



Influence of Peer Pressure on Decision Making Among Young Adults

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Abstract: *This study examines the influence of peer pressure on decision-making among young adults aged 18–25 years. Peer groups play a significant role in shaping behaviours and choices during young adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by identity formation and social belonging. Increasingly, young individuals may experience pressure to conform to peer expectations, which can affect their judgment and lead to maladaptive decisions. A cross-sectional research design was employed to investigate the relationship between peer pressure and decision-making styles. Data were collected from young adults using the Peer Pressure Questionnaire and the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire. Product moment correlation, independent samples *t* - tests and one-way ANOVA were used to assess the level of peer influence and patterns of decision-making among participants. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between peer pressure and vigilance ($r = -.236, p < .05$), indicating that higher peer pressure was associated with lower vigilant decision-making. However, peer pressure was not significantly related to buck-passing, procrastination, hypervigilance, or overall decision-making ability. Independent samples *t*-test showed no significant gender differences in peer pressure or any decision-making dimensions ($p > .05$). One-way ANOVA results indicated no significant differences based on domicile (rural, urban, semi-urban) in peer pressure or decision-making styles ($p > .05$). Overall, peer pressure demonstrated a limited but specific influence on decision-making, primarily affecting vigilance, while gender and domicile showed no significant impact.*

Keywords: *Peer Pressure, Decision Making, Young Adults.*

Introduction: Peers are among the most salient influences on an individual's behavior during the transition from childhood to adolescence (Rafferty et al., 2020). Peer pressure refers to the influence exerted by peers to conform to certain norms, behaviors, attitudes, or values within a group or social context (Bierman, 2004). Peer pressure is a pervasive social phenomenon that significantly influences the lives of adults (Buckingham, 2007). Peer pressure exerts a substantial influence on the lives of teenagers, often leading to significant consequences (Way & Chu, 2004). Peer pressure is a significant psychosocial factor influencing adolescent and young adult behavior across cultures. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that peer influence plays a central role in shaping decision-making, risk-taking behaviors, academic performance, and mental health outcomes (Steinberg, L. 2008).

Decision making refers to the cognitive and behavioral process through which individuals select a course of action from multiple alternatives. It involves evaluating information, assessing potential consequences, and

choosing responses based on personal goals, beliefs, and environmental influences (Mann et al., 1997). In adolescence and early adulthood, decision making is particularly significant because individuals frequently encounter novel social, academic, and personal challenges that require independent judgment.

Empirical research indicates that adolescents often demonstrate variability in decision-making competence due to ongoing cognitive and psychosocial development. Neurodevelopmental evidence suggests that the maturation of executive control systems continues into early adulthood, influencing impulse control and risk evaluation (Steinberg, 2008). Consequently, adolescents may be more susceptible to emotional or peer-driven influences during high-pressure situations.

The present study measures decision making using the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire (MDMQ), developed to assess individual differences in decision-making styles based on Janis and Mann's theoretical framework (Mann et al., 1997). The MDMQ evaluates four primary dimensions: vigilance, procrastination, buck-passing, and hypervigilance. Research has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and construct validity of the instrument across diverse cultural contexts (Mann et al., 1997). Higher vigilance scores are generally associated with adaptive functioning, whereas higher scores on procrastination, buck-passing, and hypervigilance reflect less effective decision-making patterns.

The Study examines the interplay between decision-making, peer pressure, and conformity during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. It highlights the psychological factors influencing decision-making, particularly the human need for social acceptance and fear of rejection. Adolescent decision-making is complex, influenced by social factors, verbal models, and developmental changes. Conformity, driven by the desire for social acceptance, plays a significant role in group settings. Understanding these intricacies helps to mitigate the impact of negative peer pressure and foster positive decision-making (Bierman, 2004)

High peer influence has been linked to increased engagement in risk-taking behaviors such as substance use and unsafe practices, as adolescents often conform to peer norms to seek acceptance and approval. Furthermore, peer social dynamics influence not only risk behavior, but also decision outcomes across academic and social domains (Seema, 2025; Shamsie, 2024). Experimental studies have shown that the mere presence of peers can increase risky decision preference among young adults compared to when they are alone (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). Research reviews also highlight that peer pressure can foster both adaptive and maladaptive behaviors depending on context, suggesting that peer influence can sometimes promote exploration and prosocial engagement (Neuroimaging Peer Influence Review, 2016). Overall, peer pressure is characterized as a complex psychosocial force that shapes decision-making processes and risk tendencies among youth.

Psychological research has identified distinct decision-making styles, often rooted in Janis and Mann's conflict theory, such as vigilant (rational) and non-vigilant (e.g., hypervigilance, procrastination, buck-passing) styles (Mann et al., 1997; Cardona-Isaza et al., 2021). These styles reflect how individuals cope with decisional conflict and stress, with rational styles associated with systematic evaluation of options and non-vigilant styles linked to avoidance or anxiety-driven responses. In adolescent samples, psychometric evaluations of the Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire (MDMQ) demonstrate that the instrument reliably distinguishes these styles and relates them to emotional and social outcomes; rational decision making correlates with emotional stability and prosocial behaviors, while maladaptive styles align with cognitive distortions and antisocial tendencies (Cardona-Isaza et al., 2021). Comparative research also confirms that the MDMQ captures decision-making constructs similar to other validated measures (e.g., GDMS), reinforcing its utility in decision-making research (Aluja et al., 2024). Thus, decision making is best understood as a multifaceted construct involving cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and coping strategies that influence choice behavior across contexts.

Materials and Methodology

Participants and survey

Distribution of selected sample by gender and area

Area	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Rural	17	21	38
Urban	33	34	67
Semi urban	3	5	8
Total	53	60	113

The total sample of research participants were 113. They were categorized based on their domicile into three groups: rural, urban, and semi-urban. The rural group consisted of 38 individuals, including 21 females and 17 males. The urban group comprised 74 individuals, with 38 females and 36 males. The semi-urban group included 8 participants, evenly split between 5 females and 3 males. Overall, the sample included 64 female and 56 male participants.

A cross-sectional study was carried out involving 113 undergraduate students from Mysore. To measure Influence of Peer Pressure, Peer Pressure Questionnaire revised (Sunil Saini, 2016) was employed, while the Melbourne decision making Questionnaire was used to assess students decision making styles. The sample consisted of 53 male and 60 female students, totalling 113 participants

Measures and Interpretation

Peer Pressure Questionnaire Revised (PPQ-R): Peer pressure was assessed using a standardized self-report measure designed to evaluate the extent to which individuals perceive influence from their peer group in decision-making and behavioral contexts. The scale measures susceptibility to peer conformity. The 25 items on the PPQ-R are meant to measure the different dimensions of peer pressure such as the pressure to conform, the readiness to take risks, and the resistance towards peer pressure. It was developed by (Sunil Saini, 2016). It adopts a variety of research methods, among which the revised Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ-R) is used as the core measurement tool.

PPQ-R is a 25-item self-report scale that assesses peer influences in everyday life situations. It is a 5-point Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale is scored by adding the scores for each of the 25 items. Higher scores indicate greater peer pressure.

It also demonstrates satisfactory concurrent validity of $\alpha = 0.79$, which implies that it is positively associated with measures of peer pressure and self-esteem (The PPQ-R has strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.932).

Which aims to measure an individual's susceptibility to peer pressure. Sample items include "I cannot say NO to my friends even if my parents do not agree," "I know my limits when with friends," and "I find it difficult to escape peer pressure."

This was followed by Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised which was used to assess peer pressure among youth participants.

Melbourne Decision Making Questionnaire (MDMQ): The Melbourne Decision-Making Questionnaire (MDMQ) developed by Mann et al. (1997) was administered. The MDMQ assesses four decision-making styles proposed in conflict theory, which are vigilance, involving a careful, unbiased, thorough, and rational evaluation of alternatives; hypervigilance, characterized by a rushed and anxious approach to decision-making; procrastination, marked by delays in decision-making; and buck-passing, which involves leaving decisions to others and avoiding responsibility. The MDMQ consists of 22 items with three response options: “Very true for me” (score 2), “Somewhat true for me” (score 1), and “Not true for me” (score 0). The range is 0 to 44, with higher scores in a subscale indicating a greater tendency toward that specific style.

This MDMQ has been validated in different languages and cultures. Results regarding internal consistency reliability showed that the MDMQ Bangla version had good internal consistency reliability. Most studies in other cultures and languages found good internal consistency reliability and a split half reliability for the MDMQ subscales and the full scale. The MDMQ demonstrates good internal consistency, with alpha coefficients typically ranging from 0.71 to 0.85 across various studies. It shows good internal consistency (alpha: 0.71–0.85) and validity across cultures, with high scores on vigilance indicating adaptive, careful decision-making.

The MDMQ is composed of four subscales, each related to one of the DM styles described by Janis and Mann’s conflict theory. The vigilance scale, the only one to tap into an adaptive DM style, is composed of six items that describe a thoughtful and cautious approach to DM (e.g., “When making decisions I like to collect a lot of information.”). The procrastination subscale, composed of five items, contains statements such as “Even after I have made a decision I delay acting upon it”. The buck-passing subscale contains six items in total, all referring to a tendency to shift responsibility onto other individuals during situations of DM (e.g., “I prefer that people who are better informed decide for me”). Both procrastination and buck-passing are considered avoidant styles of DM. The last subscale refers to hypervigilance, which leads the individual to seize impulsively and uncritically upon any alternative available in a desperate attempt to end the stress caused by the DM situation (e.g., “I cannot think straight if I have to make a decision in a hurry”).

Research indicates that while vigilance is generally positive, Westerners often score higher on decision self-esteem, whereas East Asian, Middle Eastern, or other samples may show higher scores on avoidant styles (buck-passing/procrastination) depending on the context.

Data Analysis: The data collected from the Peer Pressure and Decision making questionnaires were analysed using various statistical methods. These included a cross tabulation of domicile and gender, frequency distribution tables for both Peer pressure and Decision making, Additional analyses involved Pearson’s correlation to assess relationships between variables, an Independent Samples t-test, for comparing group means. Furthermore, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences, along with ANOVA tests to explore variations both within and between groups.

Table 1: Results of Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation between Peer Pressure and Decision Making

Decision Making		Peer pressure
Vigilance	Pearson Correlation	-.236
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012
	N	113
Buck passing	Pearson Correlation	.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.759
	N	113

Procrastination	Pearson Correlation	.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.236
	N	113
Hyper vigilance	Pearson Correlation	.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.320
	N	113
Decision making	Pearson Correlation	-.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.950
	N	113

The relationship between peer pressure and different dimensions of decision making was examined using Pearson's correlation (N = 113). There was a significant negative correlation between peer pressure and vigilance. This indicates a weak but statistically significant inverse relationship. As peer pressure increases, vigilance in decision-making decreases. Hence, higher peer pressure is associated with lower careful and rational decision-making.

No significant relationships were found between peer pressure and other dimensions of decision making. Peer pressure does not significantly influence buck-passing, procrastination, hypervigilance, or overall decision-making ability.

Table 2: An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in peer pressure and decision-making styles.

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' value	P value
Peer Pressure	Male	55	59.7455	16.02801	-1.182	.240
	Female	59	63.2373	15.51900		
Decision Making	Male	55	23.6667	7.11098	.778	.438
	Female	59	22.4746	8.97382		

There is no significant difference between males and females in peer pressure. There are no statistically significant gender differences in peer pressure or any of the decision-making styles.

Table 3: A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences based on domicile (rural, urban, and semi-urban).

One way Anova	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig
Peer Pressure	113	61.5526	15.79408	.288	.750
Vigilance	113	7.3894	2.73677	.538	.585
Buck-passing	113	15.7500	3.05894	.453	.637
Procrastination	113	4.9646	2.53873	.114	.849
Hyper vigilance	113	5.1239	2.46813	1.749	.179
Total Decision making	113	23.0442	8.12337	.974	.381

There are no statistically significant differences among rural, urban, and semi-urban participants in peer pressure or any decision-making dimensions. Since all p-values are greater than .05, the null hypothesis is retained.

Discussion

Major findings

- Peer pressure is significantly negatively related only to vigilance.
- No significant gender differences were found in peer pressure or decision-making styles.
- No significant domicile differences were found in peer pressure or decision-making styles.
- The overall relationship between peer pressure and total decision-making is not significant.

The results revealed a significant negative relationship between peer pressure and vigilance. This indicates that as peer pressure increases, vigilance decreases. In other words, individuals experiencing higher peer pressure tend to be less careful, systematic, and rational in their decision-making process. This finding suggests that peer influence may reduce independent and thoughtful evaluation of alternatives. When individuals feel pressured by peers, they may make quicker decisions without carefully analysing consequences. This aligns with psychological theories that suggest social pressure can interfere with cognitive processing and rational judgment. However, peer pressure was not significantly related to buck-passing, procrastination, hypervigilance, or total decision-making ability. This implies that peer pressure does not broadly influence all maladaptive decision-making styles. Instead, its effect appears to be specific to reducing vigilance rather than increasing avoidant or impulsive patterns.

The study found no significant gender differences in peer pressure or any dimension of decision-making style. Although females reported slightly higher peer pressure and males showed marginally higher vigilance scores, these differences were not statistically significant. This finding suggests that both male and female participants experience peer pressure similarly and adopt comparable decision-making styles. It indicates that gender may not be a determining factor in how peer influence affects decision-making in the present sample. This could be due to changing social norms where both males and females are equally exposed to social expectations, peer interactions, and academic or social competition.

The ANOVA results showed no significant differences among rural, urban, and semi-urban participants in peer pressure or any decision-making dimensions. This suggests that geographical background does not significantly influence how individuals experience peer pressure or make decisions. One possible explanation is that modernization, digital communication, and social media exposure have minimized traditional rural-urban differences. Young individuals, regardless of domicile, may now be exposed to similar peer environments and social influences.

Overall, the findings indicate that peer pressure has a limited but specific impact on decision-making. It significantly reduces vigilance but does not significantly affect other maladaptive decision-making styles or overall decision-making ability. Additionally, gender and domicile do not appear to play a significant role in influencing peer pressure or decision-making styles in this study. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving decision-making should focus particularly on strengthening independent thinking and rational evaluation skills, especially in contexts where peer influence is strong.

Conclusion: The present study examined the relationship between peer pressure and decision-making styles, along with differences based on gender and domicile. The findings revealed that peer pressure is significantly negatively related only to vigilance. This suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of peer pressure may be less likely to engage in careful, rational, and systematic evaluation of alternatives.

Vigilance, as described in conflict theory, represents adaptive decision making characterized by thoughtful information processing (Janis & Mann, 1977). The negative association found in the present study is consistent with research indicating that peer presence can reduce deliberative processing and increase impulsive or externally influenced choices (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005).

However, the overall relationship between peer pressure and total decision-making styles was not significant. This finding suggests that peer pressure may not uniformly influence all patterns of decision making. Previous literature indicates that peer influence often operates in specific contexts, particularly under conditions involving risk or social evaluation, rather than broadly affecting all decision behaviors (Steinberg, 2008). Therefore, the selective impact on vigilance observed in this study supports the idea that peer influence may interfere primarily with rational decision processes rather than maladaptive coping styles such as procrastination or buck-passing.

The study further found no significant gender differences in peer pressure or decision-making styles. This aligns with research suggesting that although males and females may differ in certain behavioral outcomes, susceptibility to peer influence and decision-making patterns are often comparable across genders (Mann et al., 1997). Similarly, no significant domicile differences were found, indicating that residential background did not significantly shape perceived peer pressure or decision-making tendencies within the sample.

Overall, the findings highlight that peer pressure plays a nuanced and selective role in decision making. While it does not significantly predict overall decision-making styles, it appears to undermine vigilant and rational decision processes. These results emphasize the importance of strengthening independent thinking and critical evaluation skills in environments where peer influence is prevalent.

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