4.41 (Fisher's exact test)	0.077
	Hosteller	110	127		
	Day scholar	47	38		

Table 4 (*Continued*)

Sl. No.	Baseline variables	≤70 (median)	>70 (median)	χ^2	*p*-Value
6.	**Father's occupation**			7.77 (Fisher's exact test)	0.656
	Private sector	94	99		
	Government sector	16	16		
	Agricultural sector	32	30		
	Retired	13	12		
	Not applicable	2	8		
7.	**Mother's occupation**			8.91 (Fisher's exact test)	0.486
	Private sector	10	11		
	Government sector	34	38		
	Homemaker	112	116		
	Not applicable	1	0		
8.	**Approachable person**			14.94 (Fisher's exact test)	0.031*
	Family	93	79		
	Friends	53	79		
	Teachers	0	1		
	Others	11	6		
9.	**Residence**			4.52 (Fisher's exact test)	0.066
	Urban	71	92		
	Rural	86	73		

*$p < 0.05$ (significant).
***$p \leq 0.001$ (very highly significant).

were hostellers. A majority (299, 92.9%) of subjects enjoyed being in the peer group. Most subject's approachable person in their need is family and friends of 53.2% and 41.2% respectively. Among the subjects, 163 (50.5%) undergraduates belonged to urban and ~160 (49.5%) belonged to rural areas.

The finding of the peer influence on lifestyle behaviors shows that the majority of 211 (65.3%) undergraduates had moderate influence, 95 (29.4%) had low influence, 16 (5.0%) had a strong influence, and 1 (0.3%) had no influence.

The most significant peer impact (79.3%) was evident in personality and communication, smoking and alcoholism (36.6%). Other sections with the highest mean percentages were healthy mind (74.8%), exercising (71.1%), food choices (68.2%), buying choices (64.9%), social media (45.7%), and use of gadgets (45.7%), respectively. Similar observations were made by Kocak et al indicates that 5.97% had a statistically significant effect on eating habits.[7]

A study to investigate the peer pressure on young adults' product purchase decisions of the University of Botswana, indicated a two-factor solution of peer influence using combined product data, peer influence by normative influence was ~54.48%, and informational influence was by 13.36%.[8]

Another study investigated the impact of peer pressure on cigarette smoking among Ethiopian high school and university students. The findings show that 15.9% of students had a significant impact of peer pressure on cigarette smoking.[9]

The findings suggest a strong influence of peer pressure on various factors. Peer groups like to interact with each other and take advice on everything, which would help them get updated on the latest trends and developments worldwide. Most of the time, peer influences positively help them, but they could also result in destructive behaviors.[10] Hence, the study emphasizes the importance of having an optimum peer influence in building healthy behaviors and habits among peers, which would help them to have a healthy lifestyle. Peers are the best medicine to relieve tensions and worries to live in this fast-paced life. Therefore, the researcher believes that the study findings would give insights to people regarding the effects of peer pressure.

Moreover, the study showed a significant relationship between peer influence and baseline variables such as gender and approachable person in need, but no such relationship existed for other variables.

Similar observations were noted by investigators in Kenya who assessed peer pressure among secondary school adolescents in Nyahururu Laikipia country. Their results revealed that peer pressure influences demographical factors such as age, class, and gender. There was a significant association between peer pressure and demographic variables.[11]

Conclusion

The study's findings showed that 65.3% of undergraduates had moderate peer influence on various lifestyle behaviors. It may vary from individual to individual. Hence, it can be concluded that peer influence plays a crucial role in one's health. Educators and parents can play a vital role in making aware of these facts in our children's minds to mold them into better citizens of the country.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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