

# Peer Group Dynamics and its Influence on Adolescent Risk Behavior

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**ABSTRACT** – This study aims to examine the influence of peer pressure on risky behavior decision making in adolescents, as well as factors that can strengthen or reduce this influence. Peer pressure is often the main factor in adolescents' decisions to engage in risky behavior, such as smoking, consuming alcohol, and unsafe sexual behavior. This study uses a literature review approach by analyzing various related references, both social and psychological theories and relevant previous research. The results of the study show that the need for adolescents to be accepted into their social groups and the influence of social anxiety can reinforce peer pressure. However, individual factors such as self-esteem, self-control, and positive family and environmental support can reduce the negative impact of group pressure. In addition, involvement in extracurricular activities and strong relationships with parents have also been shown to be important in reducing the tendency for adolescents to engage in risky behavior. This study concludes that although peer pressure can greatly influence adolescent behavior, reinforcing factors in their lives can help reduce this impact. Therefore, it is important for parents, educators, and the community to create an environment that supports the positive development of adolescents.

Keywords: Peer pressure, risky behavior, adolescents, self-esteem, self-control, family, social environment.

## A. INTRODUCTION

Peer pressure has long been a concern in studies of adolescent behavior, especially in relation to how peer groups can influence individual decisions and actions. Adolescents often learn from the experiences and perspectives of their peers, trying out various social roles, and building interpersonal relationships. Peer groups function as significant social reference groups for adolescents at various stages of their development (Darmawan, 2023). During

adolescence, individuals are in a phase of identity search and are strongly influenced by the norms, values, and expectations of the social groups they enter (Masnawati et al., 2023). In this case, risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and unsafe sexual behavior are often influenced by the need for adolescents to be accepted or considered part of their peer group (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Peer pressure, either directly through invitation or indirectly through observation of friends' behavior, can encourage adolescents to engage in behavior that they might not do if they were not in that group (Tomé et al., 2012).

On the other hand, although the influence of peers tends to be negative in many cases, there are also peers who have a positive impact on their members (Engels & ter Bogt, 2001). Peers who have pro-social values, such as supporting academic success, sports activities, or volunteer activities, can help adolescents develop healthily (Idris et al., 2004). However, in an increasingly complex society connected through social media, the pressure from peers who are oriented towards risky behavior is increasing. In some cases, adolescents feel isolated or unwelcome if they do not follow risky group behavior (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008). This is also influenced by contextual factors such as the family environment, school, and access to adequate health information. Adolescents who have a less supportive family experience or lack of guidance in decision-making are at risk of being more vulnerable to the negative influence of peers (Darmawan, 2023). Therefore, it is important to understand how the influence of peers can be mitigated and how a supportive social environment can prevent risky behavior in adolescents.

The main problem that arises regarding the influence of peer groups on adolescent risk behavior is the high prevalence of risky behavior caused by group pressure. One of the most common forms of risky behavior among adolescents is smoking and drinking alcohol.

Many adolescents engage in these activities because they feel pressured to conform to the behavior of their friends (Hariyadi et al., 2023). Research shows that adolescents tend to judge risky behavior by their peers as acceptable or even considered a sign of maturity (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). When adolescents do not have a clear understanding of the consequences of this behavior, they are more vulnerable to engaging in risky habits that endanger their physical and mental health.

In addition, the pressure to engage in risky sexual behavior also increases in peer groups. Adolescents who want to be accepted or considered popular in the eyes of their peers may feel forced to engage in sexual behavior that they do not want or that they do not understand the risks of. Many studies show that peers can play a key role in normalizing risky sexual behavior, such as not using condoms or having multiple sexual partners, which leads to an increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008). The lack of openness in talking about these risks among adolescents often exacerbates the problem.

Another major challenge is the long-term impact of risky behavior influenced by peer pressure. This risky behavior often becomes a habit that continues into adulthood, leading to long-term health problems, including addiction, mental disorders, and difficulties in social relationships or work. Therefore, the influence of peers that leads to risky behavior can create patterns of behavior that are difficult to change over time. Research shows that adolescents who are involved in groups that encourage risky behavior often experience a decline in overall quality of life, as the negative influence of these groups remains in their development (Dishion et al., 2011). Thus, this issue requires serious attention to understand the mechanisms of peer group influence on adolescent behavior and how it can continue in their lives.

Risky behavior in adolescents influenced by peers is a very important phenomenon to observe, as it can contribute to ongoing physical and mental health problems. Adolescents are at a stage of development that is vulnerable to external influences, and peer pressure is often a major factor in their decision-making. If left unchecked, this risky behavior can lead to addiction, mental problems such as depression and anxiety, and a high risk to their sexual health. Therefore, understanding how peers

influence adolescent behavior and identifying the factors that reinforce this influence is essential to creating effective prevention programs that can reduce the long-term negative impact on their well-being.

The urgency to observe the influence of this peer group is also driven by the fact that the impact is not only limited to individuals, but can also extend to society as a whole. Risky behavior that develops among adolescents has the potential to increase the incidence of social and health problems at the population level, such as the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and an increase in the rate of accidents due to the influence of alcohol and drugs (Jaccard et al., 2005). By understanding the mechanisms by which peers influence risky behavior, we can design more effective interventions, including education, policies, and social support for adolescents, which in turn can reduce the incidence of social and health problems in the future.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of peer pressure on risky behavior decision making in adolescents. In addition, this study also aims to identify factors that can strengthen or reduce the influence of peers in risky behavior experienced by adolescents. Thus, it is hoped that this study can provide an understanding of the social dynamics in adolescent life and the influence of peers on decisions made regarding risky behavior.

## B. METHOD

The research method used in this study is a literature study approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to collect, analyze, and synthesize various relevant literature sources related to the influence of peer pressure on risky behavior decision making in adolescents. Literature studies focus on understanding theoretical concepts, previous research results, and various perspectives that can provide insights into the factors that influence adolescents' social behavior (Creswell, 2014). In this case, researchers will look for scientific articles, books, and journals that discuss risky behavior, peer group influence, and adolescent dynamics. Furthermore, the data collection technique in this literature study was carried out by identifying relevant sources through searches of scientific databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed. The researcher will collect articles that examine peer pressure, decision

making, and risky adolescent behavior. The researcher will also evaluate the quality of these literature sources to ensure that the data used is highly valid and reliable. The sources used will include research published in the last 5 to 10 years to ensure that the information used is the most relevant and up-to-date (Kumar, 2011).

In addition, the analysis of the literature found will be carried out using a descriptive-qualitative approach. Researchers will map the various theories underlying adolescent behavior, including social and psychological theories that explain the influence of peer groups, as well as theories related to decision making and risky behavior (Arnett, 2018). This study aims to identify patterns in previous research and find factors that can strengthen or reduce the influence of peer groups on risky behavior in adolescents. These findings will then be organized in the form of a narrative that illustrates the relationship between existing theories and research results.

By using this approach to literature study, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the influence of peer pressure on risky behavior in adolescents. The findings obtained are expected to be an important reference for other researchers, educators, and parents to address the problem of risky behavior in adolescents, as well as to design more effective interventions to reduce the negative impact of peer pressure (Brown & Larson, 2009).

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Influence of Peer Pressure on Adolescents' Risky Behavior Decision Making**

Peer pressure is one of the factors that plays an important role in adolescent decision making, especially related to risky behavior. Adolescents often feel compelled to follow the norms of their peer groups, even though this can have a negative impact on themselves. This peer influence often stems from the desire to be accepted or recognized in their social group (Karina et al., 2012; Darmawan, 2015). Research shows that adolescents who are in groups that engage in risky behavior are more likely to follow in the footsteps of their friends and make the same decisions (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). This is because peer groups provide a sense of support and acceptance, making adolescents feel more comfortable engaging in potentially risky activities.

The social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (2001) explains that individuals learn through observation and imitation of the behavior of others in their social environment. In the peer group, adolescents often imitate the behavior of their friends, especially if their friends are rewarded or recognized for this behavior. Risky behavior, such as smoking, consuming alcohol, or having unprotected sex, can be seen as a way to gain status in a group. Research by Berkman et al. (2014) shows that adolescents who feel more accepted by their friends tend to be more at risk of making decisions that can endanger their health, because they feel stronger to face the impact of such behavior.

Adolescents are more impulsive and less able to assess the long-term consequences of their actions, making them more easily influenced by peer pressure. According to Steinberg and Cauffman (1996), the adolescent brain is not yet fully developed in terms of impulse control and risk assessment. When adolescents in a group that normalizes risky behavior, they tend to go along with the decision without considering the long-term consequences (Dumas et al., 2012). This is exacerbated by the pressure to meet social expectations in their peer groups compared to personal or rational considerations (de Boer et al., 2017).

However, not all adolescents are easily influenced by peer pressure. Research conducted by Smetana et al. (2006) shows that individual factors, such as levels of self-esteem, self-control, and family support, also play a role in mitigating or strengthening this influence. Adolescents who have higher self-esteem and strong relationships with their parents are better able to withstand pressure from their peers. Therefore, although peer groups can greatly influence adolescent behavior, strong individual factors can provide protection from these negative influences.

The relationship between peer pressure and risky behavior decision making in adolescents is not only influenced by social and psychological factors, but also by cultural and environmental factors. For example, in some cultures or social environments, risky behavior can be considered a sign of maturity or prestige, which further strengthens the influence of peers in adolescent decisions (Brown & Larson, 2009). On the other hand, a more supportive environment with healthy social norms can help reduce the negative influence of peers.

Research by Gui et al. (2020) highlights the importance of group-based interventions to reduce the negative influence of peers on risky behavior. Programs involving group discussions, education about risk, and empowering adolescents to make better decisions can help them become more aware of the consequences of risky behavior and reduce dependence on the influence of their peers. Interventions of this kind can provide an alternative for adolescents to feel accepted and valued without having to engage in risky behavior.

Overall, the influence of peers on risky behavior decision making in adolescents is very complex and influenced by various factors. Although peer pressure can encourage adolescents to engage in risky behavior, individual factors such as self-esteem and self-control, as well as family support and a healthy social environment, can play an important role in mitigating this influence. Therefore, a holistic approach that considers various aspects of adolescent life, both social and psychological, is needed to understand and address the problem of risky behavior influenced by peers.

### **Factors that Strengthen or Reduce the Influence of Peer Groups on Risky Behavior in Adolescents**

The influence of peers on risky behavior in adolescents can be influenced by various factors, both those that strengthen and those that reduce the impact. One of the main factors that can strengthen the influence of peers is the need for adolescents to be accepted by their social group. During adolescence, individuals are very likely to seek self-identity and a sense of acceptance in peer groups. When peers normalize risky behavior, such as smoking or drinking alcohol, adolescents who want to be accepted in this group may be more vulnerable to engaging in this behavior (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). The need for recognition and status in a group can encourage adolescents to engage in risky behavior as a way to strengthen their position in their social group (Gioia, 2017). In addition, emotional factors such as anxiety and psychological pressure can also strengthen the influence of peer groups. Research by Prinstein et al. (2005) shows that adolescents experiencing social anxiety or emotional problems are more likely to follow risky group norms because they feel that acting in a way that is considered normal by the group will reduce

feelings of anxiety and increase acceptance. This anxiety can increase their vulnerability to peer influence, which affects their decision to engage in risky behavior. In this case, peer pressure has a greater influence because these adolescents try to find a sense of security in their social relationships.

On the other hand, family factors play a very important role in reducing the influence of peer groups on risky behavior. Adolescents who have strong and positive relationships with their parents tend to be better able to withstand peer pressure (Smetana et al., 2006). Parental supervision, open communication, and healthy family norms can help adolescents make wiser decisions and be more confident in refusing risky peer invitations. Research by Lerner and Steinberg (2009) shows that good family support, both in the form of parental involvement and value teaching, can serve as a buffer that reduces the negative impact of peer pressure.

In addition to family influences, individual factors such as self-esteem and self-control also affect the ability of adolescents to resist peer influence. Adolescents with higher self-esteem and better self-control tend to be better able to make healthy decisions despite peer pressure (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). Adolescents who feel confident in their choices and have confidence in their ability to overcome challenges are more likely to reject risky behavior despite pressure from their social environment (Sijtsema & Lindenberg, 2018). Good decision-making skills, driven by high self-esteem, can be a significant mitigating factor against the negative influence of peers.

A supportive social environment also plays a role in reducing the influence of peers. For example, a school environment that provides space for positive social interaction and healthy activities can help adolescents form relationships with friends who have similar values that do not support risky behavior. This is in line with the findings of Jessor and Jessor (1977), which state that protective factors in the social environment, such as friends who support positive behavior, can reduce the likelihood of adolescents engaging in risky behavior.

In addition, the level of adolescent involvement in extracurricular activities or positive social groups can also reduce the negative influence of peers (Tomé et al., 2012). Adolescents who are active in activities that promote social and

health skills, such as sports, arts, or volunteer organizations, are more likely to avoid risky behavior. Research by Eccles et al. (2003) shows that participation in extracurricular activities can provide teenagers with opportunities to interact with individuals who have healthier and more supportive interests, thus reducing the pressure to engage in risky behavior promoted by peers.

Finally, cultural factors and social norms also influence the extent to which peers can influence risky behavior. In some culture or social environment, risky behavior may be seen as a way to build status or maturity, making peer influence stronger. Conversely, in cultures or environments that emphasize the importance of health and safety values, more positive peer norms can reduce the tendency of adolescents to engage in risky behavior (Brown & Larson, 2009). Therefore, cultural and social norms can function as significant reinforcers or reducers of peer influence in adolescent behavioral decision making.

Overall, various factors can strengthen or reduce the influence of peers on risky behavior in adolescents. The need to be accepted in a social group, emotional factors, and peer pressure reinforce risky behavior, while family support, self-esteem, self-control, involvement in positive activities, and cultural factors can reduce the negative influence of peers. To minimize these negative impacts, it is important for parents, educators, and the community to create an environment that supports positive development for adolescents and provides them with the skills to make better decisions.

#### **D. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, the influence of peers on risky behavior in adolescents can be reinforced by various factors, such as the need for adolescents to be accepted into their social groups and the emotional pressure that encourages them to follow behaviors that are considered normal in the group. In addition, factors such as self-esteem, self-control, and family support can reduce the negative impact of these influences. Adolescents who have a good relationship with their parents and a positive environment tend to be better able to withstand peer pressure and make wiser decisions. A supportive social environment, both at school and at home, can serve as a protective factor against risky behavior.

To reduce the negative influence of peers, it is important for parents and educators to provide greater support to adolescents in developing their self-esteem and self-control. Educational programs that teach decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional management skills can help adolescents be better prepared to deal with peer pressure. In addition, increasing adolescents' involvement in positive activities such as sports, arts, or social organizations can reduce the likelihood of them engaging in risky behavior.

For schools and communities, creating an inclusive environment that supports positive values is also very important. This can be done by facilitating healthy social interactions among adolescents and providing access to resources that support their mental and emotional well-being. Paying more attention to reinforcing factors in the lives of adolescents, such as strong family relationships and involvement in extracurricular activities, can help them make healthier decisions and reduce dependence on peer pressure.

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