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# Peer Pressure and Loneliness as Determinants of Adolescent Drug Abuse Behaviour

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Adolescence is a sensitive period for substance use. They engage in different drug use activities like alcohol, smoking, and other drug use. Drug use has also been associated with overestimating normative levels of drug use, negative life events, and specific motivations for drug use, all of which have been linked to more problematic patterns. The majority of drug users begin smoking at an early age. They seek new thrills as they become older and eventually turn into heavy drug users. The primary goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive review of the risk factors of drug abuse among adolescents. Knowledge of such factors will help the authorities to devise improved intervention strategies to reduce the incidence rates. This paper is based on a review of quantitative as well as qualitative research papers published in various journals. On the basis of the previous studies, we have concluded that peer pressure and loneliness increase the risk of drug abuse. Adolescent drug usage is still the most dangerous to experience, with physical and mental health consequences. Adolescents continue to use these medications despite the known risks linked with them.

*Keywords:* drug abuse, peer pressure, loneliness

Adolescence has been referred to as a significant stage of human life. It is the risky bridge between 'childhood' and 'adulthood'. Hall (1904) proposed that "adolescence is inherently a time of storm and stress." This period brings about physical changes, psychological changes and changes in social roles which may affect the personality and adjustment in later life. Williams et al. (2002) opine "Adolescence, which is conceptualized as a transition period, begins with the onset of puberty and ends with the acceptance of adult roles and responsibilities of all life stages, except childhood, it is the one most marked by rapid and potentially tumultuous transition". Smoking and drinking are accepted as reasons for mortality and morbidity the world over. This behavior is initiated during adolescence.

## Drug Abuse

Drug abuse in adolescents is a serious public health concern. They are at a higher risk for drug abuse due to a range of factors, including peer pressure, stress, and the desire for new experiences. Adolescents who abuse drugs are at increased risk for a range of negative consequences, including academic problems, social and relationship problems, physical and mental health issues. It is described as the "arbitrary" overuse or addiction to a single drug, with or without a prior medical diagnosis from competent health professionals

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(Lakhanpal & Agnihotri, 2007). A study was conducted on high school student's alcohol consumption and results indicated that 45.2 percent of high school students disclose alcohol consumption in their lifetime, 30 percent try to use marijuana and 21.1 percent try to smoke cigarettes (Johnston et al., 2016).

The National Drug Dependence Treatment Center (NDDTC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (2019) New Delhi accompanied the National Survey on Amount and Pattern of Substance Use in India. The most popular psychoactive drugs consumed by people in India. Nationally, alcohol is consumed by approximately 14.6 percent of the population (10 to 75 years of age). There are nearly 16 crore people in the country who drink alcohol. As compared to women, men consume alcohol more often; there are seventeen men who use alcohol for every single woman who tries to drink alcohol. The second most widely consumed drugs in India are cannabis and opioids, after alcohol. About 2.8 percent of the population confirmed consuming some cannabis product in the previous year (3.1 crore people). Alcohol was identified as the most commonly used drug in the nation by the National Household Drug Use Survey (2019) which had a response rate of 21.4%.

## Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is a kind of pressure when a member of your own age group actively exerts on you to do something. Most definitions of peer pressure clearly state that people are motivated to act and think in specific ways because they have been encouraged, supported, or pressured to do something by a peer. Adolescence is a transition period often related to less dependence on the family and more time being spent with their peer groups (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Peer group includes friend, school peer group, boyfriend and girlfriend, etc. "Peer pressure is feeling pressure from other age mates to do something harmful for self and others (Kaur, 2020). It is broadly defined as any attempt by one or more peers to force an individual to follow in the decisions of behaviors favored by the pressuring individual or group" (Sim & Koh, 2003). Research findings have shown that adolescents are at risk of using illicit substances in the

future if they have friends or colleagues who support them (Bailey & Hubbard, 1990; White et al., 1987, Kandel et al., 1978).

Recently, a study shows that adolescents' behaviour is influenced by emotional detachment from family and peer pressure. It increases the likelihood of substance use and other health risk behaviour (Gallegos et al., 2021). Moreover, the role of peers is significant to consider while researching adolescent drug usage. There is a lot of evidence to show a positive linear association between peer drug usage and the incitation of drug use by adolescents. Drug use activity is influenced by peer modeling and attitudes that support drug use (Kung & Farrell, 2000). The correlation of various aspects of peer pressure with risky drinking frequency at single-occasion. The result of the study suggests that peer conformity and peer involvement show as protective factors and regard to the use of alcohol whereas misconduct of work is a risk factor (Josef et al., 2014). A comparative study to investigate the reasons for initiation and persistent use of substances among youth and adults. Results of this study indicated that ages from 15 to 18 years have initiated the substance abuse and the causes behind peer influence, an increasing sense of being and interest whereas nonusers never gave preference to the substances because of their family values, awareness of the effect on health and family (Gopiram & Kishore, 2014).

The study tells us that peer pressure plays a crucial role in substance use in human beings. Individuals trapped by higher peer pressure are found to make use of substances. This may be because of peer acceptance and taking negative feedback from peers as void (Segun et al., 2022). As per this study, those school-going students are able to overcome substance abuse and deny peer influence (Namuwawu, 2022). The proliferation of substances was 19.4% which was higher among males than females. Peer pressure was the most dominating influence towards substance whereas school and mass media were the major notifiers of drug abuse (Umukoro et al., 2021).

Students who said they had friends who used drugs and alcohol on a regular basis reported having more drug-related difficulties themselves (Taylor, 2006) although friends have a significant effect on college students' substance use behaviour. Research has shown that having a family member, such as a parent or sibling, who uses drugs can increase a person's likelihood of using substances themselves (Brook et al., 1999). It can be conferred that peer drug use predicts the vulnerability to drug use himself or herself. Through peer influence, the family environment had a considerable indirect effect on adolescent alcohol usage (Nash et al., 2005). Peer pressure and conformity measures were found to be more powerful predictors of risk behaviour among adolescents, they engage in different activities like substance abuse, crime, dating attitudes, inappropriate intercourse, and poor school achievement, than popularity and general conformity (Santor et al., 2000).

In a study by Okoo (2019) among high school students and found that there is no significant correlation between using drugs and academic achievement but a strong association between peer pressure and illicit drug use. Substance use was predicted by spending time in unstructured social environments, although this process was mediated by partying. Students who spend time in partying were more prone to experiment with drugs, but only if they said they were susceptible to peer pressure (Caldwell & Darling, 1999). Peer impact on alcohol consumption can be exerted through actively shaping drinking behaviour and this behaviour is based on social cognitive perspective among adolescents. As a result, overt

drinking offers, drinking modeling, and local drinking norms are the most visible manifestations of peer influence (Lai et al., 2013). Likewise, teenage students are more prone to use alcohol, tobacco and even marijuana. It is a result of social function and peer interactions (Thombs, 2009).

Greater peer pressure was associated with increased drug and substance usage among high school students, particularly those in adolescence (Abikoye et al., 2014). According to a study, having your first substance use experience at a younger age is linked to being more vulnerable to peer pressure (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Peer acceptance predicts the onset of alcohol use in the future (Trucco et al., 2011). Peer pressure is defined as the act of influencing and pushing someone to participate in the same age group's activities (Santor, et al., 2000). Peer pressure could be applied both indirectly as well as directly.

## Loneliness

Loneliness is a complex and often distressing emotion that arises when an individual feels disconnected or isolated from others (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). It is a subjective feeling, and what may cause loneliness for one person may not be the same for another. Loneliness can occur in various situations including when someone moves to a new place, loss of a loved one, or lack of social connection and support.

Loneliness is becoming a measure problem in India, as elsewhere, due to globalized workforces that are increasing the distance between families. It refers to the subjective experience of an individual in the absence of near interpersonal relationships. People may turn to drugs or alcohol use despite their unwillingness when they are lonely. While loneliness can be a contributing factor, it is often just one of many factors that can lead to drug abuse, including genetics, family history, environment, and underlying mental health issues. If an individual wants close interpersonal relationships, he or she is lonely, but they are not able to create them. According to Peplu and Perlman (1982), "Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some way". Loneliness, depression, and anxiety are all factors that can contribute to addiction. However, some people use drink or drugs to assist them function in social situations by making them feel like the life of the party. Those who are lonely, on the other hand, frequently use these substances as a substitute for healthy interpersonal relationships (Nikmanesh et al., 2015).

A study was conducted to anticipate that substance use rates in patients recovering from drug abuse based on cognitive emotional control and psychological loneliness. It was found that psychological isolation was the main indicator of the risk of drug abuse (Zanganeh & Taghvayi, 2017). The research was conducted to explore the association between depression and the difficulty of substance addiction in emotional control. The sample was taken from the Universities of Baluchistan and Sistan of 452 students. The finding shows that there is a significant connection between difficulty in emotion regulation & loneliness with drug abuse. Emotional control and loneliness as risk variables for substance addiction (Nikmanesh et al., 2015; Spence & Thomas, 2003). Moreover, "the lifetime risk of suicide in patients with alcohol dependence is almost six times the expected rate" for those who are not alcohol dependent (Haw et al., 2005). Another study shows that loneliness has been positively associated with depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use behaviour (Lamis et al., 2014). Research

has shown that the person who recovers from co-occurring substance use disorder and other severe mental illnesses reported that loneliness is a major trigger for relapse (Laudet et al., 2004). The study revealed that loneliness did not have a direct effect on substance use but it has an indirect effect through an increase in the level of stress, on all indicators of substance use (Segrin et al., 2018). On the bases of the evidence, we can say loneliness has a direct and indirect impact which increases the likelihood of substance use. Loneliness is also a risk factor for smoking and alcohol addiction (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2003). Smoking is independently and positively associated with loneliness (Zhang et al., 2020).

Gutkind et al. (2021) did a comparative study and discovered that those with a moderate or severe level of loneliness used alcohol and cannabis more frequently. Hosseinbor et al. (2014) investigated a study and discovered that drug abusers have a higher perception of loneliness than non-drug abusers, which could lead to a sense of being alienated from the community, increasing the likelihood of engaging in high-risk behaviours and drug misuse. As a result, all programmes aimed at preventing or treating addiction should take loneliness into consideration. A study conducted by Stickley et al. (2014) among adolescent students found that loneliness increased health behaviour such as substance use and sexual behaviour. Furthermore, studies have shown that feeling of loneliness, hopelessness, and worry has been positively correlated with substance use behaviour (Page et al., 2014). Loneliness has also been linked to social anxiety and negative health behavioral patterns, such as substance abuse (Riccardi, 2009).

According to a study, 79 percent of 316 people seeking treatment for substance abuse issues reported feeling lonely on a regular basis. Furthermore, 69 percent of the participants in this study agreed with the statement "loneliness has been a severe problem for me" (Ingram et al., 2018). Individuals who are constantly feeling lonely are more prone to smoke cigarettes and gain weight than individuals who are not always alone (Lauder et al., 2006). Lonely alcoholics tend to be more socially inhibited than non-lonely alcoholics, and they are often less eager to participate in social situations (Weissbach et al., 1976). Research has shown that loneliness can be associated with a range of negative outcomes, including poor mental health, aggression, substance use, and other health risk behaviour (Peltzer & Pengpid, 2017). Loneliness, sleeping problems, sadness, suicidal ideation, suicide plans, and poverty are all risk factors that have been linked to an increased probability of substance use (Peltzer, 2009).

## Conclusion

Drug abuse among adolescents can lead to significant physical and mental health complications. Adolescents continue to use these medications despite the known risks linked with them. The present study indicates that high levels of peer pressure and loneliness increase the probability of adolescents' substance use behaviour. Knowledge of such factors will help the authorities to devise improved intervention strategies to reduce the incidence rates. After reviewing we can conclude that peer pressure and peer modeling leads to drug abuse behaviour, and loneliness has also been associated with depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use behaviour. Ample evidence is available to prove that peer pressure and loneliness is not only linked with drug abuse behaviour but also linked with other health risk behaviour.

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