

Dynamics of Self-Regulation, Social Intelligence and Peer Deviance Among Female Undergraduate Students

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Abstract - Peer relations are an essential component of adolescent identity development (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Peer relations can provide a context to learn positive social and emotional skills but can also contribute negatively. The concurrent study explores the dynamics between peer deviance, self-regulation and social intelligence. Purposive sampling was used to obtain data from female undergraduate students between 18-21 years of age. The Independent Samples t-test was used to find if there is any significant difference between deviant behaviour of peers and self-regulation, as well as deviant behaviour of peers and social intelligence, among female undergraduate students, in relation to the sex of their peers. Results indicated the protective effects of self-regulation and social intelligence did not allow peer deviance to have an influence on the female respondents. Differences were found in deviant behaviour if peers belonged to the opposite sex. The future implications could be providing interventions to undergraduate students for building appropriate social identities, in turn, helping them to discover themselves.

Keywords: Peer deviance, self-regulation, social intelligence, female undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is viewed as a period of crisis wherein they experience bodily changes, academic pressures, familial demands and peer pressure (Sanchez-Sandoval & Palacios, 2012). Left unchecked, all these factors can tempt adolescents towards deviance, as they also have a propensity towards risk-taking behaviours. During identity exploration, adolescents may come across numerous conflicts such as inculcating wrong behaviours of significant people in their lives and inappropriately managing problems. Mostly adolescents' rebellion can be addressed by parental authority but if left unchecked, it might lead

to deviance and more serious anti-social acts in the future (Nkhata & Mwale, 2016).

Social acceptance becomes a central factor in the developmentally sensitive period of adolescence. As adolescents pick up and respond to social cues in the environment, they are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure as they put efforts to attain peer acceptance and approval (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Earlier studies have shown that peer influence susceptibility increases during the adolescence transition (Berndt, 1979). Peer deviance is known as the most robust predictor of one's deviance (Pratt et al. 2010).

Bandura (1977) proposed that people learn through modelling. Further research (Akers, 1977) has found that people engage in crime due to their association with others who engage in criminal behaviour. They essentially have criminal models they associate with. There is substantial evidence which suggests that peer relations influence the progress of problematic behaviour among youth. Self-regulation changes over time through social experiences at school, neighbourhood, and the wider community. Self-regulation represents the ability to "actively achieve well-being, inner equilibrium, appropriate stimulation, a feeling of competence and a sense of being able to control stressful situations." (Carey et al. 2004). Parents and peers have a crucial role in the progress and manifestation of antisocial behaviour during adolescence and adulthood. Self-regulation is a main predictor of crime and behaviour. Those lacking in self-regulatory tendencies are more prone to engage in deviant behaviour

(Vazsonyi et al. 2017).

During adolescence, social learning occurs as one tends to imitate the behaviour of the model that seems like oneself. Yet social learning theorists have stressed on the importance of cognition which decides whether

the behaviour is acquired. Social intelligence involves the ability to read and pick up cues from social environment which is linked to social information processing, a facet of social intelligence. One selectively imitates certain models hence social intelligence helps to make this judgement based on social norms. Social intelligence also involves self-awareness and the ability to regulate one's behaviour in different social situations. Social intelligence is a multifaceted construct which has 3 facets: social information processing, social skills and social awareness (Silvera et al, 2001). Low social intelligence can be a risk factor for maladaptive and deviant behaviours (Zeidner et al. 2009).

Theoretical underpinnings for the current research can be drawn from Agnew's General Strain Theory which implies that in circumstances of high personal strain, low self-constraint and negative emotionality will lead to a strong possibility of offending. Strain can influence personality traits like constraint, which is akin to self-regulation (Agnew et al. 2002).

The temperament-based theory proposed by DeLisi & Vaughn (2014) found that delinquency can result when there is low effortful control and negative emotionality.

Earlier studies have reported that networking with deviant peer group members is associated with antisocial behaviours during adolescence (Vitaro et al. 1998; Synder et al. 2005). Cheating, drinking, use of illegal drugs and skipping classes was strongly related to the peers' involvement in the same behaviour and to internalized beliefs that accepted these behaviours as favourable (Rouse & Eve, 1991) Closson (2009) has found that the desirability to engage in risk-taking behaviours and submitting to peer pressure differs among male and female adolescents. There is a dearth of research exploring the dynamics of peer deviance, self-regulation and social intelligence especially among female undergraduate adolescents in the Indian scenario.

OBJECTIVES

To study the differences between deviance of peers among female undergraduate students, in relation to the sex of their peers

To study the differences between self-regulation among female undergraduate students, in relation to the sex of their peers

To find the differences between social intelligence (social information processing, social skills and social awareness) among female undergraduate students, in relation to the sex of their peers

METHOD

The ex-post facto method is used to find out the differences between deviance of peers, self-regulation and social intelligence among female undergraduate students, keeping sex of their peers in mind.

Statistical Analyses: The Independent Samples t-test was used to find if there is any significant difference between deviant behaviour of peers and self-regulation among female undergraduate students, in relation to the sex of their peers. Also, to discover if there is any significant difference between deviant behaviour of peers and social intelligence, in relation to the sex of their peers.

Sample: Convenience sampling was used as the sample was drawn from that part of the population which was easily accessible. Defining the target population using inclusion criteria made it less biased. 204 female undergraduate students between 18 to 21 years of age participated. Information regarding the sex of their peers was taken. Peer deviance, self-regulation and social intelligence were measured using standardized tools.

Variables:

Independent Variable

Sex of peers

Dependent Variables

Deviance of Peers

Self-regulation

Social Intelligence

Tools used:

- Deviant Behaviour Variety Scale (DBVS) – (Saches et al, 2016): The scale contains 19 items describing various deviant actions. The scale has two levels of deviant behaviour. It consists of Minor Infractions (MI) and Severe Infractions (SI) depending on the seriousness of the act. Each item represents different kinds of infractions. Item numbers 1,2,6,8,10,13,17 and 18 represent minor infractions, while item number 3,4,5,7,9,11,12,14,15,16 and 19 represent serious infractions. Cronbach $\alpha = 0.829$

demonstrates that the scale has high internal consistency. Scores which range from 1 to 19 were indicated as engaging in deviant acts

- Self-Regulation Questionnaire – Short version (SSRQ) (Carey et al. 2004): The Self-Regulation Questionnaire is a 31- item self- report questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale. The tool is a valid and reliable measure that sheds light on competence and autonomy. Self – regulation can be viewed as a problem-solving capacity wherein there is an active adaptation to stressful conditions to re-establish well-being. Cronbach Alpha is 0.91 for the test items. Concurrent validity is established with measures of psychological well-being (Kammann & Flett, 1983), the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the Generalized Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1993). The norms of the scale support young adults. Though it is a short version of the original 63-item scale, it is internally consistent and correlates strongly with the original scale. The scale has five dimensions namely Goal setting, Goal attainment, Mindfulness, Adjustment and Proactiveness. It measures the individual’s overall traits of self-regulation hence it is appropriate for various contexts. Researchers have used the tool to study the relationship between self-regulation and smartphone addiction or habitual internet usage among college students. Additionally, it could be used to inspect whether self-regulation predicts the psychological well-being and life adjustment of college students. It can also be used by teachers to gain insight about strengths, weaknesses, and readiness for self-regulated learning among students. In response, educators can devise creative instructional strategies like peer coaching and team-based problem-solving, that promote self-regulation, exploit inner capacities and motivate positive aspirations among the student population (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A total score of self-regulation can be computed. The higher the score, the more the self-regulation.
- Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (Silvera et al. 2001): Silvera et al (2001) developed a Norwegian

measure named The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale in Tromso University which comprises 21 items. It has 3 subscales (each subscale has 7 items): social information processing, social skills and social awareness. The Five-point Likert response format used here indicates 1 as ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 as ‘strongly agree’. The higher the score, more the social intelligence. There are three subscales – Social information processing (Cronbach alpha of 0.79), Social skills (Cronbach alpha of 0.85) and Social awareness (Cronbach alpha of 0.72). The 3 facets of social intelligence measured are moderately correlated (0.25 – 0.30) which shows they measure 3 facets of the same construct. The factor loading on all items of the scale is higher than .30. The subscales are unbiased in terms of gender and age.

1. *Social information processing* - refers to an understanding of verbal and nonverbal messages in human relations
2. *Social skills* – measures basic communication skills like active listening, responding boldly, creating, maintaining and breaking up a relationship
3. *Social awareness* – measures the capability of actively behaving according to the situation, time and place

One can calculate scores separately for each subscale and obtain a total score too. Higher scores in both subscale scores and total scores show higher levels of social intelligence.

Procedure: Students were approached in person for data collection purposes. The responses on three standardised tools were recorded on Google Forms, while the researcher was present to address their queries.

Ethical concerns: Personal identifying details like respondent names, email addresses and contact numbers were excluded from the form to ensure complete anonymity. Statistical analysis was done after data collection.

RESULTS

Table I Means and Standard Deviations of Minor Infractions of deviance among female undergraduate students who have male and female peers

Variables	Groups N	M	SD	t,df,202	p
Minor Infractions	Males	9	3.66	1.322	2.05 .041*

Females 195 2.40 1.820

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed)

Table I shows a significant difference in the mean scores of minor infractions among female undergraduate students who have male and female peer.

The above table shows that most female undergraduate students typically have female peers. Earlier studies have found that males and females interact more frequently with same-sex peers than opposite-sex peers (Bukowski et al. 1993; Kovacs et al. 1996; Martin & Fabes, 2001).

The tendency of male peers to engage in minor infractions like lying to adults, painting graffiti, and using public transportation without paying is higher than that of female peers. Evidence from earlier studies has shown that females who show antisocial behaviour

are more likely to involve themselves in nonviolent offences such as shoplifting (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014; Stahl & Coontz, 2011). Previous studies have shown that peer groups may differ in their overall rates of deviancy but if one peer member of a group participates in problematic behaviour, there is a high possibility that other members will follow suit (Dishion et al. 1995). In a qualitative study, Young et al. (2009) reported that female college students insisted that their drinking patterns were motivated by pressure to impress their male peers.

Table II Means and Standard Deviations of Severe Infractions of Deviance among female undergraduate students who have male and female Peers

Variables	Groups N	M	SD	t, df, 202 p
Severe Infractions	Males	9	1.77	1.56 1.70 .089NS
	Females	195	1.03	1.26

NS – Not Significant

Table II shows no significant difference in the mean scores of severe infractions of deviance among female undergraduate students who have male and female peers.

The data provided indicates that the female undergraduate respondents who have male peers have a slightly higher mean score than their female peers. Though the difference is not significant, it is indicative that male peers tend to indulge in severe infractions than female peers.

Past studies have also shown that males have a higher propensity towards risk-taking behaviour or only deviant acts than their female counterparts (Piquero & Hickman, 2001; Giordano & Cernkovich, 2004). Erickson et al. (2010) have found that male adolescents engage in risky behaviours like substance abuse and delinquency.

Table III Means and Standard Deviations of Self-regulation among female undergraduate students who have male and female peers

Variables	Groups N	M	SD	t,df,202 p
Self-regulation	Males	9	96.88	9.67 1.38 .167NS
	Females	195	101.52	9.80

NS – Not Significant

Table III shows no significant difference in the mean scores of self-regulation among female undergraduate students who have male and female peer

Data seen in the table above indicates that self-regulation among respondents who have female peers is higher than that of those who have male peers. Though the difference is not significant, it is evident

that those having female peers have an edge over those having male peers as far as regulatory skills are concerned.

Table IV Means and Standard Deviations of Social Intelligence (Social information processing, Social skills and Social awareness) among female undergraduate students who have male and female peers

Variables	Groups N	M	SD	t, df, 202 p
Social information processing	Males	9	17.44	2.96
	Females	195	18.24	4.42
Social skills	Males	9	20.00	3.84
	Females	195	20.30	3.55
Social awareness	Males	9	18.66	2.95
	Females	195	19.18	3.77

NS – Not Significant

Table IV shows no significant difference between the mean scores of social information processing among female undergraduate students having male and female peers.

The above table shows that social information processing is slightly higher in those respondents who have female peers than in those who have male peers. Though the difference is marginal, it is not significant. Longitudinal studies (Fontaine et al. 2002; Dodge et al. 2003) have shown that adolescents who engage in deviant behaviours have deficits in social information processing. They might display aggressive conflict problem-solving skills and be hypervigilant to threatening cues. They might have hostile attributions of ambiguous and accidental situations.

Table IV also shows no significant difference between the mean scores of social skills among female undergraduate students who have male and female peers. Social skills seem to be almost at the same level in the respondents, whether they have male or female peers, as shown in the above table. The way the female undergraduate students interact and communicate using their social skills is not influenced by the sex of their peers. But the Gender Intensification Theory (Priess-Groben & Lindberg, 2016) suggests that youth develop diverse mindsets about their capabilities based on experiences in societal norms. For instance, witnessing social exchanges among family and peers might induce females, more than males, that their capability to create relationships and uphold a positive status among peers is imperative.

Further, Table IV shows no significant difference between the mean scores of social awareness among female undergraduate students who have male and female peers. The respondents who have female peers are more socially aware than those who have male peers, though the difference is negligible. It is evident that the difference is not significant, though their female peers seem to be more socially mindful. Also, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) states that in

response to observation, imitation and modelling, learning can occur even without changing behaviour.

DISCUSSION

Although peer influence can impact the youth's development and course of antisocial behaviour, especially among youth who are moderately involved in such behaviour (Vitaro et al. 1998), the results of the current study interestingly found that female participants who have regular and frequent interaction with 'deviant' peers are not influenced negatively. Other studies (Simons et al. 2014) have reported that there is a strong possibility that females are influenced by their male peers towards deviant behaviour. In an ethnographic study on street gang life, male gangs were relatively autonomous entities, whereas female gangs were largely an adjunct to the male gang to which their male friends belonged (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996).

Earlier studies done on European American samples have shown that males tended to be more involved with a deviant peer group and frequently engaged in antisocial behaviour. Yet peer deviance was not a significant predictor of advancement in antisocial behaviour among youth high in self-regulation (Gardner et al. 2008).

A theoretical orientation about the development of crime says that those engaging in problem behaviours lack 'self-control' – this personal deficit is the main cause and peer influence is merely an avenue (Hirschi, 2004). Adolescents' self-regulation serves both as the main effect as well as the moderator in the development of anti-social behaviour (Wills & Dishion, 2004; Dishion & Patterson, 2006). Female participants high on self-regulation were more capable

of fighting temptation from peers. They can retain their focus on long-term goals, though there were occasions for momentary or temporary high-intensity social rewards frequently bestowed by their peer network. Snyder et al. (2003) suggested that self-regulation is associated with cognitive skills. Having a cognitive deficit can decrease the adolescent's ability to suppress inappropriate behaviour.

Self-regulatory processes play a protective role in non-Western samples too (Eisenberg et al. 2001). Thus, the current study found no significant relationship between peer deviance and self-regulation, as well as peer deviance and social intelligence of the female undergraduate students.

Self-regulation develops over time, largely through the process of socialisation in which peers have a pivotal role. In the current study, self-regulation tends to play a protective role in the chosen sample of female undergraduate student respondents. The respondents mostly had peers belonging to the same sex, i.e. female peers. Those having female peers showed a slightly lower tendency than male peers to engage in both minor and severe infractions of deviance acts. Adolescents prone to peer pressure face difficulties in social competence and also in making their own decisions regarding risk-taking behaviours (Allen et al. 2006).

Likewise, the social intelligence of female undergraduate respondents represented as social information processing, social skills and social awareness has played a protective role against peer influence of minor and severe infractions of deviance acts. Other studies on Big Five Personality factors have found that openness to experience and deviant behaviour have a significant inverse relationship (Jia et al. 2013). Likewise, those on the higher side of agreeableness tend to withdraw from social conflicts, whereas those with low levels of agreeability reveal higher deviant behaviour (Bolton et al 2010 & Nurul et al. 2013). Hanish et al. (2005) reported that adolescent females display more resistance to deviant peer influences than their male counterparts. Gibbons et al. (2003) conveyed that adolescents are not susceptible to peer influence indiscriminately. It is tied to their desire to emulate favourable models or desirable peers. Further, Steinberg & Monahan (2007) have found that adolescent females are more equipped

with psychosocial maturity and regulatory capacities which shield them against peer deviance.

Further, attachment to parents, parental monitoring or unfavourable attitudes towards deviance might act as buffers against the negative influence of a deviant peer (Cutrin et al. 2017). These variables could be researched in future studies.

CONCLUSIONS

The sample of the study being female undergraduate students, it was found that they preferred female peers, rather than peers of the opposite sex.

The current study reported a significant difference in minor infractions between male and female peers, implying that female peers engage in fewer minor infractions of deviance than their male counterparts.

Though there was no significant difference found in severe infractions between male and female peers, the scores are indicative that male peers are more likely to engage in severe infractions of deviant acts than female peers. A lower risk is perceived among female undergraduate students to engage in deviant behaviour and display self-regulation when their peers belong to the same sex.

Limitations of the study

Due to time constraints, a larger cross-sectional sample could not be incorporated in the current study. Also, the sample was restricted to undergraduate students, belonging to urban areas.

Implications

Nevertheless, peer influence towards the growth of deviance among adolescents cannot be overlooked. Interventions in educational spheres, mental health and community levels can help to offset deviant peer influences. Directions for future research Quantity of time spent with deviant peers, education of parents, socio-economic status of the family, type of family unit and parenting styles could influence the self-regulatory patterns of growing adolescents. These variables can be incorporated in future studies. Additionally, a comparative study can be done on urban and rural adolescents and the moderating variables influencing their propensity towards deviance.

Internalizing of symptoms can also be studied in future research on adolescent self-regulation.

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