

## FUNCTIONS OF PEER GROUP IN ADOLESCENCE LIFE

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**ABSTRACT:** *A Child when it reaches adolescence finds much attraction towards his peers. Comparing to other groups, peer group offers a better environment of equality, excitement and freedom. This study helps to understand adolescence and peer group; to know why peer group is needed; to understand the different status of peer; to know the functions of peer group: peer group for socialization, peer group for identity formation, peer group on behavior, peer group on morality, peer group on social cognition and peer group on emotion; and to understand positive and negative peer relations. The discussed findings in the paper is based on the reviewing of excising literatures such as journals papers, books, websites, reports etc., The outcome of this particular paper would be useful to those who are working with adolescences.*

**KEY WORDS:** Peer group, functions of peers, adolescence, role of peer group, and importance of peer group.

### INTRODUCTION

Man is a social being and no man can live in isolation. Aristotle has rightly said, that “No man is an island”. Man needs company and support of others, for various reasons. It can be to gain acceptance and to achieve status or many be to seek identity or to do things one cannot do alone. Peers group plays a key role in making a person what he is. To a great extent, it influences his attitude, learning, values, aspirations and his life style. Besides family, the peers group is very influential in everyone’s life. More particularly, the influence and contribution of peers is stronger during the period of adolescences. Same-age peer interaction serves a unique role. It is most important functions of the peer group in providing sources of information about the world outside of the family. From the peer group, adolescents receive feedback about their abilities. Adolescents learn whether what they do is better than, as good as, or worse than what other adolescents do. Peer experiences have important influences on children's development, those influences vary according to the way peer experience is measured, the outcomes specified, and the developmental route passes through (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005). Therefore this particular study attempts to understand the functions of peer group in adolescence life.

### PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Adolescents are wanted to be liked and accepted by their friends and the larger peer group, which can result in pleasurable feelings when accepted or extreme stress and anxiety when excluded and disparaged by peers. For many adolescents, how they are seen by peers is the most important aspect of their lives (Santrock, 1998). Hence peers and their relationship are very vital during the adolescences stage. The problem of this particular study is to understand the answers of the research questions which are 1. Who is peer? 2. Why do adolescences need to have peer groups? 3. What are roles of peers’ groups that shape the adolescences? and 4. How it is influencing the formation of adolescences? Therefore the outcome of this particular study would be very useful to the world of adolescences and the results of this study would assist people who are working with adolescences for their betterment.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The peer experience has a great impact on the child. Relationship with groups will serve many functions for the individual as well as for the society. It is striving to escape from loneliness which is one of the basic problems of human being. The group helps the person in many ways. It helps him to establish an identity, to gain acceptance and support and also functions as a major agent of socialization.

Objectives of the study are follows,

- To understand adolescence and peer group
- To know why peer group is needed
- To understand the different status of peer status
- To know the functions of peer group
- Peer group for socialization
- Peer group for identity formation
- Peer group on behavior
- Peer group on morality
- Peer group on social cognition
- Peer group on emotion
- To understand positive and negative peer relations

## METHODOLOGY

The present study purely based on reviewing of existing literatures of peer groups and adolescences. The study reviews journals, books, periodicals, reports, websites and blogs for the purpose of the study. Therefore whatever information is revealed by the present study is derived from secondary source of data.

## ADOLESCENCE

In the life cycle of every person, teen age is followed by a period of profound biological and psychological changes. It is the time of life, known as adolescence. At this time the child will have a desire and craving to develop attachments, to realize its identity, to achieve autonomy and to gain self reliance. Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood, a time of acquisition of a new sense of physical, emotional and intellectual capacities and a period of experimentation. A thorough understanding of adolescence in the society depends on information from various points of view. It is probably from the view of psychology, biology, history, sociology education, and anthropology (Barbara, 1983).

## PEER GROUP

Peers are children or adolescents who are about the same age or maturity level. A peer group is referred as a group of people of equal status and peer group is usually among the children of the same age. This is a child's first opportunity to relate to others on a basis of equality. The adolescent peer group emerges as a purposive congregation of individual's experiences identical conditions of physical, emotional and cognitive change as well as sharing the developmental position of anticipating and seeking self-definition, integration and prescription (Seltzer, 1986). As they live and interact with their peer group a child learns how to behave with people outside the family. They learn about team work, loyalty, social roles, leadership and co-operation. They learn to understand and judge the feelings and thoughts of others and to respect them. The peer group also provides a secure ground for moving further away from the protection and control of the family towards greater independence. The members in the group serve as a source of emotional support and encouragement for one another.

## NEED OF PEERS

When peer monkeys who have been reared together are separated from one another, they become depressed. (Suomi, Harlow, & Domek, 1970). The human development literature contains a classic example of the importance of peers in social development. Freud & Dann (1951) studied six children from different families who band together after their parents were killed in World War II. Intensive peer attachment was observed; the children were a tightly knit group, dependent on one another and also with outsiders. Even though deprived of parental care, they became neither delinquent nor psychotic. Good peer relations might be necessary for normal Social development in adolescence, social isolation, or the inability to "plug in" to a social network, is linked with many different forms of problems and disorders, ranging from delinquency and problem of drinking to depression (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). Positive peer relationship is associated with positive social adjustment (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Peer relations in childhood and adolescence are also related to later development. Poor peer relations in childhood, is associated with dropping out from school and delinquency in late adolescence (Roff, Sells, & Golden, 1972). Harmonious peer relations during adolescence are linked with positive mental health at midlife (Hightower, 1990).

### PEER STATUSES

Wentzel & Asher (1995) discuss five types of peer statuses. (a) *Popular Children* are frequently designated as a best friend and they are hardly disliked by their peers, (b) *Average Children* receive an average number of both positive and negative nominations from their peers, (c) *Neglected Children* are infrequently nominated as a best friend but are not liked by their peers, (d) *Rejected Children* are infrequently nominated as some one's best friend and are actively disliked by their peers, and (e) *Controversial Children* are frequently chosen both as some one's best friend as well as being disliked. Popular children have a number of social skills that contribute to their being liked. They are open and giving support to their friends. They carefully maintain open lines of communication with peer, are happy, control negative emotions, act like themselves show enthusiasm and concern for others and are self-confident without being conceited. Adolescents who were popular among their peers were characterized by higher levels of ego development, secure attachment, and more positive interactions with mothers and best friends than adolescents who were less popular with their peers. Neglected children engage in low rates of interaction with their peers and are often described as shy by peers. Peer rejected adolescents have problems in social relationships. They are more impulsive and have problems sustainers' attention. They are more emotionally reactive. They are aroused to anger more easily and probably have more difficulty calming down once aroused. They have fewer social skills in making friends and maintaining positive relationships with peers and they are aggressive. (Hymel, Vaillancourt, McDougall, & Renshaw, 2004)

### PEER GROUP FOR SOCIALIZATION

Most human beings, right from infancy, are concerned only with their own comfort and convenience. But as they grow and interact with people, they learn how to live in harmony with others. They learn to control and to use properly their emotions and impulses and to obey the social rules. Thus he shapes his behaviour and personality through the process of socialization. Socialization is the process by which an individual learns to behave like, and to get along with other in one's society and culture. (Rogers, 1962). Through socialization one learns how to behave and experience in the way society accepts and appreciates him, because certain behaviours are not accepted by the society. Socialization limits certain behaviours and it can be a chief agent to make one a good person. Different group play a vital role in the socialization of an individual and peer group is a very significant one among them. The peer group facilitates an individual to learn group living, how to behave in a group, how to mingle with the age mates, members of the opposite sex and others. They provide an opportunity to learn how to interact with age mates, to control social behaviour to develop age relevant skills and interests and to share similar problems and feelings. However for a variety of reasons peers play a more important role in adolescence than in childhood. (Conger, 1973). It is an important thing that peer relations with same sex, and opposite sex, in this period helps them very much in their later adult

life for a better social relationship, relating with others in work place and mingling and establishing healthy relations with members of opposite sex.

### **PEER GROUP FOR IDENTITY FORMATION**

Adolescent is a period characterized by anxiety, doubts, questions, indecision etc. Adolescents are very often perplexed with the question "Who am I?" The rapid changes occurring during adolescence and the feeling of self consistency makes the search for identity more prominent during adolescence. Identity can be defined as a sense of uniqueness as a person and distinctiveness from others equivalent to answering the question who am I? (Rogers, 1962). The adolescent's main task is to discover and establish an identity. Erickson describes identity as integration between what a person once was and what he is now and what he wishes to become in future. The formation of identity very much depends on the society, its values and the people with whom he interacts. His task is in building up a self-structure. This sense of self is termed as identity. This search for identity is crucial in adolescence and this is attained through identification with different individuals such as parents, peers, teachers, heroes etc. The adolescent having a strong sense of identity considers himself as a separate individual. It means both distinctiveness from others and unity of the self or the feeling of wholeness. The role of the peer group in the formation of identity is very vital. In the earlier period the child tries to identify with the parents and later as role models, but as the child enters adolescence, due to the relation with the peers, he strives to get relieved from the control of parents and identifies with the peers. The peer group facilitates ground for developing identity. The particular advantage of the adolescent friendship is that it offers a climate for growth and self knowledge that the family is not equipped to offer and that very few persons can provide for them (Conger, 1973). Erickson, a Psychologist describes the self reflective aspect of growth as a major point of identity. He says that adolescent are caught up with "identity crisis" which is the relation between what a person appears to be in the eyes of others and what he himself feels he is. It refers to the search for an inner continuity that will match the external social conditions. The intervention on peer group at this juncture is very relevant for the adolescent to overcome this crisis and establish an identity of his own.

### **PEER GROUP ON BEHAVIOUR**

The influence of peer group on the development of personality and behaviour has been described in many different studies. Early studies on juvenile delinquency pointed out that majority of the crimes committed by juveniles are done by a group and even in case of delinquency done alone will have the support or influence of a group. Sociologists and social psychologists are of the opinion that peer group influence particularly in adolescence, are some of the strongest factors determining the behaviour of adolescents.

### **PEER GROUP ON MORALITY**

Piaget a Psychologist says that for a proper moral development, cognitive growth and social experience, group relations are very important and peer group can provide it to a great extent. The social activities in which there is a good deal of give and take approach can promote moral growth. They also provide a ground for change from self centeredness and selfishness to a morality of co-operation. The goals of the group become the basis for co-operation. As the capacity for reasoning develops, the morality of a person also develops to a higher stage. The blind obedience to the established rule is questioned, and is declared as unreasonable. There will not be any fixed and unchangeable rule but they are set by group consent and maintained as long as they are useful. Piaget, who studied children at the age when they develop their morality or the super ego, found that there seems to be two moralities, the morality of constraint and morality of co-operation. The morality of constraint is formed through one way relations between child and adult especially parents and superego becomes dominant. Morality of co-operation is formed and developed by the spontaneous give and take approach of peer interaction. As the child grows the relation between parents and child becomes less important and peer group more important. Then the superego gets concentrated on a morality of co-operation. The morality of peer group and the morality derived from parents should be

agreeable to the morality of the society. Therefore a consensus between parental and peer group morality is needed

### PEER GROUP ON SOCIAL COGNITION

A distinction can be made between knowledge and process in cognition. In studying cognitive aspects of peer relations, this distinction can be made. Learning about the social knowledge adolescents bring with them to peer relations is important, as is studying how adolescents process information during peer interaction. As children move into adolescence, they acquire more social knowledge, and there is considerable individual variation in how much one adolescent knows about what it takes to make friends, to get peers to like him or her, and so forth. From a social cognitive perspective, children and adolescents may have difficulty in peer relations because they lack appropriate social cognitive skills (Underwood & Hurley, 1999).

### PEER GROUP ON EMOTION

Emotion is also playing an important role in peer relation. The ability to regulate emotion is linked to successful peer relations (Underwood., 2003). Moody and emotionally negative individuals experience greater rejection by peers, whereas emotionally positive individuals are more popular (Saarni, 1999). Adolescents who have effective self-regulatory skills can modulate their emotional expressiveness in contexts that evoke intense emotions, as when a peer says something negative. Rejected children are more likely than popular children to use negative gestures in a provoking situation.

### POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PEER RELATIONS

Peer influences can be both positive and negative (Bergeron & Schneider, 2005) were influential theorist who stressed that it is through peer interaction that children and adolescents learn the symmetrical reciprocity mode of relationships. Children explain the principles of fairness and justice by working through disagreement with peer. They also learn to be keen observers of peers' interests and perspectives in order to smoothly integrate themselves into ongoing peer activities. Sullivan says that adolescents learn to be skilled and sensitive partners in intimate relationships by forging close friendships with selected peers. These intimacy skills are carried forward to help form foundation of later dating and marital relationships. It is emphasized that the negative influences of peers on children's and adolescents' development. Being rejected or overlooked by peers lead some adolescents to feel lonely or hostile. Further, such rejection and neglect by peers are related to an individual's subsequent mental health and criminal problem (Kupersmidt & DeRosier, 2004). It is also described that the adolescent peer culture as a corrupt influence that undermines parental values and control. Further, peers can introduce adolescents to alcohol, drugs, delinquency, and other forms of behaviour that adults view maladaptive.

### CONCLUSION

It is true, that the adolescents are vulnerable to the peer group influence, but this influence varies from group to group and person to person. The adolescents find their identity more in peer group than in the family. The peer group exerts influence and control over its members and by that the members follow the group norms and interests. The peer group plays a vital role in the formation of attitudes, values, behaviour and personality of a person. The magnitude of influence depends on the nature of the group and also the nature of the person. The influence can be beneficial or detrimental to the person. Parent's role is also very important for their children in selecting their peers.

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