



Exploring the Link between Peer Pressure and Risk Behaviors of the Students in Secondary Schools, Nepal

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Abstract

This study has explored the impact of peer pressure on the behavior of Grade 10 students in Bhairahawa, Nepal and has employed a mixed-methods approach utilizing a descriptive research design. Data were collected from 62 students, aged 13 to 17, through surveys, structured questionnaires, and interviews. This paper has offered the practical implications for interventions in school counseling, family education, and peer mentorship aiming to promote positive adolescent development and responsible decision-making systems. Findings of the article have indicated that peer pressure exerts both positive and negative impacts: positive peer interactions enhance academic inspiration, social participation, and productive behaviors, while negative peer pressure relates with school absence, poor academic performance, mobile addiction, and risky behaviors such as substance use. Hence, the study has highlighted the critical role of family factors, revealing that strong parental guidance mitigates negative peer effects, whereas lack of support increases vulnerability. Furthermore, excessive parental mobile phone use reduces meaningful family interaction, adversely affecting students' educational focus. Student attitudes toward education were also shaped by the combined effects of peer influence and the home environment. Grounded in social learning theory, the paper concluded that the importance of family support and home context in shaping adolescent behavior is decisive.

Keywords: Adolescent behavior, academic performance, peer pressure, social influence

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Introduction

Peer pressure for teenaged students has been one of the most discussed discourses in the contemporary school educational system. Brown (2004) states that peer pressure refers to the social influence exerted by peers or peer groups that encourages individuals, especially adolescents, to conform to certain behaviors, attitudes, or values. This influence can manifest in both positive and negative ways, significantly affecting decision-making, social interactions, emotional development, and the formation of personal identity. During adolescence, individuals are especially vulnerable to peer influence due to the developmental stage they are in, characterized by a heightened need for social acceptance, belongingness, and the desire to establish their identity within a group. As adolescents often value peer opinions over parental or adult guidance, they may adopt behaviors constructive or harmful in order to fit in or avoid rejection. Peer pressure can lead to academic motivation and the adoption of healthy habits when peer groups value achievement and responsibility. Conversely, it can also result in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, truancy, or defiance of authority when negative influences dominate. Peer pressure, therefore, plays a critical role in shaping adolescents' short-term decisions and long-term developmental outcomes. Understanding the effects of peer pressure is essential for educators, parents, and counselors seeking to support youth in navigating social challenges. Steinberg and Monahan (2007) emphasize the importance of parental guidance and highlight both the positive and negative impacts of peer influence. I concur with their view;

parental involvement plays a critical role in shaping adolescents' ability to manage peer pressure effectively.

Peer pressure is the psychological and social force exerted by a group of peers on an individual, compelling them to adopt certain behaviors, attitudes, or values in order to fit in or gain acceptance. For adolescents, this influence can be particularly strong as they navigate their identity development and seek approval from their social circles. Peer pressure can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, with adolescents sometimes engaging in risky behaviors or making decisions that are influenced more by their desire to belong than by personal judgment (Brown, 2004). While I agree that peer pressure plays a significant role during adolescence, On the other hand I insist that with the notion that it completely overrides an individual's awareness or common sense. Many adolescents are capable of exercising self-control and making independent decisions despite external influence, especially when guided by strong values or parental support.

During the adolescent period, the range of actions, emotions, and responses are exhibited in the stage of development between childhood and adulthood. During this period, adolescents experience significant biological, psychological, and social changes that shape their behaviors. This stage is often characterized by a heightened desire for independence, exploration of identity, and susceptibility to peer influence, all of which can lead to varying patterns of behavior, including risk-taking, experimentation, and mood fluctuations (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). In my view, understanding the complexities of

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adolescence is crucial as it affects both individual development and social adjustment. Appropriate guidance and a positive social environment can help adolescents navigate this sensitive stage in a healthy direction.

Adolescent behavior is typically characterized by a period of significant physical, emotional, and social changes. Indian scholars have examined these behaviors in the context of developmental psychology, emphasizing the search for identity, the role of peer influence, and the importance of family dynamics during this stage. Adolescence is marked by experimentation, the development of personal values, and a growing sense of independence, often leading to behaviors that challenge traditional norms as adolescents seek to assert their individuality (Bhargava, 2010). My own view is that not all adolescents are heavily influenced by peers; many make their own choices. Family and community values sometimes limit risky behaviors more than we think. Experimentation is a normal part of growing up, not always a problem. Positive peer influence and bigger social factors also shape adolescent behavior.

Horwood and Anglim (2019) state that mobile phone addiction is a behavioral addiction characterized by excessive or compulsive use of smartphones, which often interferes with daily activities and psychosocial functioning. This addiction might affect teenager's students in their psychological and cognitive domains. According to Robbins & Judge (2019), decision making is the cognitive process of selecting a course of action from multiple alternatives, often involving judgment, reasoning, and evaluation of outcomes. It plays a central role in both individual behavior and organizational

functioning. My own view is that decision making process can be affected by multiple dimensions though I concede that it is cognitive process, too.

This study has focused on Grade 10 students, aged 13 to 17 years, from private schools located in Bhairahawa, Nepal. It systematically examines their behaviors, attitudes, and personal experiences in relation to peer influence, with the aim of understanding how peer interactions shape academic performance, decision-making, and social development. Hence, the study primarily tries to investigate the facts and realities surrounding the influence of peer groups on adolescents and specifically it. It also examines the impact of peer influence on adolescent behavior, particularly in relation to academic performance, decision-making, and social interactions and analyzes the key factors through which peer groups exert a significant influence on adolescents, including the roles of parental involvement, socioeconomic background, and the nature of peer relationships.

Literature Review

This review provides an overview of several studies on peer influence among adolescents, focusing on both positive and negative effects within friendship networks. It examines how peer attitudes and behaviors can influence one another, shaping the decisions adolescents make. This section explores the dynamics of peer interactions, emphasizing that these influences can be both beneficial and harmful depending on the context. It also discusses the process through which adolescents are affected by their peers' actions and choices. The review highlights how peer pressure can affect various aspects of adolescent

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behavior, including social, emotional, and academic decisions. Additionally, the research looks at how the spread of behaviors and attitudes within peer groups plays a critical role in shaping adolescent development. Through these studies, the review emphasizes the significant impact of peer networks on adolescent decision-making. Overall, it shows that peer influence is a powerful force in adolescence, with the potential to affect a wide range of behaviors and outcomes. This complex interaction between peers can lead to both positive and negative consequences, depending on the nature of the peer group. Brechwald (2011) concludes by emphasizing the necessity for further research into peer dynamics and their impact on adolescent development and behavior.

This meta-analysis explored the role of descriptive norms (perceptions about how much peers drink) and injunctive norms (perceptions about peer approval or disapproval of drinking) on college students' alcohol consumption. The study found a strong link between both types of norms and drinking behavior among college students (Borsari, 2003). These findings highlight the significant impact of peer influence on adolescent behaviors like substance use and alcohol consumption.

Risky behaviors: Adults can be influenced by peers to engage in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or reckless driving. Musick and Bumpass (2012) found that adults in networks with individuals engaging in risky behaviors were more likely to participate in those behaviors.

Unhealthy habits: Peer pressure can lead adults to adopt unhealthy habits, like

smoking or overeating. Ali et al. (2015) showed that social norms related to unhealthy eating influenced adult dietary choices and obesity.

Financial decisions: Peer influence can affect adults' financial decisions, leading to poor outcomes like excessive spending. Campbell (2013) demonstrated that peer behavior in online social trading platforms affected individuals' investment choices.

These studies emphasize the negative effects of peer influence on adult behavior across areas such as risk-taking, health habits, and financial decisions.

Peer effects can also contribute to teenagers' lack of interest in education. Goodenow (1993) found that negative peer influences, such as prioritizing socializing over academics, led to lower school engagement. Natriello et al. (1988) discovered that peer groups fostered anti-intellectual attitudes. Ryan and Patrick (2001) found that social status concerns, such as valuing popularity over academic achievement, were linked to reduced academic engagement. These studies show how peer influence can decrease teenagers' interest in education, promoting academic disengagement and anti-intellectualism.

The study by Chango (2012) highlights the significant role peer influence plays in adolescent substance use. Teenagers who are more susceptible to peer pressure tend to engage in risky behaviors such as drug or alcohol use. Importantly, the research identifies factors that increase this vulnerability, including lower levels of parental supervision and stronger ties to deviant peer groups. These findings suggest that both family environment and peer networks are crucial in shaping

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adolescents' decisions and behaviors. Addressing these factors through improved parental involvement and promoting positive peer relationships could help reduce substance use among teens.

That study explored the prevalence and patterns of health risk behaviors among adolescent students in higher secondary schools within Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Nepal. Using a cross-sectional descriptive design, the researchers collected data through self-administered questionnaires from students aged 15–19. The findings revealed a significant presence of risk behaviors, including tobacco and alcohol use, unhealthy dietary habits, lack of physical activity, and unsafe sexual practices. Peer pressure emerged as a key influencing factor behind these behaviors, with students often engaging in risky activities to gain social acceptance or due to the influence of their friend circles. The study underscores the urgent need for health education, peer counseling, and school-based interventions to address these behaviors and promote healthier lifestyles among adolescents (Shah et al., 2021). I somewhat agree with the study's findings about how actually peer pressure influences risky behaviors. However, the school environment also plays an important role in shaping adolescent behavior. Supportive teachers and positive school climate can reduce negative influences. A combined focus on peers and school is needed to promote healthier choices. Additionally, involving parents and the wider community can further strengthen support for adolescents.

The study investigated the extent of peer pressure experienced by adolescents

in Kathmandu Metropolitan City and examined how it relates to demographic variables such as age, gender, family structure, and educational background. Using a quantitative research design, the authors collected data from a sample of secondary school students through structured questionnaires. The findings indicate that peer pressure is prevalent among adolescents, with higher levels observed in students from joint families, younger age groups, and those with less parental supervision. Gender differences were also noted, with female students reporting slightly higher emotional and social pressure compared to males. The study emphasizes the influence of peer groups on adolescent decision-making and behavior, particularly in areas such as academic choices, lifestyle habits, and social conformity. It concludes by highlighting the importance of supportive family environments and school counseling programs to help adolescents cope with peer pressure in healthy and constructive ways (Maharjan & Tandukar, 2024). I disagree with the research because nowadays girls tend to be slightly more affected by peer pressure, which plays a significant role in their emotional and social behavior. However, girls are also capable of leading and bringing about positive change. Schools and families should focus on building girls' confidence and resilience. This support will help protect them from negative influences and empower them.

While previous studies have established the influence of peer pressure on adolescent behavior, especially in urban or international settings, there is a lack of context-specific research in semi-urban areas like Bhairahawa. Additionally, although this study identifies both positive and negative

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peer effects, it does not fully explore why some adolescents are more vulnerable or resilient to peer pressure. This gap calls for future research on protective factors, coping strategies, and the role of school and family environments in shaping adolescent responses to peer influence. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation of others, particularly within social contexts (Bandura, 1977). In the study, adolescents were influenced by peers to either bunk school or engage in academic activities, demonstrating the role of peer modeling. Similarly, students mirrored parental behaviors, such as distraction due to excessive mobile phone use, highlighting how both peer and parental actions shape adolescent behavior.

Research Methods

A descriptive research design has been adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors affecting adolescents in their academic, social, and personal development. To ensure comprehensive data gathering, both qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary data were collected through structured interviews, and questionnaires administered to the students. Secondary data was obtained from relevant books, journals, reports, and publications from both national and international sources.

The population for this study consisted of students enrolled in a well-established secondary school in Bhairahawa, which has a total enrollment of 952 students. Among the 23 secondary schools in Bhairahawa, one school was selected randomly using the lottery method to ensure unbiased selection. The study specifically focused on Grade 10 students, as this stage is critical in

adolescent development. The selected school had 62 students enrolled in Grade 10, all of whom were included in the study, constituting a census of the target population.

The collected data was analyzed using simple statistical tools, including percentages and frequency distributions. The findings are presented using simple paragraph to illustrate the relationships between various variables, such as peer group size, academic performance, family background, and behavioral choices. Collected data are analyzed using explanatory methods aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study. The study has also applied qualitative interpretation to reveal patterns and relationships, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the impact of peer pressure on student behavior.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from a study conducted among adolescents aged 13 to 16, a critical period marked by emotional, cognitive, and social development. The respondents included a nearly balanced sample of boys and girls, primarily from middle to upper-income families. The study explored several key themes, including peer influence, academic performance, parenting involvement, social behavior, and student motivation. Questions focused on how friendships, parental support, and environmental factors shaped students' academic engagement, school attendance, and decision-making. The results offer insight into the complex dynamics between peer groups, family involvement, and adolescent behavior in shaping educational outcomes.

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Results

Demographic Overview

This demographic overview outlines the key characteristics of a given population. It highlights factors such as age, gender,

income, education, and ethnicity.

Understanding these elements is crucial for informed planning and decision-making. The data provides insight into trends, needs, and opportunities within the group.

Table 1

Demographic Overview Age and Gender

Attribute	Category	Number	Percentage
Age	13-16 Years Old	42	68%
	Above 16	20	32%
Gender	Male	34	54%
	Female	28	46%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The age distribution of the respondents indicated that the majority (68%) were between 13 to 16 years old, which is considered a critical period of adolescence. During this stage, individuals undergo significant social, emotional, and cognitive development, making them particularly susceptible to peer influence and external social pressures. This age group is also marked by a heightened desire for independence, identity exploration, and peer acceptance, which makes peer groups a central part of their daily experiences and behavioral choices.

In terms of gender distribution, the study included 54% male and 46% female participants. This represents a relatively

balanced sample, ensuring that the findings are not heavily skewed toward one gender and can be considered reflective of broader adolescent trends. Such balance enhances the reliability and generalizability of the data, especially when analyzing gender-based differences in peer pressure, decision-making, and academic or social behaviors.

Parental Income and Its Impact

This section examines parental income as a key socioeconomic indicator. It reflects the financial resources available within family households. Income levels influence access to education, healthcare, and opportunities. Understanding these patterns helps identify disparities and support needs.

Table 2

Parental Income and Its Impact

Parental Income	Number	Percentage
Below Rs. 25,000	22	36%
Rs. 25,000 to 50,000	21	34%
Above Rs. 50,000	19	30%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

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The study examined the parental income of the respondents and found that 36 of the students came from the families earning below Rs. 25000 a month and 34 percent of the students came from families earning between Rs. 25,000 to 50,000 a month, while 30 percent came from families earning above NPR. 50,000. This income diversity may suggest varying access to resources, which could potentially affect students' academic

performance and social engagement.

Peer Groups and Friend Circles

This section explores the structure and influence of peer groups and friend circles. Social connections play a critical role in shaping behavior, values, and identity. They impact emotional well-being, academic performance, and decision-making. Understanding these dynamics provides insight into youth development and social trends.

Table 3

Peer Groups and Friend Circles

Parental Income	Number	Percentage
2-5 Close Friends	34	54%
Big Friend Groups	28	44%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The study revealed that 54 percent of respondents reported having 2 to 5 close friends, suggesting that most adolescents maintain relatively small but emotionally significant peer groups. These friendships play a pivotal role in shaping social behavior, interpersonal communication, and decision-making during adolescence. The close-knit nature of these groups can either support or challenge a student's development depending on the quality of the relationships.

Impact of Peer Influence on Academic Performance

Peers have a significant impact on students' academic behaviors and outcomes. Positive peer groups can encourage motivation, collaboration, and achievement. Conversely, negative influences may lead to disengagement and lower performance. Understanding peer dynamics is essential for fostering supportive learning environments.

Table 4

Peer Influence on Academic Performance

Impact	Number	Percentage
Negative	21	34%
Positive	17	28%
Neutral	24	38%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Peer influence had a dual effect on academic performance: The study shown 34 percent of students reported

a negative impact of peer influence on their studies, indicating a decline in academic focus due to distractions

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or peer pressure. At the same time 28 percent stated that their peers had a positive effect, motivating them to study harder and perform better. This underscores the mixed nature of peer influence, with potential to either hinder or enhance academic success based on the behavioral tendencies of the peer group.

Table 5

Parenting and Family Involvement

Parenting	Number	Percentage
Good Parenting	25	40%
Not Good parenting	15	24%
Neutral Parenting	22	36%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The study discovered 40 percent of students reported experiencing good parenting, characterized by support, guidance, and active involvement in academic matters. It is found that 24 percent indicated they did not receive good parenting, which may correlate with increased vulnerability to peer pressure and engagement in negative behaviors. This highlights the essential role of parental support in countering adverse peer influences and fostering better

Parenting and Family Involvement

Parenting and family involvement play a vital role in a child's development and success. Active engagement from family members supports academic achievement and emotional well-being. The quality of parental support influences motivation, behavior, and social skills. Understanding these factors helps strengthen family-school partnerships and outcomes.

academic and behavioral outcomes.

Skipping School and Peer Influence

Skipping school is often influenced by the social dynamics within peer groups. Peers can encourage or discourage attendance through direct pressure or subtle cues. Understanding this relationship helps identify reasons behind absenteeism. Addressing peer influence is crucial for improving student engagement and attendance.

Table 6

Skipping School and Peer Influence

Skipping School	Number	Percentage
Bunked due to peer pressure	22	36%
Influenced by friends' talk	30	48%
Not Bunking	10	19%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings showed that: 36 percent of students admitted to bunking school due to peer pressure. Majority number (48 percent) stated that their decision to skip

school was influenced by discussions or persuasion from friends. These results suggest that peer negotiation and pressure are significant contributors to

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school absenteeism, raising concerns about academic disengagement.

Peer Pressure and Decision Making

Peer pressure significantly influences individual choices, especially during

adolescence. It can impact decisions related to behavior, academics, and social activities. Understanding this influence helps reveal how social dynamics shape personal outcomes. Examining peer pressure is key to promoting healthier decision-making skills.

Table 7

Peer Pressure and Decision Making

Peer Pressure	Number	Percentage
Felt peer pressure	29	46%
Friends made decisions to pass time	22	36%
Peers led them down wrong path	11	18%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

This shown table shows that 46 percent of respondents reported feeling peer pressure in different situations. It is found that 36 percent observed that their friends made decisions simply for passing time. It is observed that 12% noted that peer decisions sometimes led them down the wrong path. These findings illustrate how adolescents' decision-making processes are often shaped by their peers, for better or worse.

Mobile Addiction and Parental Influence

Mobile addiction among youth is a growing concern in the digital age. Parental influence plays a crucial role in shaping screen time habits and boundaries. The balance between guidance and autonomy impacts behavioral outcomes. Understanding this dynamic helps address tech dependency and promote healthier use.

Table 8

Mobile Addiction and Parental Influence

Observation	Number	Percentage
Excessive mobile use by parents	38	61%
Responsible mobile use by parents	24	39%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The study also explored technology use within families. It was found that excessive mobile phone use by parents had a negative impact on students' educational focus. This points to the need for parental supervision, not only of children's screen time but also of their own digital habits, to create a more balanced and engaging

home environment. Out of the observed group, 61% of parents were noted to engage in excessive mobile use, while 39% demonstrated responsible mobile habits. This suggests that a significant majority may be modeling potentially problematic screen behavior, which could influence children's own mobile usage patterns.

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Interest in Education

Interest in education reflects the level of enthusiasm and value individuals place on learning. It is shaped by personal motivation, environment, and social

influences. Higher interest of every individual also often leads to better academic engagement and outcomes. Analyzing this interest helps reveal trends in educational behavior and aspiration.

Table 9

Interest in Education

Interest of Students	Number	Percentage
Positive Interest	24	38%
Found Education Boring	11	18%
Neutral	27	44%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

When assessing students' interest in education: majority number (38 percent) expressed a positive interest in their studies. It is found that 18 percent respondent's education to be boring. The remaining 25 percent reported a neutral attitude, indicating indifference or fluctuating interest based on external influences like teaching methods, peer motivation, or parental involvement. These statistics reflect varying levels of motivation and engagement, which are significantly shaped by peer and family dynamics.

Discussion

The discussion highlights the strong influence of both peer relationships and parental involvement on adolescents' academic and social development. During this critical stage, students are particularly sensitive to their social environment, and peer groups play a complex role in shaping behavior. While 28 percent of students reported that friendships motivated them to study better, 34 percent felt that peers negatively affected their academic performance. The impact of peer pressure was evident, with 36 percent admitting to skipping

school and 48 percent influenced by friends to miss classes. This pressure was often stronger in small, close-knit friend groups, where the desire to conform was more intense. As a result, many adolescents found themselves making decisions based on peer behavior, even when those choices conflicted with their academic goals.

Parental influence also emerged as a key factor in guiding adolescent behavior. Around 40 percent of students reported having supportive parents, which contributed to better focus and resilience against negative peer influence. In contrast, 24 percent said they lacked adequate parental involvement, and many pointed to parents' excessive phone use as a distraction that limited quality interaction. This emotional disconnect made some adolescents more vulnerable to peer pressure and disengagement from academics. Additionally, while 38 percent of students expressed a clear interest in education, others reported boredom or indifference, often linked to weak parental support, poor teaching methods, or unmotivated peer groups. Overall, the findings suggest

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that a balanced combination of active parental engagement and healthy peer relationships is essential for promoting adolescents' academic success and emotional well-being.

Major findings

- Adolescents aged 13 to 16 are particularly vulnerable to peer influence, with a balanced gender distribution in the sample.
- Socioeconomic factors such as parental income affects students' access to resources and academic support.
- Peer groups, mostly small and close-knit, have both positive and negative effects on academic performance, attendance, and behavior.
- A significant portion of students (34%) experienced negative academic impacts due to peer pressure, while 36% admitted to skipping school influenced by peers.
- Quality of parenting plays a key role in academic focus and resistance to negative peer pressure.
- Parental mobile phone usage patterns influence adolescents' digital habits.
- Interest in education varies widely, influenced by peer and environmental factors.
- The study emphasizes the interconnected roles of peer pressure, family involvement, and socioeconomic context in adolescent development.

Conclusion and Implications

The study focused on adolescents in the 13 to 16 age group, a period characterized by heightened emotional and social development. The sample included a fairly balanced representation of boys and girls, with many students coming from middle to upper-income

families, which likely influenced their access to educational resources. Most of the adolescents were part of small friend groups, and these close peer networks played a significant role in shaping their behavior and decisions. Peer influence showed both positive and negative outcomes while some students found motivation and support in their friendships, others experienced academic distractions and a decline in performance due to peer pressure.

Parental involvement was another critical factor in the study, with many students benefiting from supportive and engaged parenting, which helped them stay focused and make responsible decisions. However, some adolescents lacked adequate parental support, often feeling emotionally disconnected due to limited interaction or distractions such as excessive mobile phone use by parents. This absence of parental guidance left students more susceptible to peer pressure and poor academic engagement. While some students expressed a genuine interest in learning, others felt indifferent or bored, often influenced by the attitudes of peers, the quality of teaching, or the level of support received at home. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering strong peer relationships and active parental involvement to promote positive

The implications of this article suggest that adolescent behavior is shaped by a complex interaction of peer influence, family dynamics, and socioeconomic factors. Schools, families, and communities must work together to create supportive environments that reduce negative peer pressure and promote positive development. The findings highlight the need for targeted

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interventions such as peer counseling, parental involvement, and school-based programs to guide adolescents toward healthier decision-making and academic engagement.

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