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Dr. Shalini Soni
Assistant Professor,
Department of Psychology,
Govt. P.G. College, Noida,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Graduate students' experiences with peer pressure and coping strategies: A psychological study

Dr. Shalini Soni

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Abstract

'Peer pressure' denotes the influence that peers (individuals of comparable age or status) can wield on an individual's feeling, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. It can have significant impact on adolescents in various way, often guiding their choices and behavior based on the desire to conform to their social group. Psychological research on peer pressure has delved into the fact that this influence can materialize in both favorable and adverse ways. This paper explores the phenomenon of peer pressure and its notable impact on the decision-making processes of graduate students.

Keywords: Peer pressure, decision making process, coping strategies

Introduction

'Peer pressure' denotes the influence that peers can exert on an individual's cognitive processes, attitudes, emotions, and behavioral patterns. It can wield a substantial impact on adolescents, molding their behaviors, attitudes, and decisions in various ways, often compelling them to align their choices and behaviors with the aim of adhering to their social circle. Can significantly impact an individual's development and decision-making processes. Psychological studies on peer pressure have explored that this influence can manifest itself in both favorable and detrimental ways. While it is often associated with negative connotations, such as influencing risky behaviors or encouraging conformity, peer pressure can also have positive effects. Positive peer pressure can motivate individuals to strive for personal growth, adopt healthy habits, and pursue constructive goals. This form of influence can foster a sense of community, support, and encouragement within social circles, leading to mutual empowerment and growth.

Peer pressure can be seen mainly in two forms: direct and indirect. Direct peer pressure involves explicit requests from peers to engage in specific behaviors and verbal persuasion through convincing arguments or emotional appeals. In contrast, indirect peer pressure occurs through social norms, where individuals conform to the prevalent attitudes and behaviors within their peer group without direct pressure, and through implied expectations, where there is a sense of needing to act in certain ways to fit in or gain approval based on unspoken group norms.

Moreover, understanding the dynamics of peer pressure is crucial for adolescents navigating their social environments. Building a strong sense of self-awareness and confidence can empower adolescent to resist negative peer pressure and cultivate relationships based on mutual respect and support. Ultimately, by fostering a positive and empowering social environment, individuals can harness the potential of peer influence to enhance their well-being and personal growth.

Literature Review:

Research by psychologists on peer pressure has explored various dimensions of its impact on behavior, decision-making, and social development. Result of research done by Steinberg, L., & Monahan, K. C. (2007) ^[7] shows that across all demographic groups, resistance to peer influences increases linearly between ages 14 and 18. In contrast, there is little evidence for growth in this capacity between ages 10 and 14 or between 18 and 30.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Shalini Soni
Assistant Professor,
Department of Psychology,
Govt. P.G. College, Noida,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Middle adolescence is an especially significant period for the development of the capacity to stand up for what one believes and resist the pressures of one's peers to do otherwise.

In the stage of development, an adolescent becomes less tolerant and he or she becomes more dependent on others (Glaser, Shelton & Bree, 2010) [4]. Peers become increasingly important socializing agents during adolescence (Ryan, 2000) [6]. A teenager is completely conscious of what his friends think about him. How do they evaluate him? If he finds himself, not popular among his peers he will be full of tension (Bhargava, 1987) [2].

If we want to examine, the major developmental tasks which confront boys and girls in late childhood, during pubescence, and in later adolescence, it would become apparent that many of these can only reach a satisfactory solution by boys and girls through the medium of their peer groups. It is in this group that by doing they learn about the social processes of our culture. They classify their sex roles by acting and being responded to, they learn competitions, cooperations social skills, values and purposes by sharing the common life (Tryon, 1944) [9].

If we talk about its negative aspect peers have a direct influence in adolescent's involvement in risk behaviours whilst the positive influence is more connected with protective behaviours (Tome, G. *et al.*, 2017) [8].

Padilla, Walker & Bean (2009) [5], Tome, Matos & Diniz (2008) found in their studies that peer-pressure may strongly determine many areas of adolescent's life such as dressing preference, talking and clothing style, substance abuse, sexual behaviour, adopting and accepting violent behaviour, learning criminal and anti-social behaviour etc.

Jason Chein, Dustin Albert and all (2011) [3] explored in their study that the presence of peers increases adolescent risk taking by heightening sensitivity to the potential reward value of risky decisions.

Aditi Acharya and Dr O. P. Gupta (2014) [1] in their survey had found a positive relationship between peers using a brand or favoring a brand and the consumer switching to that brand. Their study also revealed that sharing of brand opinions was correlated with brand switching, thereby reinforcing the strength of peer pressure.

The literature indicates that peer groups play an important role in adolescent development, serving as a primary source of socialization and identity formation.

Objectives of the study

This research study aimed to highlight the phenomenon of peer pressure and its notable impact on the decision-making processes of graduate students. The objectives of this paper are threefold:

1. To survey the positive and negative impact of peer pressure in decision making in male and female graduate students.
2. To explore and analyze male and female graduate student's perception and view about peer pressure, gaining insights into how they experience these social dynamics.
3. To study the coping strategies employed by male and female graduate students to manage peer pressure.

Methodology

Sample: The sample comprised 46 male and 54 female graduate students studying in Delhi NCR. These students were studying in second year of their graduation course of arts, commerce and science faculty.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

As the study focused on collecting data from graduate students on peer pressure and coping strategies to deal with it. Questions were put in a google form. The link to the google form was shared with graduation students studying in second year. Researcher incorporated questions specific to the positive and negative impact of peer pressure and coping strategies to deal with peer pressure. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions. A frequency count was done to analyse the responses to the questions.

Finding and Discussion

Data collected from 100 graduate students was analyzed, and finding have been encapsulated in the following paragraphs.

1. Importance to fit in with peer group

Gender-wise Percentage distribution of responses of importance to fit in peer.

Table 1: How important is it for you to fit in with your peer?

	Extremely Important	Moderate Important	Slightly Important	Not important at all
Male	21.74%	39.13%	21.74%	17.39%
Female	23.26%	37.21%	34.88%	4.65%
Total	22.73%	37.88%	30.30%	9.09%

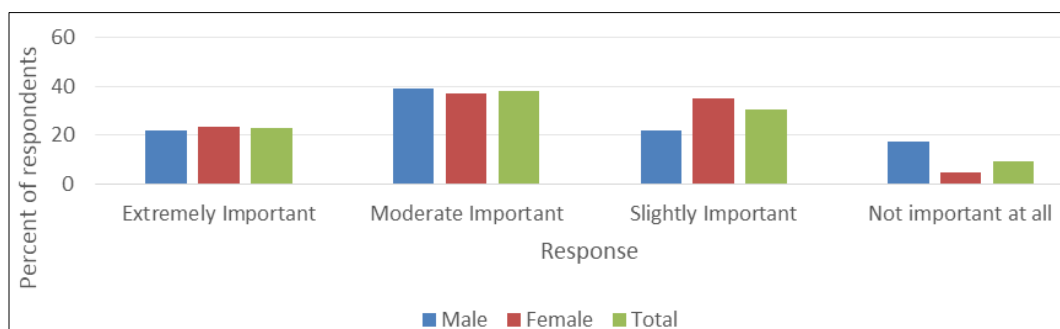


Fig 1: How important is it for you to fit in with your peer?

The data presented in Table-1 and Fig. 1, illustrates the varying perceptions of the importance of fitting in with peers across genders. Among male’s students, 21.74% consider fitting in to be extremely important, while a larger portion, 39.13% view it as moderately important. Interestingly, a significant percentage (21.74%) of males also find it slightly important and 17.39% feel that it is not important at all. In contrast, female respondents show a slightly higher inclination towards the extreme importance of fitting in, with 23.26% rating it as such. A notable (37.88%) classify it as slightly important, while a larger proportion (34.88%) classify it as slightly important. Only 4.65% of females felt fitting in to be not important at all. Overall, the indicates that both genders generally prioritize fitting in to some extent, but females demonstrate a higher tendency to place it within the slightly important category,

whereas males exhibit a greater proportion of indifference, particularly in the ‘not important at all’ category. This disparity suggests differing social pressures or values related to peer acceptance between the genders.

Gender-wise Percentage distribution of responses on frequency of feeling peer pressure even when they were not comfortable with table 2

Table 2: How often you feel peer pressure to do something, even when you are not comfortable with?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Male	8.70%	21.74%	47.83%	17.39%
Female	11.63%	16.28%	53.49%	20.93%
Total	10.61%	18.18%	51.52%	19.70%

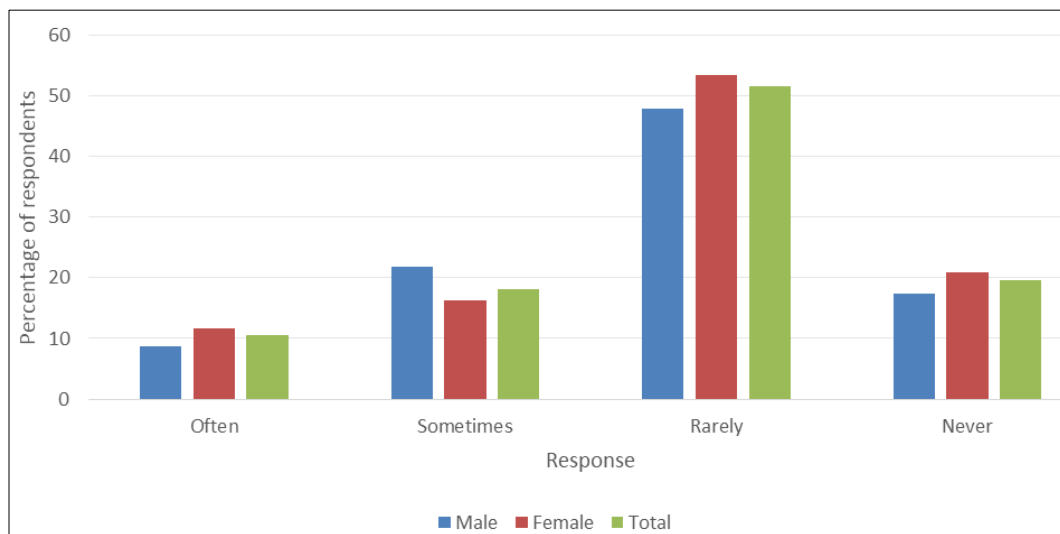


Fig 2: How often you feel peer pressure to do something, even when you are not comfortable with?

Table-2 & Fig. 2, examines the frequency of experiencing peer pressure among respondents, distinguishing between males and females. The results indicate that 8.70% of males feel peer pressure to engage in uncomfortable activities often, while a larger segment, 21.74%, reports feeling this pressure sometimes. Notably, 47.83% of males claim to experience it rarely, and 17.39% assert they never feel such pressure. In comparison, female respondents report slightly higher frequencies, with 11.63% feeling peer pressure often and 16.28% sometimes. A significant majority of females, 53.49%, say they experience peer pressure rarely, while 20.93% state they never feel it. Overall, the data reveals that while both genders encounter peer pressure, males tend to experience it less frequently,

particularly in the "often" category. Females, while also indicating a majority experiencing it rarely, report a higher incidence of feeling peer pressure compared to their male counterparts, especially in the “often” and “sometimes” categories. This suggests that females may be more susceptible to social influences or feel the pressure to conform in various situations, highlighting potential differences in social dynamics and the impact of peer relationships across genders.

Gender-wise Percentage distribution of responses on participation in activity under peer pressure

Table 3: Under peer pressure, mostly which type of activity do you participate in?

	Male	Female	Total
Skipping school or class	30.43%	23.26%	25.76%
Testing or bullying others	13.04%	9.30%	10.61%
Academic cheating	8.70%	11.63%	10.61%
Trying alcohol/smoking/ drug etc	34.78%	9.30%	18.18%
Participating in risky/dangerous activities	8.70%	2.33%	4.55%
More focus on appearance/fashion	4.35%	20.93%	15.15%
Hanging out with friends	21.74%	4.65%	10.61%
Academic Participation	8.70%	2.33%	4.55%

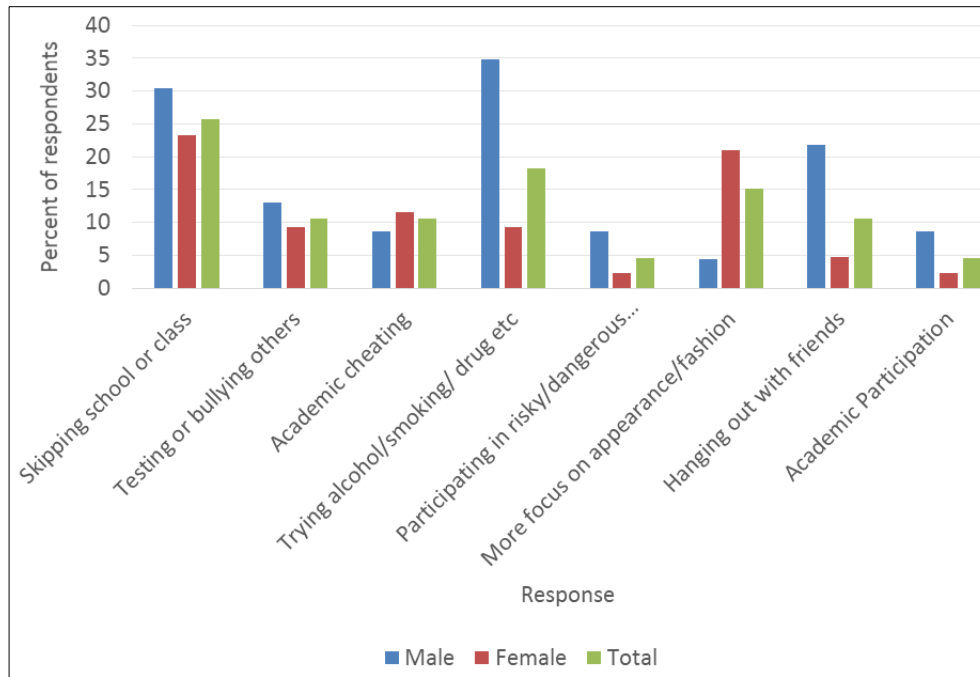


Fig 3: Under peer pressure, mostly which type of activity do you participate in?

Table-3 & Fig.3, outlines the types of activities respondents participate in under peer pressure, differentiating between males and females. The data reveals distinct patterns in behavior influenced by social pressures. Among male respondents, the most common activity is trying alcohol, smoking, or using drugs, with a notable 34.78% indicating engagement in this behavior. Following this, 30.43% report skipping school or class, highlighting a significant tendency towards avoidance of academic responsibilities. Males also engage in hanging out with friends (21.74%) and testing or bullying others (13.04%), while academic cheating is reported by 8.70%. Additionally, 8.70% participate in risky or dangerous activities, and the least reported behavior is academic participation at 8.70%, with a mere 4.35% concerned with appearance or fashion.

In contrast, female respondents show different priorities. The highest percentage, 23.26%, indicate that they skip

school or class, followed by a more modest 20.93% focusing on appearance and fashion. Only 9.30% of females report trying alcohol or smoking, significantly lower than their male counterparts. Academic cheating is slightly more prevalent among females (11.63%), while testing or bullying others is less common (9.30%). Notably, very few females (2.33%) engage in risky activities, and similarly, only 2.33% report academic participation.

Overall, the data illustrates that males are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors under peer pressure, particularly related to substance use, while females are more inclined to prioritize social dynamics, such as appearance and fashion.

Gender-wise Percentage distribution of responses on often influence on decisions making by friends

Table 4: Does pressure by your friends often influence your decisions?

	Response in 'Yes'	Response in 'No'
Male	60.70%	39.13%
Female	53.49%	46.51%
Total	56.06%	43.94%

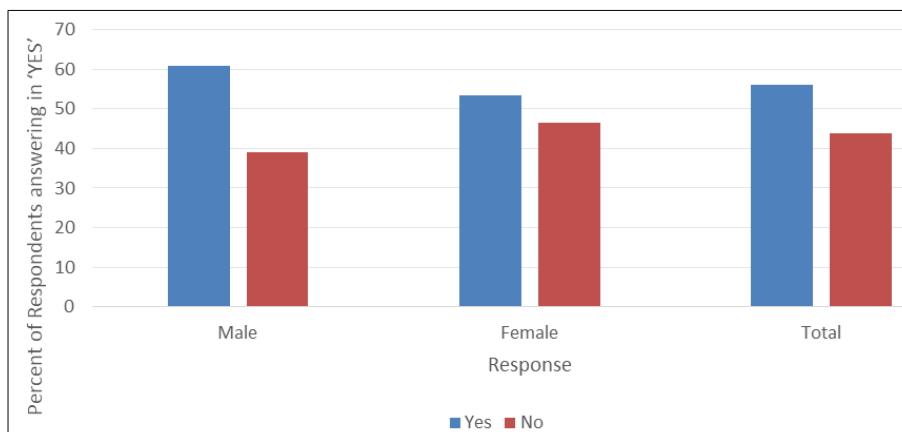


Fig 4: Does pressure by your friends often influence your decisions?

Table-4 & Fig. 4, explores the influence of peer pressure on decision-making among respondents, categorized by gender. The results indicate that a majority of males (60.70%) affirm that pressure from friends often influences their decisions, suggesting a significant susceptibility to social influence. Conversely, 39.13% of male respondents indicate that such pressure does not impact their choices. In comparison, female respondents exhibit a slightly lower, yet still substantial, acknowledgment of peer influence, with 53.49% stating that friends' pressure often affects their decisions. A notable 46.51% of females, however, feel that peer pressure does not play a role in their decision-making processes.

Overall, the data reveals that both genders experience peer pressure, but males report a higher tendency to be influenced by their friends. This suggests a greater reliance on social validation in decision-making among males, while females show a more balanced perspective, with nearly half asserting independence from such pressures. This dynamic underscores the complexities of social relationships and the varying degrees to which peer influence impacts individuals based on gender.

Gender-wise Percentage distribution of responses on strategies for coping with peer pressure

Table 5: Usually which of the following strategies do you use to cope or deal with peer pressure?

	Seeking support of elders	Talking to trusted person	Engaged in hobbies	Learn to say 'No'	Practice self-affirmation	Not sure
Male	13.04%	26.09%	17.39%	17.39%	21.74%	4.35%
Female	16.30%	20.93%	30.23%	11.63%	16.28%	4.65%
Total	15.15%	22.73%	25.76%	13.64%	18.18%	4.55%

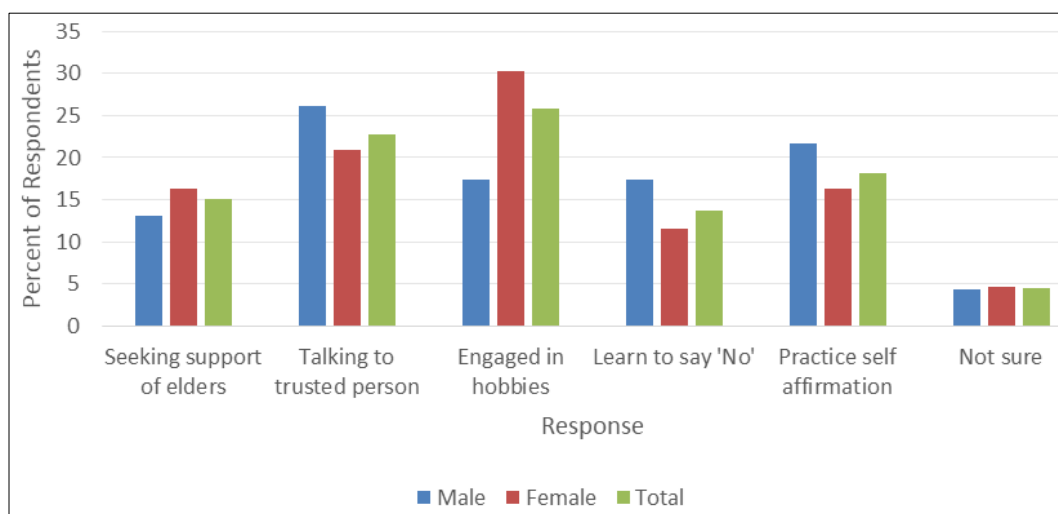


Fig 5: Usually which of the following strategies do you use to cope or deal with peer pressure?

Table-5 & Fig.5, outlines the coping strategies employed by respondents to deal with peer pressure, highlighting both male and female perspectives. Among males, 13.04% seek the support of elders, while a higher percentage, 26.09%, prefer talking to a trusted person. Engaging in hobbies is chosen by 17.39% of males, with an equal percentage (17.39%) indicating they practice saying "no." Additionally, 21.74% of males utilize self-affirmation as a strategy, and 4.35% are uncertain about their coping methods. In contrast, female respondents exhibit slightly different preferences. A larger proportion, 16.30%, seek support from elders, while 20.93% talk to trusted individuals. Notably, a significant 30.23% of females engage in hobbies as a coping mechanism, the highest percentage among all strategies

listed. Only 11.63% of females reported using the strategy of saying "no," and 16.28% practice self-affirmation, with 4.65% expressing uncertainty.

Overall, the data indicates that both genders employ a variety of strategies to cope with peer pressure, though their preferences differ. Males lean more towards self-affirmation and seeking support from trusted individuals, while females favor engaging in hobbies as their primary coping strategy. The tendency for females to engage more in hobbies may suggest a greater emphasis on personal interests as a means of resisting peer influence.

Gender-wise Percentage distribution of responses on effectiveness of adopted peer pressure coping strategy

Table 6: According to your experience, what was the effectiveness level of peer-pressure coping strategies adopted by you?

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Average effective	Slightly effective	Not effective
Male	8.70	34.78	34.78	13.04	8.70
Female	4.65	30.23	32.56	23.26	9.30
Total	6.06	31.82	33.33	19.70	9.09

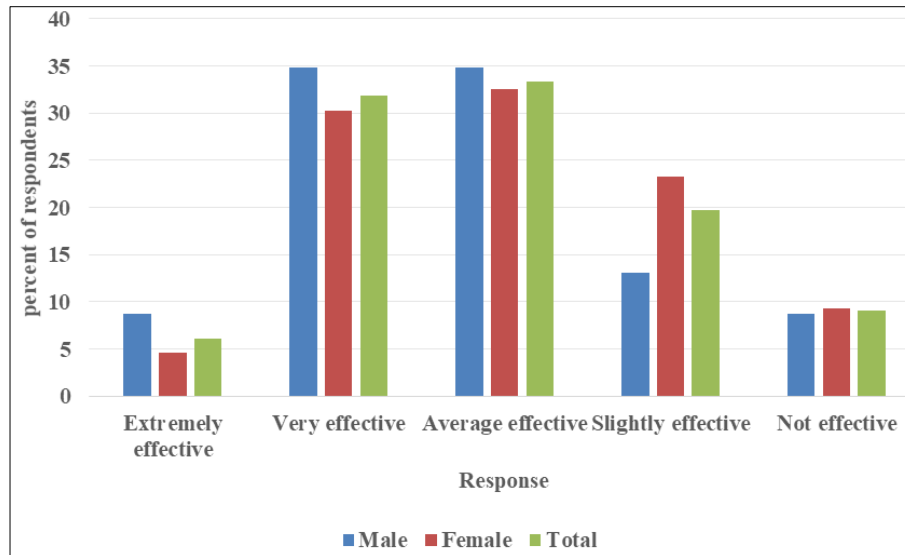


Fig 6: According to your experience, what was the effectiveness level of peer-pressure coping strategies adopted by you?

Table-6 & Fig. 6, presents the perceived effectiveness of various coping strategies for managing peer pressure, with responses categorized by gender. Among male respondents, 8.70% rate their coping strategies as extremely effective, while a larger portion, 34.78%, considers them very effective. Another 34.78% find their strategies to be average in effectiveness. Additionally, 13.04% of males describe their strategies as slightly effective, and 8.70% deem them not effective at all.

In comparison, female respondents show slightly different perceptions of effectiveness. Only 4.65% rate their strategies as extremely effective, while 30.23% view them as very effective. A similar 32.56% find their strategies to be average, but a higher percentage than males, 23.26%, categorize their strategies as slightly effective. Furthermore, 9.30% of females consider their strategies not effective.

The data indicates that both genders generally perceive their coping strategies to be effective, with a significant number of respondents rating them as very effective or average. Males appear to have a slightly higher confidence in their strategies, particularly in the "very effective" category. In contrast, females express a greater tendency to view their strategies as slightly effective.

Conclusion

The data illustrates differing perceptions of the importance of fitting in with peers across genders, showing that a higher percentage of female students consider it extremely important compared to their male counterparts. It indicates that females may be more influenced by social pressures and feel a stronger need to conform, revealing notable differences in social dynamics between genders.

Males are more prone to engaging in high-risk behaviors, especially regarding substance use, while females tend to focus on social factors like appearance and fashion. These differences may highlight the varying ways in which peer pressure manifests across genders, reflecting underlying social influences and expectations.

Although both genders experience peer pressure in decision making, males show a greater reliance on social validation, whereas almost half of females express a degree of independence from such influences.

In terms of coping strategies, males often utilize self-affirmation and seek support from trusted individuals, while

females are more likely to engage in hobbies. Overall, both genders generally perceive their coping strategies as effective; however, females tend to rate their strategies as only slightly effective, which may reflect varying expectations and experiences with peer pressure.

It is very much clear that for managing peer pressure, adolescents can adopt some key strategies such as encouraging open communication with trusted adults or friends, building confidence and self-esteem, staying true to oneself, learning to say no respectfully, and fostering healthy friendships. These approaches empower adolescents to resist negative influences and make decisions that align with their values, ultimately guiding them through this challenging phase of life.

Above all, being a confident individual, every adolescent and young adult should take care of what they are interested in by listening their inner voice. They should develop awareness by understanding their values and recognizing triggers they have to realize that they will be responsible for their own activities so they should do what make them happy and successful ahead.

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