

THE ROLE OF PEER PRESSURE AND SELF-CONTROL ON AGGRESSION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MONYWA TOWNSHIP

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effect of peer pressure and self-control on aggression of high school students in Monywa Township. A total of 400 high school students (203 males, 197 females) in Monywa Township were randomly selected as participants of this study. Correlational research design and survey method were used in this study. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were carried out. Three instruments: Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI), Self-Control Scale (SCS), and Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) were used. According to the findings of this study, the result of independent samples *t* test revealed that there was no significant difference in peer pressure by gender. However, it was found that there was significant difference in peer pressure by grade ($t = -3.171, p < 0.01$). The result also stated that there was no significant difference in self-control by both gender and grade. Moreover, the result of independent samples *t* test pointed out that there was no significant difference in aggression by both gender and grade. Then, the result of mediation analysis proved that peer pressure had significant direct effect on aggression and also significant indirect effect on aggression through self-control as a mediator. Totally, 31.4 % of the variance in aggression can be explained by the model.

Keywords: peer, peer pressure, self-control, aggression

Introduction

Humans are social beings and hence socialization takes place across the life span. Individuals learn together, have fun, and socialize in a social group. These groups determine how the individual will live and what kind of person he or she will be. One of the most important periods of an individual's life is adolescence, when one remarkably comes under the contact of many people and rapid changes takes place due to the influence of their interaction. During this time, the peer relationships take on increasing importance and play a critical role in a person's life, his social skills, his development, and even his self-concept (Klarin, 2006, cited in Mistry, 2019). It is a strong desire, for an adolescent, to have a peer group and to be appreciated by that group.

The concept of peer influence is related to a mutual influence process through which peers become increasingly similar over time and share similar characteristics (Dishon & Dodge, 2005, cited in Mistry, 2019). Peer pressure is persuading or encouraging another person to engage in certain types of behaviour. Berndt and Ladd (1989) defined susceptibility to peer pressure as the influence that peer groups exert by rewarding those who conform to expected norms and/or punishing those who violate them.

Moreover, peer group pressure is one of the most dangerous aspects of adolescence to which teenagers are exposed. Negative peer influence could cause adolescents to behave in an aggressive way (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). This is because adolescents would like to gain acceptance and appreciation from their peers. Thus, they would behave similar to their negative

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peers (Eldeleklioglu, 2007). The negative consequences of aggressive behaviours further enhance the importance of identifying the contributing factors to prevent the development of aggressive behaviour among adolescents (Benson & Buehler, 2012).

Austin and Sciarra (2012, cited in Yavuzer, 2014) expressed that aggression can be the result of wanting to assert power, wanting to have an effect over peers or wanting to be a part of this kind of power. Others claim that aggression occurs from the interaction between individual (e.g., social and emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, peer rejection, academic failure) and environmental (e.g., poverty, lack of family supervision, limited social support, conflicts within the family) characteristics (Coie et al., 1993).

Therefore, aggressive behaviour has been defined by experts in educational psychology in various ways. Wood et al. (2005) defined it as the intentional infliction of physical or psychological harm on others. From this definition, it is obvious that for an act to be classified as an aggressive behaviour, the infliction of physical or psychological harm on others must be intentional. Hence, unintended and accidental infliction of harm on others may not be rightly classified as aggressive behaviour. Aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools takes various forms. It can be physical or verbal. Physical aggression refers to inflicting injury on others, while verbal aggression entails using words that are intended to harm another person.

When aggressive urges become activated, self-control can help one respond in accordance with personal or social standards that admonish aggression. Poor self-control over aggressive urges is a widespread problem, and addressing this problem has practical and scientific value for clinical, forensic, organizational, social, personality, and developmental psychologists, as well as for neuroscientists.

Self-control is defined as the ability to change one's thoughts, feelings, or behaviours, either in accordance with societal norms or expectations, or to serve one's long-term goals and interests (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Research across developmental periods has supported the notion that individuals who are unable to inhibit prepotent responses, focus attention, delay gratification, follow rules, control anger, and engage in effective planning are also more likely to show increased aggression and rule-breaking behaviour, including involvement in juvenile delinquency and later adult offending (Pratt & Cullen, 2000).

Therefore, it is interesting to assess how to relate the three variables: peer pressure, self-control and aggression.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the research is to study the effect of peer pressure and self-control on aggression of high school students. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To explore peer pressure, self-control and aggression of high school students,
2. To compare the differences in peer pressure, self-control and aggression of high school students by gender and grade,
3. To examine the relationship between peer pressure and aggression of high school students,
4. To examine the relationship between self-control and aggression of high school students,

5. To examine the relationship between peer pressure and self-control of high school students, and
6. To find out whether peer pressure predicts aggression of high school students directly and indirectly through the mediator, self-control.

Definitions of Key Terms

Peer Pressure: Peer pressure is the force from peers that encourage or motivate other individuals to mold their beliefs and behaviours (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

Self-Control : Self-control is defined as the ability to change one's thoughts, feelings, or behaviours, either in accordance with societal norms or expectations, or to serve one's long-term goals and interests (Duckworth & Kern, 2011).

Aggression : Aggression is defined as any kind of behaviour intended to hurt others (Freedman, Sears & Carlsmith, 1989).

Review of Related Literature

Erikson' Identity Theory for Peer Pressure. Erikson's theory stated that peer pressure is needed for a person to develop, learn and grow to form into an individual, it is throughout positive and negative peer pressure that people form and develop their individuality and social status, this often starts in adolescence. Erikson identified four stages of peer pressure, i.e. Autonomy; Fitting in; Failure and Success (as cited in Duff, 2015).

(1) Autonomy: Children seek to become independent from their parents and immerse themselves in their own social environment during adolescence.

(2) Fitting In: In Fitting in stage, adolescents often pull away from their parents and rebel. Fitting in is also where adolescents often struggle in finding who they want to be and their position in society. Peer group fulfill the adolescent's need for validity and acceptance and provide space and opportunity for exploration and experimentation.

(3) Failure: In Failure stage, a child is having difficulties finding who they are and when they fit in, this is often when negative peer pressure comes into play and risk taking behaviours start. If a child is struggling at this stage and identity confusion is stronger than identity formation, he/she might explore lifestyles that are unhealthy or dangerous. Children who are pressured by parents to conform to a particular role they don't identify with may also rebel.

(4) Success: In Success stage, adolescents seem to find who they are but still fit into social peer pressure. The healthy rebellion stage begins, this is where the rules, responsibility and consequences are understood. This stage is needed for a healthy transition to adulthood.

According to Erikson, successful completion of his fifth stage leads to the virtue of fidelity and the ability to be loyal to people and ideologies, and it is necessary for a positive transition to adulthood.

The Self-Regulatory Strength Model of Self-Control. Exerting self-control to change or alter behaviour or emotions requires effort and some form of energy or willpower. Self-control is considered as strength (rather than a skill or a cognitive schema). By exerting self-control to resist temptations or engage in desirable behaviour, for example, people deplete a reservoir of limited resources. When self-regulatory resources have been expended, a state of ego depletion

results and failure on a subsequent, unrelated task requiring self-control is more likely (Baumeister et al., 1998).

One's limited self-control reserve is depleted when one does any number of tasks requiring self-control. Importantly, the model and empirical evidence suggest that different types of self-control (e.g., temptation resistance, impulse overcoming, task persistence, emotion regulation, choice making) tap into the same self-control resource (Baumeister et al., 1998). The important implication is that exerting self-control temporarily depletes resources necessary for a large variety of self-regulatory behaviour across a variety of behavioural domains, making subsequent self-control failure more likely.

Four-Factor Model of Trait Aggression. The four-factor model of the Buss and Perry (1992) sheds light into the specific manifestations of trait aggression. They also developed Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ). The model includes four sub-types of trait aggression (physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility). Physical aggression is the act of lashing-out bodily with the intent to harm others who are motivated to avoid the harm. Physical and verbal aggression share two key features: harming others and the activation of motor responses. Anger is the affective sub-type of trait aggression that is central to aggressive behavior, often serving as the motivational precursor to it. The fourth factor, hostility, is a cognitive sub-type of trait aggression that refers to an antagonistic mindset in which perceptions and attributions are biased towards the assumption that the world is unjust towards others.

Method

Sampling. The participants were high school students from Monywa Township. The number of participants was 400 students (203 males, 197 females). The sample was selected by using simple random sampling technique.

Research Method. The design and method used in this study were correlational research and survey method.

Peer Pressure Inventory. The key instrument used to measure peer pressure was Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) developed by Brown and Clasen (1985). PPI was composed of five subscales and 32 items. The reliability coefficient of peer pressure was 0.7.

Self-Control Scale. The key instrument used to measure self-control was Self-Control Scale (SCS) developed by Tangney et al. (2004). SCS was composed of 36 items. The reliability coefficient of self-control was 0.86.

Aggression Questionnaire. The key instrument used to measure aggression was Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) developed by Buss and Perry (1992). The instrument was composed of four subscales and 29 items. The reliability coefficient of aggression was 0.82.

Data Analysis and Findings

An Analysis of Students' Peer Pressure. In term of descriptive statistics, mean, mean percentage and standard deviation of students' peer pressure were presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Peer Pressure of High School Students

Variables	Mean	Mean Percentage	SD
Peer Conformity	30.63	56.72%	3.99
Family Involvement	21.85	72.83%	4.56
Peer Involvement	25.77	61.35%	4.67
School Involvement	31.22	74.33%	5.67
Misconduct	5.52	30.67%	3.49

Among the subscales, the mean percent of 'school involvement' was the highest and it can be interpreted that most of the high school students had the pressure from their friends to study hard, take accelerated classes, finish high school, be liked by teachers, try to get good grades, and be nice to teachers. Since the mean percent of 'misconduct' was the lowest, it can be interpreted that the students had the pressure from their friends to get drunk, get beer or liquor before they are 18, and be rowdy.

Table 2 Peer Pressure Levels of High School Students by Gender

Peer Pressure Level	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Negative Influence	0	0	0
Low Influence	166	182	348
	(41.5%)	(45.5%)	(87%)
Positive Influence	37	15	52
	(9.25%)	(3.75%)	(13%)

According to Table 2, it can be interpreted that most of the students were in the low influence level of peer pressure. However, there were no students in negative influence level of peer pressure. High school students were under the close and direct control/guidance of parents and teachers. They had to follow their parents' supervision and directions. They rarely do the bad things themselves and give the force to others to do them. Because of the above reason, it may be said that there was no negative influence in peer pressure level.

Table 3 Results of Independent Samples *t* Test for Peer Pressure of High School Students by Gender

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Peer Pressure	Male	115.76	13.25	1.59	1.369	370.318	0.172
	Female	114.17	9.70				

Table 3 showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in peer pressure. Therefore, it can be concluded that gender is not a factor which can affect on peer pressure.

Table 4 Results of Independent Samples *t* Test for Peer Pressure of High School Students by Grade

Variable	Grade	Mean	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Peer Pressure	Grade 10	112.82	11.04	-3.67	-3.171**	367.896	0.002
	Grade 11	116.49	11.85				

Table 4 showed that there was significant difference in peer pressure of high school students by grade. Therefore, it can be concluded that Grade 11 students felt more peer pressure as compared to Grade 10 students.

An Analysis of Students' Self-Control. In term of descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation of students' self-control were presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for Self-Control of High School Students

Variable	Mean	SD
Self-Control	121.84	14.89

As shown in Table 5, the mean score of students' self-control was 121.84 and the standard deviation was 14.89. Since the total mean (121.84) was higher than the theoretical mean (108), it can be said that high school students' self-control level is satisfactory.

Table 6 Results of Independent Samples *t* Test for Self-Control of High School Students by Gender

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Control	Male	121.93	14.72	0.185	0.124	398	0.901
	Female	121.74	15.12				

Table 6 showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in self-control. Therefore, it can be concluded that high school students' self-control from Monywa Township was not influenced by gender factor.

Table 7 Results of Independent Samples *t* Test for Self-Control of High School Students by Grade

Variable	Grade	Mean	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Control	Grade 10	123.15	13.62	2.231	1.476	398	0.141
	Grade 11	120.91	15.70				

Table 7 showed that there was no significant difference in self-control of high school students by grade. Therefore, it can be interpreted that Grade 10 students seem to be the same level of self-control as Grade 11 students.

An Analysis of Students' Aggression. In term of descriptive statistics, mean, mean percentage and standard deviation of students' aggression were presented in Table 8.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics for Aggression of High School Students

Variable	Mean	Mean Percentage	SD
Physical Aggression	19.55	43.44%	4.63
Verbal Aggression	12.90	51.60%	3.28
Anger	16.27	46.49%	4.82
Hostility	20.79	51.98%	5.89
Aggression	69.52	47.94%	13.95

Table 8 indicated that the mean and standard deviation of aggression were 69.52 and 13.95 respectively. Since the total mean score (69.52) was lower than the theoretical mean (87) in total aggression, it can be said that level of high school students' aggression is very rare.

Among subscales, the mean percent of hostility is highest (51.98%), it can be interpreted that high school students were hostile. And high school students had the lowest mean percent in physical aggression (43.44%) among the four subscales of aggression, it showed that the commitment of high school students' physical aggression is very rare.

Table 9 Results of Independent Samples *t* Test for Aggression of High School Students by Gender

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Aggression	Male	70.15	13.44	1.280	0.917	398	0.360
	Female	68.87	14.46				

Table 9 showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in aggression. Therefore, it can be concluded that males and females may have the same level of aggression.

Table 10 Results of Independent Samples *t* Test for Aggression of High School Students by Grade

Variable	Grade	Mean	SD	MD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Aggression	Grade 10	67.91	13.08	-2.738	-1.939	398	0.053
	Grade 11	70.65	14.45				

Table 10 showed that there was no significant difference in aggression of high school students by grade. Therefore, it can be interpreted that Grade 10 and Grade 11 students may have the same level of aggression.

Table 11 displays the correlation results among peer pressure, self-control and aggression.

Table 11 Intercorrelations Among Peer Pressure, Self-Control and Aggression

Variable	Peer Pressure	Self-Control	Aggression
Peer Pressure	-	-0.115*	0.124*
Self-Control		-	-0.554**
Aggression			-

Note: *Correlation is significant at 0.05 level.

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Table 11 showed that there were significant negative correlations between peer pressure and self-control ($r = -0.115$, $p < 0.05$) and between self-control and aggression ($r = -0.554$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, there was significant positive correlation between peer pressure and aggression ($r = 0.124$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the finding implies that the more peer pressure students perceived, the less self-control of students, and the more peer pressure students perceived, the more aggression the students show. Moreover, the more students have high self-control, the less aggression the students show.

The mediation analysis was conducted to examine the effect of peer pressure on aggression through the mediator, self-control. The direct and indirect effects of peer pressure on aggression through self-control were presented in Table 12.

Table 12 Summary of Causal Effects for the Path Model

Outcomes	Determinants	Causal Effects		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
Self-Control $R^2 = 0.063$	Peer Pressure	-0.105*	-	-0.105*
Aggression $R^2 = 0.314$	Peer Pressure	0.125*	0.054*	0.179*
	Self-Control	-0.515***	-	-0.515***

Note. *** denotes significant paths t at $p < 0.001$.

* denotes significant paths t at $p < 0.05$.

According to the result of mediation analysis, peer pressure had significant direct effect on aggression and also significant indirect effect on aggression through self-control as a mediator. Totally, 31.4% of the variance in aggression can be explained by the mediation model.

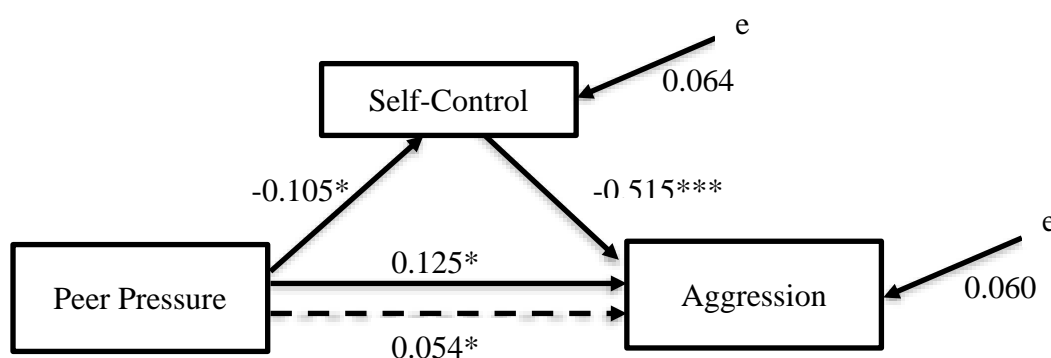


Figure 1 Simple Path Diagram for Predicting Aggression from Peer Pressure and Self-Control

Note: —————> denotes direct effect.

- - - - -> denotes indirect effect.

The findings demonstrate that self-control and peer pressure are correlated with aggression. Therefore, high school students who have high self-control perceived low influence of peer pressure and consequently, may show less aggression. A conclusion can be made that self-control serves as a mediating variable in explaining how peer pressure influences on aggression among high school students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main cause of people's negative problem and social relationship was due to low self-control (Baron, 2003). The result of correlation analysis in the present study revealed that high school students' self-control had significant negative correlation with peer pressure. In the study of Boman and Gibson (2011), it was found that low self-control tend to have higher association with delinquent peers and in turn, adopted delinquent or analogous behaviour. Adolescents with high self-control tend to select peers with similar level of self-control and this friendship is more stable compared to those who adopted low level of self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

This study found that self-control had significant negative correlation with aggression. Children and adolescents with higher self-control reported less aggressive behaviour (Denson et al., 2011). Moreover, having a high self-control seems to reduce the probability for adolescents to act aggressively (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

To help high school students' self-control strengthen, teachers and administrators should-

- Have the knowledge about peer relationship of the students,
- Always identify student problems,
- Strive to create safe, fair and harmonious environments,
- Promote communication between teachers and students,
- Train students to develop habits of self-control (e.g. keeping everything neat, always on time, resisting temptation, meditation, yoga),
- Make effort to know more about students' background (e.g. family and personal factors, socioeconomic status),
- Try to implement effective prevention and intervention programme to reduce the possibility of high school students to involve in aggressive activities.

Although people often think of peer pressure as bad, peer can give both positive and negative impact on the child's behaviour. It is possible that high school students would behave similar to their negative peers to gain acceptance and appreciation from them.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations would be given. To help high school students resist negative peer pressure and reduce aggressive behaviour, parents and teachers should-

- Develop a good relationship with their children. The experiences of closeness with parents express lower levels of psychological and social problems.
- Encourage open and honest communication. Let them know they can come to you if they are feeling pressure to do things that seem wrong or risky.
- Teach the children to think when others try to get them to do something whether it is right or wrong, helpful or harmful.
- Teach the children to be assertive and to resist getting involved in dangerous or inappropriate situations or activities.
- Encourage them to avoid giving an immediate "Yes" or "No" answer when friends want them to do something questionable. They can buy time to make a good decision by saying, 'May be later,' or 'I'll wait and see.'

- Encourage them to participate in extracurricular activities such as sport teams or civic organizations supervised by adults who care about the well-being of young adults. Exercises reduce endorphin which are said to lift mood.
- Help students to overcome the negative impact of peer pressure,
- Find the source of aggression.
- Always identify students' problems and solve them.
- Emphasize the need for counseling services.
- Guide and educate students who engage in aggressive behaviour.
- Invite religious leaders for interaction with students and others.

If parents and teachers follow the above recommendations, they can help students overcome the negative impact of peer pressure and have the ability of self-control not to engage in aggressive behaviour.

This study can provide some reliable information and innovative ideas to teachers and administrators in developing conducive environment for their students in order to control peer pressure, improve self-control and reduce aggression. Therefore, it is suggested that educators should know that peer pressure and self-control were significant factors in the development of aggression among high school students.

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