

## COMPULSION INDUCED BY PEER PRESSURE AMONGST STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*Peer pressure is one of the most significant aspects of studying at a higher education institute for a student, which can be a very terrifying aspect for some students. Students who fear rejection or are simply too afraid of being labelled "outcasts" are compelled by their peers and friends to perform tasks that they find uncomfortable, thus making their social lives miserable. These incidents are usually so mundane that they often fly under the radar of authorities maintaining discipline and professors as "acts of friendship." This study aims to understand the perspective of the students and analyze their experiences regarding the negative effect of peer-induced compulsion by considering the difficulties and problems faced by the students compelled to perform tasks that they do not wish to do and focusing on the frequency of the feeling of being compelled by students, the form of activities or actions they are compelled to undertake, and the reason as to why they tolerate or suffer in silence as they are compelled by their peer group.*

**Keywords:** Compulsion, Peer pressure, Peer influence, Tolerance, Avoidance, Acceptance

### Introduction

There are various aspects of peer pressure, some of them not as negative as others and some surprisingly beneficial to the influenced, but these instances are rare and hard to come across. In most scenarios, the individual under peer pressure is being compelled or asked to do tasks they do not wish to, which ultimately leads to the tainting of their academic as well as their social experience at their educational institute. Most students are unaware that they are being forced by their peers to perform or participate in certain activities, and those who are aware usually tolerate this behavior by their so-called friends, as many feel that they are dependent on their friends for their social standing in the unspoken hierarchies formed in a class or batch of students. This need to be accepted and fit in is why most students fail to talk about what they are going through and reach out for help.

Research on peer pressure ranges from its psychological aspects to the long-lasting effects it can produce on the individual, no matter how insignificant the acts of peer-induced compulsion or other unwarranted influence. Most research focuses on the effects peer influences have on groups of individuals, which are usually teenagers (15–17 years old) or preteens (12–15 years old). This study focuses on the types of actions students at higher educational institutions are compelled to perform due to peer influences from peers aged 19-28 years, and how these actions affect them

emotionally, with consideration given to the reasons why individuals seek validation from their peers to such an extent that they harm themselves while pleasing others. This study solely focuses on the experiences of the individuals who are a part of it and does not expect them to understand, solve, or assume any instance or circumstance. Thus, the study's findings are solely based on instances in which students are peer influenced and how they feel about these situations, as determined by their approach to these uncomfortable situations. Results of this study state that students belonging to the younger age group are not only compelled more often but are also more likely to avoid and ignore these instances and brush them off, even though they get hurt emotionally due to them. On the contrary, the older age groups are less frequently compelled and are more likely to talk about it or confront the individuals compelling them, and they feel the need to be accepted and liked by all as the younger students feel the need to.

### **Problem Statement**

Compulsion is the act or state of forcing someone to do something or being forced to do something. This study aims to understand the compulsion faced by students at a higher education institute under the influence of peer pressure and influence, with special emphasis on the avoidance or tolerance of this behavior by the students, primarily due to their need to be accepted into their social friend group.

### **Research Gap**

The latest research on peer pressure was done in the month of December 2022 on the peer influence-linked prevalence of drug abuse and the use of tobacco being developed into a habit seen in the youth of Malaysia. Even though there is a vast array of research linked to peer pressure-induced habits and effects on lifestyle choices of an individual since the 1990s, this study focuses on a population of students categorized by age and aims to analyze and provide insight on not only the effects of acts undertaken due to compulsion but also the reason as to why most of them tend to please their fellow peers by performing these tasks that make them feel uneasy. Furthermore, a significant aspect of this study is that it was conducted by a student rather than a research scientist as a member of the population under study, so the analysis of results is not only unbiased but also at times better understood.

### **Methodology**

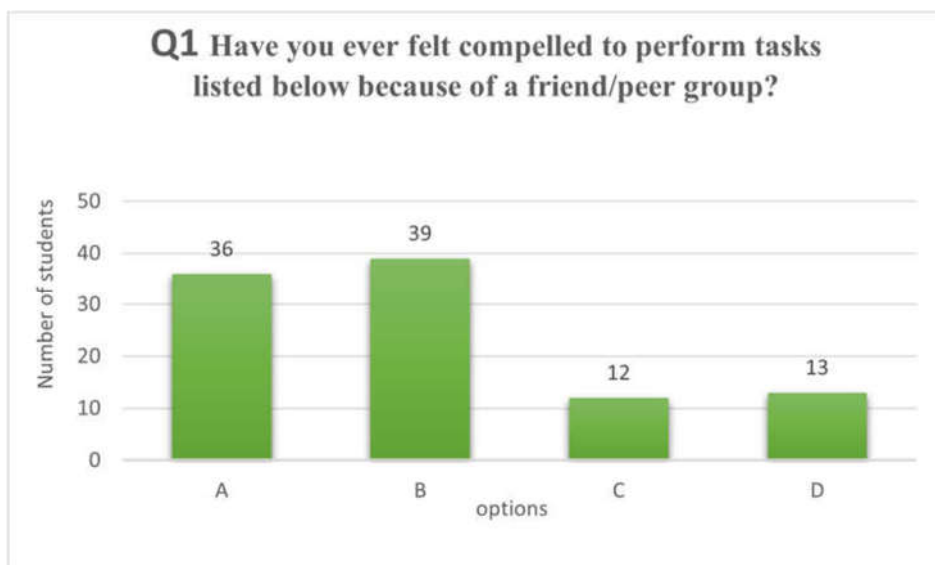
This study has been conducted using a survey based on a list of ten experience-focused questions, each of which has four comprehensive and unambiguous options for an answer. The sample population is made up of one hundred students from a highly regarded Indian institute that offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The students who contributed to this study are divided into three categories: fifty undergraduate students (mostly students in their first and second years of study); twenty-five postgraduate students (students in master's programs in their first year); and 25 Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) students who also serve as teacher's assistants (TAs). The fifty undergraduate students lie in the age range of 17–19 years, while the twenty-five master's program students lie in the range of 20–23 years of age, and the PhD students have a varying age range of 24–29 years of age.

### Result analysis

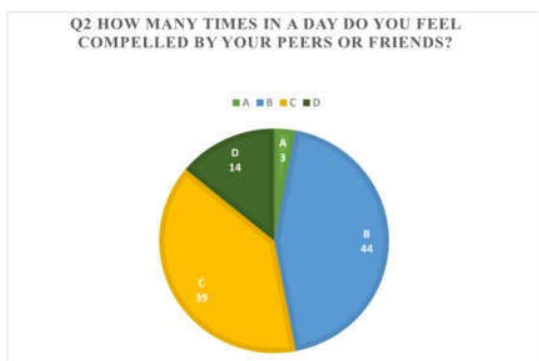
The questionnaire, in the form of a hard copy (printed on a sheet of A4 paper), was circulated in the premises of the institute, and students were asked to give their honest replies based on their experiences. Students were also requested to write their name and role number on the top corner of their questionnaire form for the purpose of authenticity and cross-checking if required at a later stage. Many refused to give this information as the topic of this study was a sensitive matter to them, but they complied with providing their name and participating in the study.

The responses for this study were collected over the course of two working days and analyzed in the week thereafter. The responses to each question were constructed into graphical representations, which are displayed and interpreted below.

- A) Participate in an event
- B) take on tasks which were difficult to handle
- C) be part of a group project reluctantly
- D) hated someone without knowing them

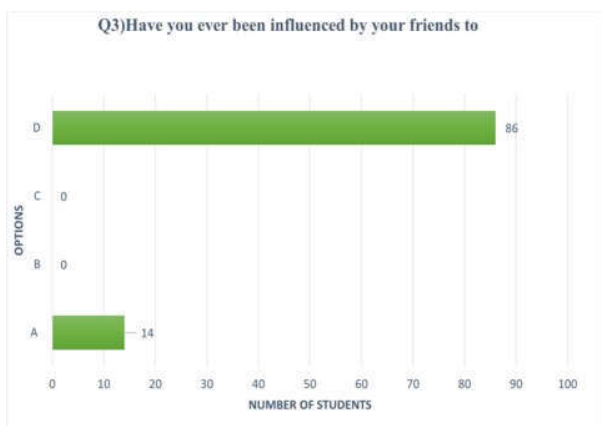


This question aims to find the tasks or activities that students are usually compelled to perform. As represented above, most students feel uneasy when compelled to take on responsibilities that are too burdensome for them to take on. These tasks that they are compelled to take also instils a sense of fear as they are expected to perform well in these tasks that they did not want to undertake in the first place. Group projects and activities require students to form groups in which they perform these activities; some students are unwillingly included in groups just because their friends are in that group. Forming an opinion about someone just based on how people perceive them is a generic form of compulsion faced by students more often than expected. Most of these impressions about the unknown classmate or peer are wrong and usually stem from jealousy and disdain on the part of others.



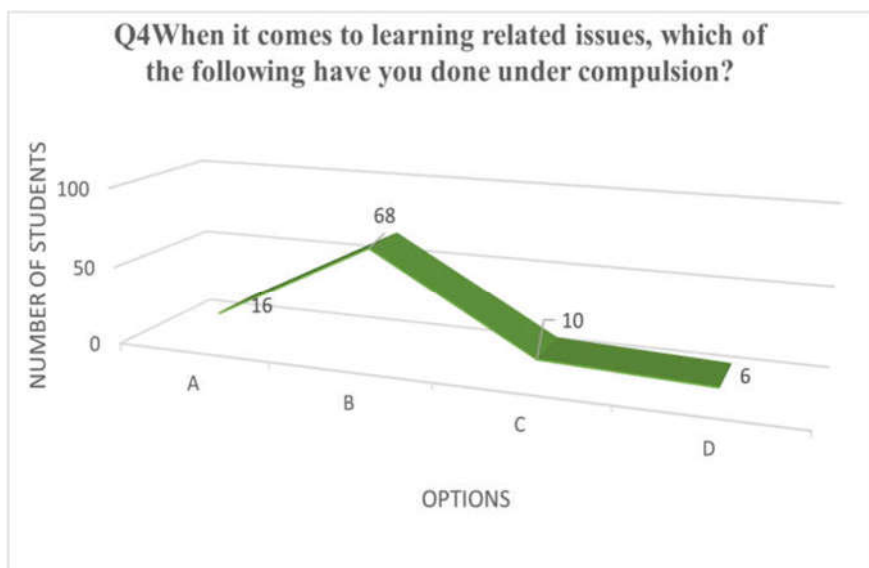
- A) Once
- B) a few times
- C) rarely
- D) too often to keep track

Interpretation: The frequency of the feeling of being compelled to do a task unwillingly by a student is as important, if not more, than being compelled by their peer group. It has been observed that most undergraduate students are compelled a few times per day, with some of them unable to keep track of the number of times they are compelled because it occurs more frequently than they can count. Senior students in master's and PhD programs are rarely compelled, so they are rarely influenced by their peer or friend group.



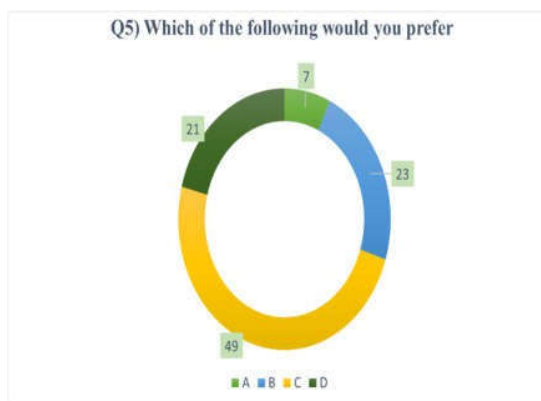
- A) Drink
- B) smoke
- C) abuse drugs
- D) lie

Peer influences have been known to induce health-degrading lifestyle habits, some of which are listed in the options of the question above. Fortunately, in the population under study, students refuse to be compelled to form habits or engage in activities such as abusing drugs or smoking, which may be life-threatening. It is still alarming that many students are being compelled to drink and lie, not only to their fellow peers but also to their parents.



- A) Take assignments lightly
- B) not studied properly for tests
- C) skipped class
- D) disrespected your teacher

Academically, it is observed that students are more compelled than in any other aspect of their lives. Assignments and different forms of assessment are often areas in which every student wants to do well to secure a good grade, but in cases of peer pressure, students take subjects and evaluation systems lightly just because their friends and seniors assure them repeatedly that it will be easy, and some peers even go as far as to threaten fellow students so that the class average remains low. Skipping class because their friends are doing so and ignoring the topic being taught is also common, as is their declining attendance record under the pressure of seeming cool to their friends. The most concerning aspect is the disrespect some students have the audacity to show to their gurus and influence other fellow classmates to do so too; thus, students who feel that it is wrong do not say a word or stand up against these happenings because of the fear of angering their peers.



- A) To be part of the popular friend group
- B) To be part of the quiet friend group
- C) To have only one friend that you associate with
- D) To be a loner and not socialize at all

Social acceptance is seen as the major, if not the only, factor driving students to function as they do under compulsion, but many are seen to desire only a single friend with whom they can truly

associate and not be judged or seen differently as they are in their company. Alas, this friendship rarely comes across these young learners as they are usually observed to be surrounded by a slew of peers who compel, if not outright force them, to participate in activities. Nevertheless, most older students in master’s and Ph.D. programs confess to not minding being a loner or outcast and not socializing at all, some describing this as the perfect way to go about college.



- A) More supportive in studies
- B) Being more accepting of faults
- C) Have more similar hobbies
- D) Being lazy

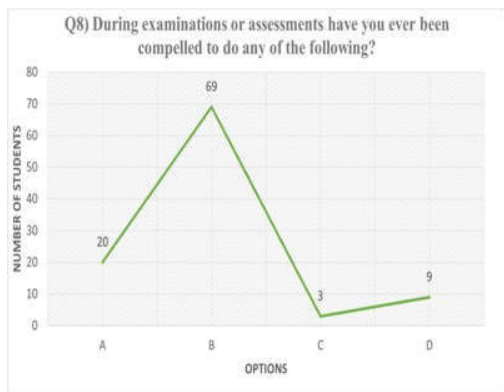
Students belonging to friend groups that compel them to follow their own selfish interests long for friends with whom they can share hobbies and interests; most even confess that their friends look down upon their hobbies and interests. Most friends also regard studying as a secondary option, but the students who have left home to come to a different unfamiliar state and city all together have a distinct perspective on a quality education and wish their friends would understand this without being labelled as nerds. Many students also wish their friends were more accepting of flaws.



- A) Ignoring them
- B) Asking them what their problem is
- C) Defending yourself
- D) Tolerating them

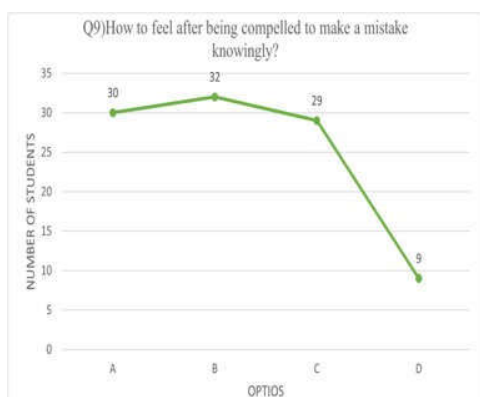
Very few students have the courage and conviction to talk to their friends truthfully about how they are feeling and to confront them about the fact that this is the wrong way to behave. Ignoring the behavior of their friends and tolerating it is the approach that the vast majority of

students take when confronted with the situation in which they are compelled or forced to perform activities while under the influence of their friends.



- A) Cheat
- B) show your answers
- C) bring reference material to cheat
- D) distract the invigilator so your friends can cheat

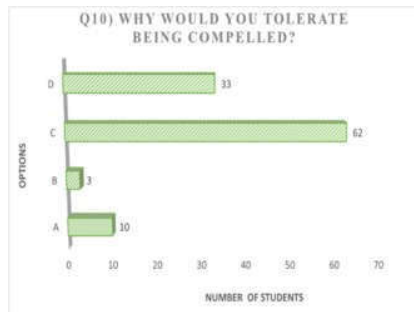
It is extremely concerning to see that students who are under compulsion are forced to show their answers to their friends and peers and therefore take an active part in cheating, which may lead to them being subjected to severe punishment. While many students are forced to dismiss classes and take examinations lightly, it is even more concerning to see that students who are under compulsion are forced to take examinations lightly. A considerable number of people value their standing in their social group more highly than the repercussions they would have to endure if they were caught cheating. Some students have admitted that they were coerced into distracting the instructor in charge and even bringing reference materials into the testing room so that other students may cheat.



- A) Guilty
- B) ashamed
- C) regretful
- D) empty

It has been observed that, in the majority of instances of compulsion resulting from peer influence, the students end up blaming themselves for tolerating their friends who compelled them to make mistakes that they could have easily avoided. The sensation of shame is a major component of how it affects them, followed by the sensations of guilt and regret. Some people

are also left with a sense of emptiness as a consequence of making errors that they could have avoided in order to win the approval of their peers.



- A) You want to feel busy
- B) you want to appear popular
- C) fear of rejection
- D) you do not know how to deal with the situation

When asked in the questionnaire as the last question as to why most students tolerate being compelled by their friends, a majority replied with the fear of being left alone in a sea of friend groups and social hierarchies; they do not wish to be rejected; a sense of social belonging holds them back from saying anything against their friends for forcing them, and instead they just end up tolerating them. Many feel that tolerating their friends will keep them busy and on their toes without hampering their social life, so they consider it a solution where everyone benefits. Some confess to not having the wherewithal and knowledge to know how to deal with the situation, so they end up saying nothing and tolerating their friends in silence.

### Discussion on results

The responses to the survey's questions should only be based on the students' own subjective experiences. It has become known that the vast majorities of students are unhappy with their friendships and are filled with a sense of melancholy and loneliness. This causes them to seek out friendships with people who end up pressuring them to engage in activities that leave them with feelings of remorse and guilt. Many people have a deep desire for genuine connections, but they lack the means and the guts to actively seek them out. They are bound by the need to be accepted and the fear of being rejected, which causes them to put up with being forced to engage in behaviors that will, in the long-term, be extremely detrimental to their professions, personal lives, and overall perception of the world.

### Unexpected findings

It is surprisingly observed that most students are not under the compulsion to smoke or abuse drugs, both of which are lethal activities that are highly glorified in the cinema and entertainment industries. This is a fortunate and relieving aspect that has become known, but it is still concerning that many are forced to drink and party while their time could have been utilized in more productive activities. It is also alarming to observe that, despite their years of experience, the majority of the students tend to tolerate being forced instead of addressing the situation, as many confess that they feel it is a waste of their time and energy. It is also observed that students, though a few, do not undo being compelled to appear popular or cool as previously assumed; they do so for entirely different reasons, the main one being that they fear not



belonging to any group and being left alone, meaning that the main reason students tolerate being compelled by their friends is because of their need for social belonging.

### **Scope for further research**

The findings of this study are limited to the compulsions that students face as a result of peer pressure, but they can be used to conduct research into why students avoid feeling compelled and tolerate the pain that it causes. It is also imperative that, through further research and knowledge, a solution to the ever-progressing issue of peer pressure can be lessened, if not completely solved, as many students realize that there is no need to be part of a friend group that only ends up hurting each other by compelling each other and not respecting feelings and opinions. This is a sensitive issue that requires utmost care in its handling and gathering of information, especially as it involves how students perceive themselves in a social setting.

### **Conclusion**

The fundamental worry of parents, teachers, and educational authorities is not so much the existence of peer pressure as it is the level to which it truly affects the behaviors and beliefs of the pupils. This study focuses on one of the many concerning factors of the effects of peer pressure on students and their behavior both inside and outside of the classroom. The purpose of the study is to ascertain why the majority of students tolerate being pressured by their peers and eventually avoid or ignore the situation. The study focuses on one of the many concerning factors of the effects of peer pressure on students and their behavior both inside and outside of the classroom. According to the findings of the study, the overwhelming majority of students experience feelings of isolation as well as anxiety when they are forced to spend time by themselves. It is hypothesized that these emotions are caused by the significant life adjustment involved in moving from their hometowns, which can be thought of as their "zones of comfort," to a new city that has a distinct culture and set of norms in comparison to their own (for most of the students as some may be locals). The majority of students, when faced with the challenge of adjusting to an unfamiliar environment and surroundings while being away from their support system, end up looking for validation and acceptance from their parents and friend group. This compels them to behave in the same manner as their friends in order to "fit in," as this is the only way they will feel like they "belong." It is acceptable to state that the other students take use of this vulnerability in order to exploit it by compelling and forcing them into circumstances they do not like to be in. This is done by taking advantage of the fact that other students are aware of this vulnerability. It is a common observation that some students who do well in school both academically and in extracurricular end up going astray when they leave home for higher education at colleges or universities, where they are tied down by their friend group and a growing urge to be liked and belong. This is a common observation because it is common to see that some students who do well in school both academically and extracurricular end up going astray. The majority of people end up feeling even more isolated as a result, along with a general loss in academic performance and a sense of shame and remorse for behaviors they took under the coercion of their friends. Additionally, their academic performance generally declines. Eventually, all of these factors led to students developing habits that were detrimental to their health such as drinking, encouraged them to lie more frequently, caused harm to their career prospects, and influenced both the students' perceptions of their fellow classmates and peers as

well as the perceptions that others had of them.

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