

## **Impact of Peer Influence on Social Behavior and Students Performance at Secondary School in District Mardan**

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### **Abstract**



*Peer influence has a considerable impact on the social behaviour and academic achievement of adolescents, especially in secondary school where peer influences are stronger. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of peer influence on social behavior and academic performance of the female secondary school students of Tehsil Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. The quantitative descriptive survey design was applied, with 300 students randomly selected from Grade 9 and 10 from ten government girls' secondary schools. The data was gathered using structured questionnaire and analyzed descriptively, by one-sample t-test, Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The results showed that peer influence had significant impact on students' social behavior and academic performance. The One-sample t-test showed that there were statistically significant positive perceptions on the influence of peers on social behavior and academic achievement ( $p < .001$ ). There was also a weak, but significant positive correlation between social behavior and academic performance ( $r = .125$ ,  $p = .031$ ). Regression analysis also showed that moderate but significant contributions to predicting academic performance came from social behavior. Based on the study, it is concluded that positive relationships with peers positively impact cooperation, motivation, classroom participation, and study habits, while negative relationships impact distractions, poor social adjustment, and low interest in schoolwork. The results indicate that mentoring, counseling, and productive school climates are needed to encourage positive peer interactions both in and out of school for the school, parents, and educational authorities.*

**Keywords:** Peer Influence, Social Behavior, Academic Performance, Secondary School Students, Adolescent Development, District Mardan

### **Introduction**

Adolescence is one of the most significant phases of human growth where there is an accelerated psychological, emotional and social development (Steinberg, 2017). In this phase, youth are more likely to look for acceptance, emotional support and identity in peers (Erikson, 1968). Peer groups have an important role as influential agents which impact the attitudes, behaviours and educational aspirations of students as they occupy a considerable amount of time in school environments (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016). Peer influence thus has gained significance in the field of education research, since it is directly connected with the academic results and socialization of students (Ryan, 2001).

Peer influence is when an individual alters his or her attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors due to the expectations or actions of others in his or her peer group (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The influence can be direct, either by encouragement or by peer pressure, or indirect, by observation and imitation, and by conforming to social norms (Bandura, 1977). Peer relationships are deemed important in adolescent's adjustment because it is suggested that adolescents tend to emulate values, attitudes and behaviors of their peers and classmates (Brown & Larson, 2009).

Peer influence can have many aspects. Positive peer relationships have been linked to positive outcomes, such as collaborative learning, increased school motivation, engagement in school activities, and healthful social interaction (Wentzel, 2017). The quality of the academic attitudes of students, their self-confidence in learning and academic performance are positively related to their association with friends who value learning (Ryan, 2001; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). In contrast,

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being around peers who engage in negative behaviors can have negative consequences on absenteeism, school engagement, classroom behavior and risky behaviors (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). So peer influence can be a development opportunity and learning challenge.

There are several theories to address the question of peer influence on adolescent behaviour. There are a number of theories to answer the question of how peers influence adolescent behaviour. Bandura's social learning theory states that people acquire behaviors by observing and imitating others – the people with whom they interact in the school environment – who they view as significant models (Bandura, 1977). Adolescents are said to be in the identity versus role confusion stage of development in Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, which has made them extremely susceptible to peer approval and social acceptance (Erikson, 1968). In addition, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights the role of peer groups as an integral part of the adolescent's microsystem, which continually influences and is influenced by the family, school and larger social setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The peer influence has become more complicated in Pakistan especially in KP due to changes in social context, technological developments, and the extensive use of social media (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Adolescents' behaviors are still influenced by traditional family values, but digital communication has increased adolescents' exposure to peers outside of the classroom (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Such influence at the same time poses specific educational and social difficulties when students make an effort to cope with the requirements of today's society and the values of traditional culture.

The context of district Mardan to explore the influence of peer among secondary school students is important. Pupils have the opportunity to develop strong relationships with the community and are also growing up with greater access to modern communications and rising expectations for their learning. The study of peer relationships has been a growing area of international research pertaining to adolescent development (Brown & Larson, 2009; Wentzel, 2017), but very few studies have explored the interplay of peers on social behavior and academic performance in the Pakistani context. Previous studies have been concerned with either academic outcomes or social adjustment outcomes, with few studies examining the relationships between these two outcomes in Pakistani secondary school students (Siddiqui, 2019).

In this regard, the present study is designed to investigate the impact of peer influence on social behavior and academics performance of girls studying in secondary schools in Tehsil Mardan. Taking a concurrent look at these connections will provide evidence to help teachers, parents, school administrators, and policy makers design interventions to foster positive peer relationships and reduce the harmful side effects of peer influence (Wentzel, 2017; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The results also will make a contribution to the expanding body of literature on adolescent development and education outcomes in a developing-country context.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate how peer influence shapes the social behavior of students.
2. To assess the effect of peer influence on students' academic performance.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does peer influence shape the social behavior of Grade 9 students in secondary schools of District Mardan?
2. In what ways does peer influence impact the academic achievement of Grade 9 students in secondary schools of District Mardan?

### **Literature Review**

Adolescence is one of the most important times of human growth when psychological, emotional, and social growth is happening rapidly (Steinberg, 2017; Santrock, 2020). In this developmental phase adolescents are more apt to look to friends for acceptance, emotional support, and identity (Erikson, 1968; Brown & Larson, 2009). Adolescents spend a considerable amount of time in an educational setting with peers, and peers are important influential agents that shape their attitudes, behaviors, and educational aspirations (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016; Ryan, 2001). Peer influence is therefore a significant factor in educational research because of the strong relationship between peer influence and students' academic performance and socialization (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011).

Peer influence is the change of attitudes, beliefs or behavior that occurs in the individual when the expectations, behaviors or norms of the members of the peer group influence the individual (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The influence may be direct, via encouragement, persuasion or peer pressure, or indirect, via observation, imitation and acceptance of social norms (Bandura, 1977). Peer relationships are seen as a crucial aspect of adolescent adjustment as adolescents model the behaviors, values, and attitudes of their peers and classmates (Brown & Larson, 2009; Rubin et al., 2015).

Peer influence is multi-dimensional. Positive peer relationships promote collaborative learning, boost academic motivation, support a learning environment in the classroom, and support healthy social interactions (Wentzel, 2017). Pupils who surround themselves with others who have positive attitudes towards education tend to display more positive attitudes towards education, higher academic self-confidence, and better academic performance (Ryan, 2001; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). On the other hand, when peers engage in negative behavior, they may become absent, less motivated to study, behave inappropriately in the classroom, and engage in a variety of risky behaviors (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Thus, peer influence can be viewed as a developmental asset, as well as a learning challenge.

Theories of peer influence can be related to adolescent behavior in a few ways. Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn behaviors by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1977) who are important to them, in this instance class mates and friends in the school environment. According to Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer acceptance and expectations and they go through a period of identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1968). Likewise Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory shows that peer groups are an important part of the adolescent's microsystems that are constantly influencing the family, school and broader social and cultural environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Peer influence has become more complicated in Pakistan especially in KPK due to the globalisation of society, the rise in technology and the use of social media by the majority of the population (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Despite the influence of traditional family values on the behaviours of adolescents, digital communication has enabled students to have more access to peer networks outside of the classroom (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). These intersecting factors present special educational and social issues for students as they strive to negotiate both cultural norms and contemporary society (Siddiqui, 2019).

The context of the study is important that is District Mardan; where the study was conducted. Students are growing up in a community with strong relationships, and at the same time are being challenged by the access to a new generation of communication technologies and higher expectations in education. While there has been a growing body of literature in the international context on peer relationships and adolescent development (Brown & Larson, 2009; Wentzel, 2017), there is a lack of studies that examine the impact of peer relationship on social behavior and academic performance together in the context of Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2019). Academic achievement or social adjustment has been investigated separately in previous studies, with a lack of understanding of the linkages between them in case of Pakistani secondary school pupils (Ali et al., 2021).

Therefore, to tackle this lacuna the present study tries to analyze the impact of peer influence on social behavior and academic performance of female secondary school students of Tehsil Mardan. The study aims to offer evidence that can help teachers, parents, school administrators, and policy makers design interventions that promote positive relationships among peers and mitigate the negative impact of peer influence (Wentzel, 2017; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). The findings are also anticipated to add to the existing evidence and literature of adolescent development and educational outcomes in developing countries (UNESCO, 2021).

### **Methodology**

In this study, the types of research design employed is Quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to explore the effect of peer relationship on social behavior and academic achievement of female secondary school students of Tehsil Mardan, District Mardan. Students from 26 Government Girls' High Schools were the population and 300 of them (100 Grade 9 and 200 Grade 10) were selected by simple random sampling from 10 selected schools. This helped to ensure a representative sample and reduce selection bias.

Data was collected on a structured self-administered questionnaire which was developed after a comprehensive literature search. Demographics, peer influence on social behavior, and peer

influence on academic performance were the three parts of the instrument. The responses were obtained using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree (1); Disagree (2); Unsure (3); Agree (4); Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire was expert validated and a pre-test was undertaken using Cronbach's alpha to test for reliability of the questionnaire with satisfactory internal consistency. The consent of the relevant education authorities and principals of schools and participation was voluntary and confidentiality and anonymity was observed before data was collected and during the collection process.

The data collected were coded and analyzed by the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical data were used to condense the data such as percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation. To analyze students' perceptions, one-sample t-test was used while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between social behavior and academic performance and Simple Linear Regression was used to examine the predictive effect of social behavior on academic performance. Data was analyzed using statistical analysis at 0.05 level of significance and the research was carried out ethically; informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and use of data only for academic purposes.

## Results

**Table 4.1**

**Demographic Profile of the Participants**

| Variable            | Category                       | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%)    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Gender              | Female                         | 300           | 100.0             |
|                     | Male                           | 0             | 0.0               |
| Type of School      | Government Girls' High Schools | 10            | 100.0             |
| Students per School | Selected Participants          | 30            | 10.0 (per school) |
| Grade Level         | Grade 9                        | 156           | 52.0              |
|                     | Grade 10                       | 144           | 48.0              |
| School Location     | Rural                          | 10            | 100.0             |
|                     | Urban                          | 0             | 0.0               |
| Total Participants  | —                              | 300           | 100.0             |

*Note.*  $N = 300$ .

As revealed in the demographic data of the population presented in Table 4.1, 300 students were selected from 10 Government Girls' High School of Tehsil Mardan. To provide a balance in the representation of each school, an equal number of students (30) were selected from each school. In respect of the distribution of grades 156 students (52.0%) were in Grade 9 and 144 students (48.0%) were in Grade 10. In addition, the schools in the sample were all rural, and there were no urban schools included.

**Table 4.2**

**Distribution of Participants by School and Age**

### A. School-Wise Distribution of Participants

| S. No.       | School                   | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1            | GGHS Bago Banda          | 30            | 10.0           |
| 2            | GGHS Maho Dheri          | 30            | 10.0           |
| 3            | GGHS Chagharzai          | 30            | 10.0           |
| 4            | GGHS Sheikh Yousaf Killi | 30            | 10.0           |
| 5            | GGHS Chail Aslam Killi   | 30            | 10.0           |
| 6            | GGHS Tekadar Killi       | 30            | 10.0           |
| 7            | GGHS Shankar Mahal       | 30            | 10.0           |
| 8            | GGHS Gaddar              | 30            | 10.0           |
| 9            | GGHS Qazi Abad           | 30            | 10.0           |
| 10           | GGHS Manga               | 30            | 10.0           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>—</b>                 | <b>300</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |

### B. Age-Wise Distribution of Participants

| Age (Years) | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| 14          | 57            | 19.0           |
| 15          | 129           | 43.0           |
| 16          | 90            | 30.0           |

|              |            |              |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 17           | 24         | 8.0          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>300</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Note.  $N = 300$ .

The distribution of the respondents across school and age groups is given in table 4.2 below. The number of students recruited from the 10 Government Girls' High Schools (GHS) were not equal, so 30 students were recruited from each school, which means that 10% of each school was sampled and there was a total of 300 students.

The age profile of the respondents reveals that the highest number of students (43.0%) was 15 years old and 30.0% were at 16 years. 19.0% of the sample was 14 years old while 17 year old students made up the remaining 8.0% of the sample. The results showed that most respondents were aged 15 and 16 years which correspond to the usual age of students in Grades 9 and 10.

**Table 4.5**

**One-Sample *t*-Test Results for Peer Influence on Social Behavior and Academic Performance**

| Variable                                | <i>N</i> | Mean | SD   | <i>df</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Mean Difference |
|-----------------------------------------|----------|------|------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Peer Influence and Social Behavior      | 300      | 3.77 | 0.29 | 299       | 46.26    | .000     | 0.77            |
| Peer Influence and Academic Performance | 300      | 3.77 | 0.30 | 299       | 44.75    | .000     | 0.77            |

Note. Results are significant at  $\alpha = .05$ .

Table 4.5 shows the results of the one sample *t*-tests that were carried out to explore students' perceptions of the influence of peers on social behavior and academic performance. For social behavior, the mean score ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ) exceeded the test value of 3.00, producing a statistically significant result ( $t(299) = 46.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result suggests that the second null hypothesis is rejected as the students felt that peers had a greater impact on their social behavior.

Likewise, the results for academic performance showed a mean score of 3.77 ( $SD = 0.30$ ) that is also significantly above the neutral test value. This *t* value of 44.75 with a significance level of  $p < .001$  indicates that there is a statistically significant effect of peer influence on students' academic performance. Hence, the null hypothesis was also rejected indicating that peer influences have a significant impact on students' social interaction and academic achievement.

**Table 4.9**

**Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Performance from Social Behavior**

**A. ANOVA for the Regression Model**

| Model      | Sum of Squares | <i>df</i> | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------|----------|
| Regression | 0.414          | 1         | 0.414       | 4.715    | .031     |
| Residual   | 26.167         | 298       | 0.088       | —        | —        |
| Total      | 26.581         | 299       | —           | —        | —        |

**B. Regression Coefficients**

| Predictor       | B     | SE    | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|----------|----------|
| Constant        | 3.283 | 0.225 | —       | 14.620   | .000     |
| Social Behavior | 0.129 | 0.059 | 0.125   | 2.171    | .031     |

Note. Results are significant at  $\alpha = .05$ .

The simple linear regression analysis is summarized in Table 4.9 which investigates the relationship between social behavior and student's academic performance. The results of the ANOVA indicated that the regression model was statistically significant ( $F(1, 298) = 4.715$ ,  $p = .031$ ), and that social behavior makes a sizable, albeit not overly large, contribution toward explaining the variation in academic performance.

The regression coefficients also indicated that social behavior is a positive predictor of academic performance ( $B = 0.129$ ,  $\beta = 0.125$ ,  $t = 2.171$ ,  $p = .031$ ). This indicates that the social behavior score increased by 1 unit, and the academic performance score increased by approximately 0.129 unit. The statistically significant positive coefficient, although small, suggests that students who exhibit more positive peer related social behaviors tend to have slightly better academic results.

**Discussion**

In the present study, it was aimed to explore the effect of peer relationship on social behavior and academic performance of secondary school students in Government Girls High Schools Tehsil Mardan. The results show that peer influence is not only one of the factors that influence students' social behavior but can also influence their academic achievement. Generally, respondents expressed

positive perception about the influence of peers on interpersonal relationships, participation in the classroom, learning and motivation to learn in school.

The one sample t test showed that peer influence on their social behavior had a significant effect on students. This discovery indicates that peers play a significant role in the interactions and development of communication, cooperation, respect for others, and participation in the school experience. Adolescence is a developmental stage in which students turn to peer groups for emotional support and identity development, as well as social acceptance. As a result, positive peer interactions promote pro-social behaviors and a healthy adjustment in the school environment. The findings are in line with Bandura's Social Learning Theory which is a theory explaining that people learn behaviours by imitating and observing significant others, such as friends and classmates. The findings also confirm the findings of Brown and Larson (2002) that supportive peer relationships promote adolescents' social competence, emotional health and interpersonal functioning.

These results also showed that the peer influence is significant to the academic performance of students. Students recognized that friends who value school work help them attend school regularly, make assignments, study well, participate in the classroom and feel more confident when doing schoolwork. The results confirm earlier studies demonstrating that positive peer experiences are positively related to academic motivation and educational outcomes. Students who are around other students who are motivated and disciplined are more likely to exhibit similar learning behaviors and have greater academic aspirations. This concurs with Wentzel (1998) who stated that supportive peer relations lead to better academic motivation and classroom involvement and with Ryan (2001) who suggested that peer groups influence the educational attitudes and expectations of students because they share the same academic norms.

The correlation analysis showed that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between students' social behavior and academic performance but the relationship was rather low ( $r = .125$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding suggests that improvements in student's social behavior is related to the minimal improvements in academic performance. Although this association is statistically significant, it does indicate that academic outcomes are determined by many other factors such as family support, teacher effectiveness, socioeconomic status, school resources, and the student's own abilities and motivation. Thus, peer influence should be considered as one of the important elements in achieving academic success but not the only one.

A regression analysis also verified that social behavior is a good predictor of academic performance, but with a small proportion of the variance explained ( $R^2 = .016$ ). The finding suggests that positive social behaviour makes a significant contribution to pupils' academic performance, but it explains a small proportion of the variance in academic performance. The results are in line with the educational research that has been pointing to the multidimensional nature of educational achievement where cognitive, psychological, environmental and institutional factors work simultaneously. However, the statistically significant predictive relationship emphasizes the value of educational environments fostering supportive peer environments within schools.

The results have significant implications for educational practice in Pakistan because adolescents spend large part of their time in secondary schools encounters with their peers. One of the main points to make about peer relationships is that they are not just social interactions, but are valuable resources of learning. Teachers can foster opportunities for collaborative learning, peer mentoring, cooperative group activities, and classroom discussions that promote positive peer interaction. Likewise, school counselors need to create intervention programs designed to alert students to negative peer pressures, and to build positive peer relationships that foster student learning.

The general conclusion is that positive peer influence is important in social adjustment and educational success of the secondary school students. The development of school environment where students can cooperate with each other, respect and support each other in school learning can not only promote students' learning, but also promote students' comprehensive personal and social development.

### **Conclusion**

In the present study, the effect of peer influence on social behavior and academic performance was studied in Government Girls High Schools of Tehsil Mardan, District Mardan. The results indicate that peer influence factors are very important for students' interpersonal behaviour and for their

learning experiences. Overall, students felt that supportive peer relationships fostered cooperation, good communication, involvement in school activities, good study habits, and increased motivation to study.

All of the statistical analyses were used to show that significant positive perceptions were found in both social behavior and academic performance. In addition, there was a positive relationship between social behavior and academic achievement, and the regression analysis showed that the social behavior significantly predicted academic achievement, but the strength of this prediction is not much. These findings indicate that positive peer relationships generates learning settings that promote personal growth and learning success.

The findings in this study show that peers are influential social agents in adolescence. Positive peer dynamics help students to learn behaviors that are socially appropriate, engage in classroom activities, and hold higher education aspirations. On the other hand, negative peer influence can lead to a decrease in academic involvement and impede healthy social development. Thus, promoting positive peer relationships should be regarded as a valuable part of school improvement plans and student services.

### **Recommendations**

1. School leaders should foster peer mentorship and peer learning opportunities to encourage positive academic and social association between students in the school.
2. Relationships between peers should be enhanced through cooperative teaching methods, group projects and classroom discussions, and negative peer pressures should be avoided.
3. Awareness sessions to teach pupils how to recognise and overcome negative peer pressure and to build positive peer and decision-making relationships should be organised by the school counselling services.
4. Parents are advised to have regular contact and are encouraged to keep an eye on their children's peer relationships to help promote healthy social and academic growth.
5. Life-skills education, peer leadership programs, and character education should be included by educational policymakers in the secondary school curriculum to promote positive peer cultures.
6. Future research should be carried out on the same type of students (males), schools (private schools), and geographical areas in order to make the findings more generalizable. Mixed-methods and longitudinal studies are also suggested to explore the temporal variation of peer impact and to better understand social and academic experiences of adolescents.

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