



## PEER PRESSURE AND THE USE OF DRUGS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Article History: Received on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Revised on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Published on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020

### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to identify the correlation between certain peer pressure characteristics and drug consumption in adolescents. Peer relationships have a key role in the adolescent period. In a negative context, peer pressure can be done in various ways that benefit from the characteristics of growing adolescents, who are often insecure and need a sense of acceptance and belonging.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a survey method and data was collected from 234 students from the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia, on peer pressure questionnaires. For analysing the data SPSS was used.

**Main Findings:** The findings of this study verify the existence of a statistically significant correlation between certain peer pressure characteristics and drug consumption aiming at experiencing the feeling which the rest of the peer group already has.

**Implications/ Applications:** The value of the results, besides obtaining valuable new indicators based on scientific research methods, is that they offer guidelines for prevention and intervention in cases of various peer problems and problems with the abuse of addictive substances.

**The novelty of the Study:** Drug consumption has become one of the prevailing problems in adults in the current era. This study is enhancing the literature by investigating the role that peer pressure plays in drug consumption.

**Keywords:** *Drug Abuse, Peers, Influence, Pressures, University Students.*

### INTRODUCTION

Peers have much more influence on youth than family, especially parents. Therefore, adolescents do whatever their peers demand from them, which is manifested in the decisions they make and in the way they behave ([Allen, Chango, Szewedo, Schad & Marston, 2012](#); [Gatpandan & Ambat, 2017](#); [Veerachaisantikul & Chootarut, 2016](#)). When people that they respect are involved in things like drugs and alcohol, peer pressure can make it very difficult for a child to say no to trying them. A study by Columbia University found that a child is up to six times more likely to have an alcoholic drink if they have friends who drink. However, although this problem is generally thought of as a teenage issue, research has shown that peer pressure may well carry through all age groups, as peer groups continue to exist throughout adult life. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure because they are at a stage of development when they are separating more from their parents' influence, but have not yet established their values or understanding about human relationships or the consequences of their behaviour. They are also typically striving for social acceptance and are more willing to engage in behaviours against their better judgment to be accepted. The adolescents' susceptibility to the influence and also pressure imposed by the peer group depends on many factors, first of all on their mutual closeness and the quality of their friendship ([Glaser, Shelton, & Bree, 2010](#); [Iryani & Murtiwidayanti, 2017](#); [Manager, 2017](#); [Mai & Thuy, 2015](#)). Different forms of peer pressure can affect adolescents in various ways. In a negative context, peer pressure can be expressed in ways favoured by the adolescents' characteristics of growth – they are often insecure and they need to feel accepted and belonging to the group. Peer pressure increases in the period of adolescence, and one of the research ([Bot, Engels, Knibbe & Meeus, 2005](#)) propose it may manifest as a very negative impact on the adolescent.

Thus, peer pressure can influence an adolescent to abuse drugs. Various meta-analysis data indicate that an average relationship between peers has a stronger effect on substance use than that of the parents. The adolescent age and type of drug, as a few restricted types of influence, have been taken into account ([Allen et al., 2003](#)).

### Significance of the Study

The contribution of the study, besides obtaining valuable new indicators based on scientific research methods, is that they offer guidelines for intervention and treatment in cases of various peer problems and problems with addictive substances abuse.

### Research Objectives

The objective of this study is

- i) To determine the correlation between the use of drugs by which they want to experience what the rest of the peer group members already have, and
- ii) To determine the characteristics of peer pressure among university students along with their predictive value.

The point of the study is related to design adequate treatment for students who have difficulties to oppose negative peer pressure and other difficulties occurring in peer relationships, as well as for students who have problems with the abuse of addictive substances in the widest sense.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Certain authors ([McIntosh, MacDonald, & McKeganey, 2003](#); [Sutthipornphalangkoon, 2016](#)) indicate the need for a differentiation between influence and pressure concepts since, except for the direct coercion, peers influence the adolescents' behaviour in other ways, too. Namely, the choice of like-minded friends and the process of socialisation by which young people internalise the group's attitudes and values are significant for understanding the mechanisms which lead to the manifestation of certain behaviour. However, as numerous research studies, concerning peers, have shown ([Lashbrook, 2000](#); [Kiran-Esen, 2003](#); [Brown, 2004](#); [Masuo&Cheang, 2017](#)), the concept of pressure is tighter than the concept of influence, and it relates to the peer expectation for an adolescent to act in a mode regardless of his/her desires ([Lebedina-Manzoni & Ricijaš, 2013](#)). In a large number of researches, the definition of peer pressure and influence ([Almulla, 2018](#); [Coggans& McKellar, 2009](#)) indicate that the researchers were referring just one isolated factor, in a complex relationship between adolescents as individuals and their peers, ignoring other factors. The role of individuals in their development needs to be re-examined, with particular emphasis on reconsideration of the role of choice and also motivation about substance abuse and interaction with peers. The authors conclude that the assumption that the choice and motivation for substance abuse stems solely from personal or social inappropriateness should be omitted.

A lot of reasons to start using addictive substances are known. Some studies discovered that drug abuse is correlated with serious personal problems. Different emotional states and tensions are reduced by using drugs ([Bortner, 1988](#); [Boynton, 1988](#); [Richter, Brown & Mott, 2010](#)). On the other hand, reasons can be inquisitiveness, protest, a form of behaviour among friends, tryout ([George&Koob, 2010](#); [Khurana, Romer, Betancourt, Brodsky, Giannetta& Hurt 2015](#)). All aforementioned are characteristics of the student population; however, the literature mostly describes drug abuse through a generic concept ([Cato, 1992](#); [McKay, Murphy, McGuire, Rivinus&Maisto, 1992](#)). The literature points out ([Bortner, 1988](#); [Boynton, 1988](#); [Richter, Brown & Mott, 2010](#)), that drug addicts have a lower sense of their responsibility. Lower sense of responsibility may lead to a lack of self-confidence, their unsatisfactory success, helplessness... The adolescents who are unstable, unsatisfied and unhappy by themselves or the environment they live in, experiment with different substances, and their internal motivation to use the drug again will arise faster. Also, self-control disappears, and habit will develop and turn into an addiction. Just over 1/8 students used different drugs either before or during their university education ([Bucher, Vu & Hojat, 2012](#); [Naeem&Hameed, 2018](#); [Shams, 2016](#); [Suharti&Pramono, 2016](#)). One of their hypothesis was confirmed: adolescents who used psychostimulants have significantly higher aggressive–hostility personality factor.

When it comes to the decision on drug consumption, the adolescent's sex should also be considered. Across genders, there are physiological differences and they are influenced by many socio-cultural factors. Different social roles, of men and women, can create different patterns and practices when it comes to using drugs ([Zolala, Mahdavian, Haghdoost, & Karamouzian, 2016](#)).

## Hypothesis

This study proposes the existence of a statistically significant correlation of certain peer pressure characteristics and drug consumption aiming at experiencing what the rest of the peer group members already have. The proposition is based on the assumption, which has been confirmed by former research, that a higher adolescents' autonomy from peers is linked to a higher resilience to the peer influence, which depends on the young people's maturity and increases with age, and vice versa ([Allen et al, 2003](#)). Susceptibility to group influence depends on their mutual closeness and the quality of their friendships, as well as on assertive denial ([Glaser et al, 2010](#)). As aforementioned, differences in drug-using are evident concerning sex, which is important since the sample observed women are prevailing. Gender differences are evident in reasons of drug use and initiation and also motivation ([Zolala et al, 2016](#)).

It is hypothesized that,

**H1:** *There is a significant correlation between certain peer pressure characteristics and drug consumption aiming at experiencing what the rest of the peer group members already have.*

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample of Examinees

Examinees were 234 students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia. Table 1 shows the gender of respondents.

**Table 1:** Examinees' sex

Sex	Aps.	(%)
M	5	2.1
F	229	97.9

Table 2 shows examinees regarding the study year they attended in the 2018/2019 academic year, indicating that a larger number of examinees (over 86%) were attending one of the first three years of study, which means that they still were in the upper limits of the adolescent age.

**Table 2:** Examinees' year of study

Year of study	Number of students	Percentage (%)
1	73	31.2
2	78	33.3
3	51	21.8
4	16	6.8
5	16	6.8

### The Instrument and Data Collection

The measuring instrument The Peer Pressure Questionnaire was used in the research (Lebedina et al., 2008). The questionnaire was constructed by the third-year students of Social Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences after the Peer Influence in the Adolescent Period Questionnaire constructed for secondary school pupils by Social Pedagogy Students of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences of the University of Zagreb and adapted by (Lebedina et al., 2007). The author's written consent to use the questionnaire was procured.

The questionnaire consists of 25 items on a five-degree Likert type scale (5=always, 4=often, 3=sometimes, 2=rarely, 1=never). Higher values obtained on the scale represent a higher self-evaluation of susceptibility to peer pressure. The internal consistency of the scale expressed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .89.

The research was conducted in the 2018/2019 academic year among students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula. Ethical standards were respected during the questionnaire conduction, while data are used only for scientific purposes. The research was approved by the decision reached by the Committee for the evaluation of the research ethics of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia.

### Data Analysis

Besides calculating the basic statistical values, the regression analysis was used in data processing as part of the SPSS program.

### RESULTS

According to arithmetic means of the predictive set of items, it can be noticed that the average item values are different with a special deviation of item *It is important to me what my friends think of me* (item 13), *It is important to me what others think of me* (item 3), *I choose the place to go out according to the choice and taste of my friends* (item 17) and *It is important to me to be similar to people I socialize with to feel good* (item 1) in the sense that a higher value represents a higher self-evaluation of susceptibility to peer pressure. However, in general, except for the separated items, the susceptibility to peer pressure was self-evaluated to a lower extent, i.e. spanning from never to rarely. Moreover, the offered answer "always" linked to a certain peer pressure characteristic was not chosen in 40% of the items, while in item 20 (*I bet / gamble because my friends also do it*) answers "sometimes", "often" and "always" were never chosen.

**Table 3:** Coefficient of the multiple regression of the predictive set of items and the criterion

	Value
Multiple R	.836
Multiple R2	.699
Adjusted R2	.665
F	20.234
P	.000
Std. Err. of Estimate	.306

The regression analysis was done on a predictive set of items that describe certain peer pressure characteristics and the criterion item of drug consumption by which they want to have the experience which the rest of the group already had. The results show that there is a statistically significant correlation between peer pressure characteristics and drug consumption by which they want to have the experience which the rest of the group already had (Table 3). Thus, it is

possible to predict the use of drugs by which they want to experience what the rest of the peer group members already have. The peer pressure characteristic, as the predictive set of items, explains 84% of the common variance. The standard regression coefficient (Table 4) is the highest and statistically significant for items:

- *When I hang out with people who take drugs I become tempted to try them myself* (item12),
- *My companions influence my sexual behaviour* (item 24) and
- *I am afraid I will appear stupid in front of my companions due to my opinion or behaviour* (item 7).

The items *When I hang out with people who take drugs I become tempted to try them myself* (item12), *My companions influence my sexual behaviour* (item 24) and *I am afraid I will appear stupid in front of my companions due to my opinion or behaviour* (item 7) mostly contribute to the criterion item of progression, while the other items do not significant.

**Table 4:** Multiple regression analysis for the criterion

Items	B	Std. Error B	Beta	t	p-level
<i>Intercept</i>	.147	.213		.689	.491
1. It is important to me to be similar to people I socialize with to feel good.	9.764	.023	.019	.422	.674
2. I behave in a way that does not suit me to fit in with the group.	6.042	.041	.071	1.485	.139
3. It is important to me what others think of me.	-7.908	.033	-.012	-.243	.808
4. I compare my looks with others.	-2.648	.027	-.047	-.978	.329
5. My thinking and attitudes are based on the thinking and attitudes of my companions.	-4.281	.028	-.069	-1.536	.126
6. It is more important to me to do what my peers expect me to than to satisfy my desires.	4.080	.039	.049	1.042	.298
7. I am afraid I will appear stupid in front of my companions due to my opinion or behaviour.	-6.317	.027	-.109	-2.337	.020*
8. I will give up my opinion/values or attitudes if they differ from those of my companions.	2.139	.040	.026	.535	.593
9. I need to be popular among the people I socialise with.	-2.835	.029	-.004	-.096	.923
10. When I am with my friends, I avoid people who do not belong to my group.	1.849	.026	.031	.724	.470
11. My behaviour is based on the behaviour of the people in my group.	-2.845	.030	-.044	-.958	.339
12. When I hang out with people who take drugs I become tempted to try them myself.	.627	.038	.741	16.606	.000*
13. It is important to me what my friends think of me.	-2.577	.024	-.052	-1.073	.285
14. When I find myself in a situation where everyone is drinking alcohol except me, I have the feeling that I cannot fit in/have fun/relax.	-2.203	.026	-.004	-.084	.933
15. I need to have the same attitudes, values, and opinions as my friends to feel good among them.	1.409	.030	.023	.467	.641
16. I need to be praised by my „gang“ to have a good opinion of myself.	-8.303	.030	-.015	-.281	.779
17. I choose the place to go out according to the choice and taste of my friends.	2.166	.021	.045	1.020	.309
18. My friends and I hardly accept people who are differently dressed or listen to different kind of music.	2.272	.025	.039	.891	.374
19. I will engage in risky behaviours if my friends want me to.	7.650	.049	.070	1.570	.118
20. I bet / gamble because my friends also do it.	-8.256	.166	-.020	-.499	.618

21. I would participate in a student protest, although I do not support their ideas.	-1.997	.036	-.023	-.549	.584
22. I stay out longer than I would like to because my friends expect me to.	2.520	.031	.003	.082	.935
23. I feel inferior because I have less sexual experience than most of my friends.	8.188	.053	.068	1.535	.126
24. My companions influence my sexual behaviour.	.217	.089	.112	2.445	.015*

## DISCUSSION

The research confirms the hypothesis assuming the existence of a statistically significant correlation between certain peer pressure characteristics and drug consumption aiming at experiencing the feeling which the rest of the peer group already has. The aforementioned is confirmed by research when it comes to peer pressure, personality traits and self-esteem (Ginsburg, La Greca & Silverman, 1998), which means that the pressure imposed on an individual by the peer group is higher if the person has lower self-esteem and vice versa (Kaplan, 2004; Prinstein, 2007). About sexual behaviour, the research conducted by authors Potard, Curtois, & Rusch (2008), which aimed at determining „to what degree the predominance of risky sexual behaviour during adolescence is the result of social influence, in particular, that of peers, according to the perception of their attitudes and sexual behaviour, leads to the conclusion that the sexual norms of peers influence young people's attitudes and behaviours. Gender differences in sexual socialization are also important“.

In our context, considering all of the above, the main role in the phase of adaptation to the university students' life and prevention and intervention in cases of various peer problems, as well as the promotion of health in a wide sense, is given to students' associations and centres and Psychological counselling working at Juraj Dobrila University in Pula, Croatia“ (Radetić-Paić, Ružić-Baf & Medaković, 2013) because if a peer problem occurs, the positive influence of the family should be compensated. In that context, learning strategies are important to handle peer pressure effectively, for instance, learn to say no, know yourself, and remember your values, choose the right friends who will support your value.

## CONCLUSION

Different forms of peer pressure can affect adolescents in various ways. In a negative context, peer pressure can be expressed in ways favoured by the adolescents' characteristics of growth – they are often insecure and they need to feel accepted and belonging to the group. Peer pressure increases in the period of adolescence and may manifest as a very negative impact on the adolescent. The current study highlights that peer pressure may affect adolescents adversely and they may begin to abuse addictive substances and become drug addicts. This research has also highlighted avenues that are yet to be explored by future researchers.

## LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESEARCH

This research limitation is the relatively small sample of examinees limited to only one university population, as well as the fact that the diverse effects that different drugs have on the user may mean that the reasons for use will closely mirror these differences. Thus stimulants will be used for reasons relating to increased nervous system arousal and drugs with sedatives will be used for reasons relating to an increased nervous system depression“ (Boys, Marsden & Strang, 2001) and this was not studied in this research, and it could influence results.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Recommendations for further research are, first of all, the number of examinees can be expanded to make the results more representative. Secondly, it is recommended to explore peer influence considering reasons for using different drugs, and thirdly, when it comes to the decision on drug consumption, the adolescent's sex should also be considered.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors would like to pay gratitude to faculty, staff, and students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia for cooperation in data collection. Thank you to all.

## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Mirjana Radetić-Paić is a prime author and all the activities concerning data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results along with final write-up are carried by the writer himself.

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