



YOUTH PERCEPTION OF SMOKING AND PEER PRESSURE - AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ALIGNED WITH SDG – 3

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of peer pressure and age on young people's perceptions of smoking, a persistent health issue aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being). The research focused on two objectives: first, to examine whether age is related to the extent of peer influence on smoking behaviour, and second, to assess if smoking is perceived as a way to appear "cool" or mature among peers. Data were collected from 202 student respondents, and the analysis was carried out using SPSS with Chi-Square tests and descriptive statistics.

The findings revealed a strong and statistically significant association between peer influence and smoking behaviour ($\chi^2 = 54.322$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, perceptions of smoking as a marker of maturity or social acceptance were also significant ($\chi^2 = 26.853$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$). Descriptive results indicated that 35.2% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that smoking enhances social image, whereas 60.9% disagreed.

Overall, the study demonstrates that although peer pressure plays a substantial role, social perceptions also critically shape youth attitudes toward smoking. These insights highlight the need for awareness and educational interventions to foster healthier lifestyle choices among young people.

Keywords: *Peer Pressure, Smoking Behaviour, Youth Perceptions, Social Influence, Chi-Square Analysis, SDG 3.*

Introduction

Smoking continues to be a major public health concern, especially among young people whose habits often shape their long-term health and lifestyle choices. In alignment with **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3**, which focuses on ensuring good health and well-being for all, understanding the social and psychological factors behind youth smoking becomes crucial.

Peer pressure and the belief that smoking reflects maturity or social acceptance are key influences on youth behavior. Many adolescents perceive smoking as a way to appear confident, independent, or "cool" among their peers. Although age plays a role in determining susceptibility to these pressures, the interaction between age, peer influence, and social perception remains complex.

This study, based on **202 student respondents**, uses **descriptive statistics and Chi-Square analysis** to explore how peer influence and social perceptions shape smoking behavior. The findings highlight that, beyond peer pressure, the desire for social image and acceptance significantly contributes to smoking tendencies among youth. These insights emphasize the need for awareness programs that encourage healthier choices and support the objectives of SDG 3.

Review of Literature

1. **Influence of Peer Networks on Adolescent Smoking** Littlecott et al. (2023) carried out a meta-ethnographic review to understand how friendships and peer connections influence smoking habits



among adolescents. The research found that many young people view smoking as a way to gain social acceptance and project a sense of maturity. The study also highlighted that the desire for peer approval often outweighs concern about health risks, underscoring the importance of prevention programs that directly address peer influence.

2. Peer Pressure and Socioeconomic Context

Littlecott et al. (2022) observed that peer relationships in school settings have a strong influence on students' smoking behavior, especially among those from economically weaker backgrounds. The researchers noted that in environments with limited tobacco-control measures, the impact of peer influence becomes even stronger, showing that the social context plays a vital role in shaping adolescents' smoking tendencies.

3. Predictors of Adolescent Smoking

UlinNuha, Demartoto, and Prasetya (2023) conducted a meta-analysis that identified key factors contributing to tobacco use among teenagers. The study emphasized that having friends or parents who smoke, along with stress, are the strongest influences on adolescents' smoking habits. It also indicated that when young people are surrounded by smokers, they tend to imitate this behavior, showing that social modeling and emotional stress play a major role in smoking initiation.

4. Smoking Behavior among Indian Adolescents

Kumar et al. (2023) explored smoking habits among Indian school students and discovered that about 16% of participants smoked mainly because of peer influence, curiosity, and stress. The research further revealed that most respondents had limited understanding of the long-term health effects of smoking, underscoring the importance of introducing awareness and prevention programs at the school level to address this issue early.

5. Social Media and Digital Peer Pressure

Vassey et al. (2022) examined how social media exposure affects adolescent attitudes toward smoking. Their study showed that frequent viewing of smoking-related content on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube makes the behavior seem normal and socially acceptable. This pattern demonstrates that online environments can amplify peer influence and increase the likelihood of imitation among youth.

6. Peer and Gender Influences in India

Gupta et al. (2023) investigated adolescent tobacco use in Rajasthan and found that both peer influence and gender norms significantly shape smoking behavior. The study revealed that male students were more likely to begin smoking due to encouragement from their peers, reflecting how cultural expectations around masculinity and social approval contribute to tobacco use among Indian youth.

Research gap

While several studies have examined how peer pressure and social environments influence youth smoking behavior, there remains limited understanding of how **age and social perception jointly shape these behaviors**, particularly within the **framework of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being)**. Most existing research has focused on **Western populations** or used descriptive approaches that fail to capture the **sociocultural nuances of developing nations** like India. There is a clear gap in exploring **how young individuals interpret smoking as a marker of maturity, confidence, or social acceptance** in the Indian context, where peer dynamics and cultural



expectations differ significantly. Addressing this gap is essential for designing effective **youth-centered interventions** that align with SDG 3 objectives

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between peer pressure and smoking behavior among youth.
- To analyze the influence of age on the extent of peer pressure in shaping smoking attitudes.
- To assess how smoking is perceived as a marker of social acceptance, maturity, or “coolness” among young individuals.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive and analytical cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between peer pressure, age, and youths’ perceptions of smoking. Cross-sectional survey designs are widely used to assess associations among behavioral and social variables within a specific population at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study was conducted among college students in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. A total of 202 students were selected using a convenience sampling technique. Although non-probability sampling limits generalizability, it is appropriate in exploratory behavioral research where accessibility and feasibility are key considerations (Etikan et al., 2016).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended items. The instrument included sections on demographic characteristics, experiences of peer pressure, and perceptions of smoking (e.g., smoking as a symbol of maturity or social acceptance). Structured questionnaires are effective for ensuring uniformity in responses and facilitating quantitative analysis (Bryman, 2016).

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize participant characteristics and key variables. The Chi-Square test of independence was employed to examine associations between age, peer pressure, and smoking perceptions, as it is suitable for analyzing relationships between categorical variables (McHugh, 2013). Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

Ethical Considerations: The study adhered to ethical research standards, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and protection of participant confidentiality.

Sustainable Development Relevance: The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by addressing social and behavioral determinants influencing youth smoking behaviors (United Nations, 2015).

Analysis of Data: The study aimed to assess the influence of peer pressure and age on youth smoking behavior and their perception of smoking as a marker of social acceptance or maturity. The data were analyzed using SPSS through Chi-Square tests and descriptive statistics.



1. Relationship between Peer Pressure and Smoking Behaviour

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	54.322 ^a	1	0.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	52.251	1	0.000		
Likelihood Ratio	56.941	1	0.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.000	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	54.052	1	0.000		
N of Valid Cases	201				

Source: Primary data

A Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to examine the association between peer pressure and smoking behavior among young people. The analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between the variables, $\chi^2(1) = 54.322$, $p < .001$.

The p-value of less than .001 indicates a strong and statistically significant association between peer pressure and smoking behavior. This finding suggests that students who experience peer pressure are more likely to engage in smoking compared to those who do not report such influence.

Influence of Age on Perception of Smoking

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.853 ^a	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	28.086	4	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.074	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	202		

Source: Primary Data

A Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the association between age and youth perception of smoking. The findings showed a statistically significant relationship between the variables, $\chi^2(4) = 26.853$, $p < .001$. The statistically significant p-value ($p < .001$) indicates that age plays an important role in shaping perceptions of smoking. Younger participants were more likely to associate smoking with social image and “coolness,” whereas older respondents demonstrated greater awareness of the health risks associated with smoking.

Descriptive Analysis on Perception of Smoking

Statistics		
Do you think smoking is a way to appear cool or mature among peers?		
N	Valid	202
	Missing	797

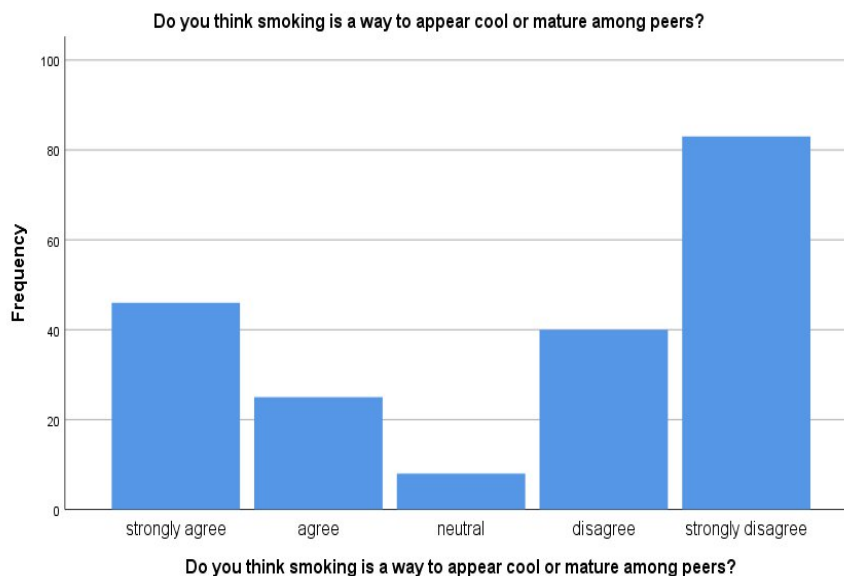


Mean	3.44
Median	4.00

Source: Primary Data

Do you think smoking is a way to appear cool or mature among peers?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	46	4.6	22.8	22.8
	agree	25	2.5	12.4	35.1
	neutral	8	0.8	4.0	39.1
	disagree	40	4.0	19.8	58.9
	strongly disagree	83	8.3	41.1	100.0
	Total	202	20.2	100.0	

Source: Primary Data



Descriptive statistics were used to examine participants' perceptions of smoking as a symbol of coolness or maturity. The findings indicate that 22.8% of respondents strongly agreed and 12.4% agreed that smoking helps an individual appear cool or mature among peers. In contrast, 19.8% disagreed and 41.1% strongly disagreed with this statement, while 4% remained neutral.

The mean score was 3.44 ($M = 3.44$), and the median value was 4.00 ($Md = 4.00$), indicating that responses were generally inclined toward disagreement. Overall, the results suggest that most respondents do not endorse the belief that smoking enhances social image or maturity. Although a small proportion of youth perceive smoking as image-enhancing, the dominant trend reflects a rejection of this notion.

Findings



I. Peer Influence as a Major Factor: The results show a strong link between peer pressure and smoking behavior. Youth who experience peer influence is more likely to start or justify smoking, proving that social circles play a major role in shaping such habits.

II. Age and Smoking Perception

Age significantly affects how youth perceive smoking. Younger respondents often view it as a symbol of confidence or popularity, while older ones recognize its health risks, showing growing awareness with age.

III. Shift in Attitudes

Most respondents disagreed that smoking enhances one's image. The mean (3.44) and median (4.00) values indicate a general disagreement, suggesting that many youths now reject the idea that smoking is "cool."

IV. Need for Early Awareness

The findings stress the importance of early awareness and school-based programs to counter peer pressure and promote healthy lifestyles in line with SDG 3.

Conclusion

The study finds that peer influence and social perception explosively shape smoking behaviour among youth people. Although some youth still view smoking as a symbol of maturity or social belonging, this belief tends to reduce as they grow ages and come more apprehensive of its health pitfalls. The results align with the objects of Sustainable Development thing 3(Good Health and Well-being), emphasizing the significance of early education and preventative programs to reduce tobacco use.

In summary, youth smoking is not just an individual decision but a socially told behaviour, shaped by peer pressure and age - related attitudes toward acceptance and tone - image. .

Suggestions

1. Implement School and College Awareness Programs: Conduct interactive workshops and campaigns to educate students about the long-term health impacts of smoking and the psychological aspects of peer influence.
2. Promote Peer-Led Interventions: Train student ambassadors to promote smoke-free lifestyles and act as positive influence within peer groups.
3. Integrate SDG Awareness into Education: Link anti-smoking awareness to SDG-3 to encourage youth participation in achieving global health goals.
4. Parental and Community Involvement: Encourage parents and local organizations to monitor and guide youth social circles to prevent exposure to negative influences.
5. Policy Recommendations: Government and NGOs should collaborate to design youth-focused anti-tobacco campaigns that use social media and relatable content to counter the "coolness" myth.

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