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Peer relations and peer pressure in an educational context

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Abstract: The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education." - Martin Luther King Jr.

"Peer relationships play an important role in children's school lives, and relationships with peers become even more influential as children enter adolescence. Research on positive peer relationships often distinguishes between friendship and peer acceptance. High-quality friendships involve not only companionship, but also caring, validation, and support. Peer relations refer to the interactions and relationships that students have with their classmates and other peers in school. Peer pressure refers to the influence that peers can have on each other to do or not do certain things, such as studying, cheating, drinking, or bullying. Peer relations and peer pressure can have both positive and negative effects on students. On the positive side, peer relations can provide students with social support, companionship, validation, and learning opportunities. Peer pressure can also motivate students to work hard, cooperate, and follow norms and values. On the negative side, peer relations can create conflicts, competition, isolation, and rejection. Peer pressure can also lead to conformity, deviance, risk-taking, and low self-esteem.

This research paper describe about the peer relations and peer pressure in the educational context because they can affect students' academic performance, social development, and well-being. Therefore, it is important for educators and parents to understand the dynamics of peer relations and peer pressure in school and how they can help students cope with them

Key Words: : Peer relationships, adolescence, validation, self-esteem, academic performance, interactions .

As children become adolescents, they usually begin spending more time with their peers and less time with their families, and these peer interactions are increasingly unsupervised by adults. Children's notions of friendship often focus on shared activities, whereas adolescents' notions of friendship increasingly focus on intimate exchanges of thoughts and feelings. Peer relationships provide a unique context in which children learn a range of critical social emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving strategies. Peer relationships can also contribute negatively to social emotional development through bullying, exclusion, and deviant peer processes.

Peers- As children become adolescents, they usually begin spending more time with their peers and less time with their families, and these peer interactions are increasingly unsupervised by adults. Children's notions of friendship often focus on shared activities, whereas adolescents' notions of friendship increasingly focus on intimate exchanges of thoughts and feelings. During adolescence, peer groups evolve from primarily single-sex to mixed-sex. Adolescents within a peer group tend to be similar to one another in behaviour and attitudes, which has been explained as a function of homophily, that is, adolescents who are similar to one another choose to spend time together in a "birds of a feather flock together" way. Adolescents who spend time together also shape each other's behaviour and attitudes.

Peers can serve both positive and negative functions during adolescence. Negative peer pressure can lead adolescents to make riskier decisions or engage in more problematic behaviour than they would alone or in the presence of their family. For example, adolescents are much more likely to drink alcohol, use drugs, and commit crimes when they are with their friends than when they are alone or with their family. One of the most widely studied aspects of adolescent peer influence is known as deviant peer contagion (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011), which is the process by which peers reinforce problem behaviour by laughing or showing other signs of approval that then increase the likelihood of future problem behaviour.

Importance of Peer Relations- When children move into adolescence, the prominence of peers becomes more salient in their daily lives. Adolescents gradually shift their attention from parents toward peers, yielding peer relations as a domain that becomes increasingly important for support and companionship, and adolescents' social and mental development. The increased salience of peers is shown by the extent to which adolescents spend time with peers. In general, adolescents spend double or triple as much time with peers than with parents or other adults. For example, in the United States adolescents spend 50% of their time with peers and approximately 15% of their time with adults. This difference in time spending can partially be explained by daily, prescribed activities, particularly attending school in the proximity of peers, and results in age segregation and gives rise to the development of a distinct peer culture, independent from the adult world.

Peers are a pervasive aspect of our social life. They entail a broad range of people who surround us in our everyday lives from

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early childhood until old age. Members of the same classroom, community, work or sports team constitute important and highly salient peer group contexts. In addition, we seek and maintain a number of dyadic relationships with peers, such as with a close friend, an acquaintance, a flat mate, a colleague, a fellow-student, or a neighbour.

Peer and Friends- children develop their social abilities and make their first friendships early, and these early relationships can significantly influence a child's social development and general well-being. As kids enter puberty, peer networks take on increased significance. Adolescents frequently seek assistance, approval, and guidance from their peers. The morals, convictions, and conduct of their peers may also have an impact on them. This can have a good effect, like when peers support academic success or healthy habits. It can also have a negative impact, like when peers participate in unsafe or damaging behaviours.

What is Peer Relationship- Peer interactions serve a significant and formative role in children's social skill development. Children learn to divert their ego-centric interests into channels that support the interests of their peer group and therefore shift from self to other-centeredness. Peer interactions and disagreements are crucial circumstances for a youngster to learn to accept the viewpoint of another. During such encounters, the youngster learns to question his or her claims. This peer group experience is required to break down the child's egocentrism and force him to examine opinions other than his own. As children develop their role-playing talents, they begin to engage in social behaviours that include others, such as teamwork, cooperation, conversation, and planning with others. Peer engagement is essential for the development of role-taking abilities. The more a youngster participates in a social group, the more developed his social skills are and the more likely he is to be popular among his classmates. Peer interactions have a significant impact on children's social skills. Peer connections and friendships develop from childhood through puberty. Interactions become more complicated and social as people become older. Although even very young children have friends and acquaintances, the gap between a close friend and a member of the greater population becomes increasingly pronounced as the kid grows older.

Friendships: A Necessity- Applied research on the importance of friendship and peer groups in children has shown that these relationships significantly impact a child's development. For example, research has found that children with close friends are more likely to have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and a stronger sense of identity. They are also less likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Regarding peer groups, research has shown that children their peer group accepts are more likely to have positive social and emotional outcomes. They are more likely to have higher self-esteem and social competence and are less likely to engage in risky or harmful behaviours.

This continues to be true even in adulthood. Applied research on the importance of friendship and peer groups in adults has shown that these relationships are important to healthy development and well-being. For example, research has found that individuals with close friends are more likely to have better mental health, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. They are also more likely to have higher self-esteem and a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment in life. In terms of peer groups, research has shown that adults their peer group accepts are more likely to have positive outcomes. They are more likely to have higher job satisfaction, better physical health, and a greater sense of social support. Research suggests that friendships are necessary for several reasons. Some of the key benefits of having close friends include:

Emotional support- Friends provide emotional support during stress, illness, or loss. They can listen, offer advice, and provide comfort and understanding.

Social connections- Friends help individuals feel connected and valued. They provide a sense of belonging and can help reduce loneliness and isolation.

Improved mental health- Having close friends has been linked to better mental health, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. Friends can help individuals cope with stress and provide emotional support during difficult times.

Increased well-being- Friendships have been linked to increased well-being and happiness. They can provide opportunities for fun and enjoyment and help individuals feel more fulfilled and satisfied with their lives.

Improved physical health- Research has shown that individuals with strong social support networks, including close friends, have better physical health. They may have lower blood pressure, a stronger immune system, and a reduced risk of chronic illness.

Social Influence- "People care about what others think across all different age groups-and that influences how much they value different ideas and behaviours," says Dr. Emily Falk at the University of Pennsylvania. She studies how social networks affect decision making. This is called social, or peer, influence. Teens are especially responsive to peer influence. That's because their brains undergo changes that make them highly attuned to social situations. At the same time, the reward



system in the teen brain becomes extra sensitive.

Peer Quality, Not Quantity- Positive and negative peer influences can affect more than just your behaviour. They can also change the way you feel. Studies show that, in general, the more friends you have and the more time you spend with them, the happier you are. Friends give you people to share your feelings with, to get new perspectives from, or to just do fun activities with. Friendships you feel you want to let go of may be low quality. They might be fraught with conflict, criticism, and aggression. For youth, low quality friendships are linked to poor academic performance and behavioural issues. Spending time with friends can be especially helpful for people with anxiety or depression. However, Schwartz-Mette's studies have shown that depression can also be worsened by certain friendship qualities. One is called co-rumination. "Co-rumination is basically when people get together and talk excessively about everything that's going wrong and how bad they feel," she explains. "With that person, they feel understood, validated, and that this person is emotionally close to them. But they get more depressed because they're focusing their attention on negative things." Research suggests that it may help to refocus such friendships. Talk about both positive and negative things in your day. Look for healthy activities to get out and do together, like going for a walk. Encourage each other to keep up healthy habits like physical activity, healthy eating, and getting a good night's sleep.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS- Focus on teaching and modelling social and emotional learning strategies that encourage reflection and self-awareness-

Encourage students to consider how individual actions and words have consequences. Through various modelling opportunities, assist in developing students' ability to take different perspectives and viewpoints. Teach students to think through situations and/or challenges by rehearsing various outcomes (Quinn et al., 2000)

Teach problem-solving and conflict resolution skills.

Many students with behavioural disorders have deficits in executive functioning skills and require step-by-step instruction in problem-solving activities. Teachers and parents should take the role of a coach and assist students in a problem-solving process. Teach students and children to identify the problem and brainstorm various solutions and identify the solution he or she will use (Steadly, Schwartz, Levin, & Luke, 2011)

Create opportunities to practice effective social skills both individually and in groups. Model effective social skills in the classroom and at home through praise, positive reinforcement and correction and redirection of inappropriate behaviours. Provide role-play scenarios that build social skills (Quinn et al., 2000)

Practice and model good communication skills, in school and at home. Provide opportunities to practice effective communication skills and model to students/children how to listen to others and waiting to talk, taking turns in a conversation, suggesting an idea, providing praise to others, saying thank-you and apologizing. Communication skills can be taught through role play, games, and practice.

Peer pressure- Peer pressure is the direct or indirect influence on peers, i.e., members of social groups with similar interests, experiences, or social statuses. Members of a peer group are more likely to influence a person's beliefs, values, and behaviour. Peer pressure can be spoken or unspoken, direct or indirect, and positive or negative. For example:

Spoken peer pressure is when someone verbally influences another person to do something. For instance, a friend might say, "Come on, just try it once" to persuade someone to smoke a cigarette.

- * Unspoken peer pressure is when no one verbally influences another person, but there is still a standard set by the group to behave in a certain way. For instance, a person might feel pressured to wear certain clothes or listen to certain music because it seems like everyone else does.
- * Direct peer pressure is when a person uses verbal or nonverbal cues to persuade someone to do something. For instance, a person might hand another person a drink or a drug and expect them to take it.
- * Indirect peer pressure is when no one singles out another person, but the environment they are in may influence them to do something. For instance, a person might feel pressured to drink alcohol at a party where everyone else is drinking.
- * Positive peer pressure is when a person is influenced by others to engage in a beneficial or productive behaviour. For instance, a person might be encouraged by their peers to study hard, exercise regularly, or volunteer for a good cause.
- * Negative peer pressure is when a person is influenced by others to do something they wouldn't normally do or don't want to do as a way of fitting in with a social group. For instance, a person might be pressured by their peers to drink alcohol, do drugs, or have sex.



Peer pressure can have various effects on people depending on their personality, age, situation, and goals. Some people may resist peer pressure and stick to their own values and preferences. Others may succumb to peer pressure and conform to the expectations of their peers. Peer pressure can affect people's self-esteem, health, relationships, and academic performance. Peer pressure can also lead to addiction if people start using substances or engaging in behaviours that are harmful or addictive. Therefore, it is important for people to be aware of the sources and types of peer pressure they may face and how they can cope with it. Some strategies for coping with peer pressure are:

- Knowing your own values and goals and being confident in yourself
- Choosing your friends wisely and avoiding people who are negative or harmful
- Saying no firmly and politely when you don't want to do something
- Seeking support from trusted adults, family members, or friends when you feel pressured
- Finding positive alternatives to negative behaviours.
- Educating yourself about the risks and consequences of substance use and other risky behaviours.

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Importance of peer group for education of students- Peer groups are groups of people who share similar characteristics, such as age, status, interests, or goals. Peer groups are important for education because they can influence students' learning, behaviour, and development in various ways. Some of the benefits of peer groups are:

- They provide socialization and emotional support for students, helping them cope with stress, develop friendships, and express themselves.
- They enhance cognitive and academic skills by allowing students to teach and learn from each other, practice problem-solving, and apply their knowledge in different contexts.
- They foster moral and ethical values by exposing students to different perspectives, opinions, and norms, and by encouraging



them to cooperate, respect, and empathize with others.

- They prepare students for future roles in society by developing their teamwork, communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills. However, peer groups can also have some negative effects on education if they are not well-managed or supervised by teachers or parents. Some of the drawbacks of peer groups are:

- They can create peer pressure and conformity that may discourage students from pursuing their own interests, goals, or values

- They can lead to negative behaviours such as bullying, cheating, substance abuse, or violence if they are influenced by deviant or antisocial peers.

- They can cause academic underachievement or dropout if they distract students from their studies or lower their expectations or motivation. Therefore, it is important for educators and parents to monitor and guide students' peer interactions and provide them with positive and constructive feedback. Peer groups can be a valuable resource for education if they are used wisely and effectively.

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