

# Peer Pressure Survey of Chinese University Women

Xinran Tang

Psychology, Penn State University

\*Corresponding author. Email: xft5032@psu.edu

## ABSTRACT

Peer pressure is one of the most common pressures that college women can suffer from. Family, appearance, career, marriage, socialization, and income can all become coordinates for comparison. Many suffer from it, but there is not enough research related to the importance of peer pressure. Psychological stress is an issue of great concern in modern society. A certain degree of stress can help promote the study and work of college students, but excessive stress can affect their physical and mental health. As a group with a high level of culture and a reserve of senior talents in our society, university students play a pivotal role in the future development of our country. Therefore, it is important to study the peer pressure of college students. A questionnaire was administered to 225 participants of women between the ages of 18 and 26 about their peer pressure. The results found that the current peer pressure most troubling for women in this age group was focused on school and work. The school should carry out relevant work activities to ease communication.

**Keywords:** Peer Pressure, College Student, Survey, Female, Questionnaire, Peer Influence, Undergraduate Student

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected a lot of sectors, including the mental and physical health of individuals, especially young adults. The psychological effects caused by COVID-19 are varied, including heightened fear, obsessive-compulsive disorder, hypochondria, depression, and neurasthenia among young people [1]. There is a need to implement interventions aimed at helping young people to cope with the effects including using peer networks and social platforms for young people to support each other in adhering to regulations, as it has been proven the strong influence of peer pressure. Peer pressure has been proven to be a major factor in decision-making among individuals, but this effect is more pronounced in females aged between 18 and 26 years.

The paper undertakes a meta-analysis on peer pressure among women aged between 18 and 26 years, and will discuss the main sources of stress and the main causes of stress among female university students. Understanding the influence of peer pressure among young females is critical to understanding processes that contribute to risk-taking decisions. Besides, with the development of society and the increasingly fierce competition, college students will face more and more

psychological pressure and increasingly diverse psychological stressors, which also makes the physical and mental health of college students suffer more and more serious hazards. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to examine the stressors of college students, so as to relieve the stress of college students and promote their physical and mental health.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DATA SOURCE

### 2.1. Literature review

According to the findings of Keyzers, Lee, and Dworkin, peer pressure has a significant influence on emerging adults (18–29 years) in terms of socialization and substance use [2]. The study findings are relevant because the participants were predominantly women (60.8%), highlighting that young adult females are affected by peer pressure. Christopher and Maria [3] as reported in Pakki and Sathiyaseelan note that peer pressure and teasing from family and friends were a significant factor in the body image perception of young adults (18-25 years). The effects of such peer pressure on young adults include “mental health implications such as self-esteem, anxiety, depression, eating disorders and self-confidence” [4]. The findings of Giles revealed that

peer pressure has a significant influence among sorority women on their level of satisfaction and their body image [5]. The study demonstrated that peer influence played a significant role in how they perceived themselves and noted that conversations with peers on the value of their appearance led to a “decrease in the overall satisfaction of body image amongst these peers” [5]. The findings of Foulkes et al. showed that young adults aged between 19 and 25 years did not show prosocial influence and were less susceptible compared to adolescents [6]. Chatterjee et al. note that females after and during adolescents demonstrate more resistance to peer influence than males in general and are less susceptible as they grow older [7].

In a study on peer pressure influence through social media on young adults (17-27 years), Hogue and Mills revealed that, young women actively engaged in “image-based social media of attractive peers” had a more negative body image than before the engagement [8]. Makwana et al. report the effect of social media platforms

on adolescents and young women, noting that the social media environments influence adolescents and young women to have feelings of inadequacy and body dissatisfaction [9]. Holland and Tiggemann also reported that young adults on social media (Instagram) and watching fitspiration were more likely to engage in unhealthy eating and exercise behaviors [10].

**2.2. Data source**

Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. 225 valid questionnaires were returned, 225 of which were from female students. 3 under the age of 18 and 222 from 18 to 24.

**3. RESULTS**

**3.1. Major sources of peer pressure of young adults**

**Table 1.** The three most common sources of peer pressure of the participants

options	subtotal	The proportion
Their original family is not harmonious, envy peers family harmony	25	11.11%
I failed/dissatisfied in the postgraduate entrance examination. I envy my peers' success in the postgraduate entrance examination	26	11.56%
Envy peers can study abroad, but their economic conditions do not allow	23	10.22%
Envy peers to make money/achieve wealth freedom	92	40.89%
Envy peers will socialize and have many friends, but I am relatively introverted	69	30.67%
Envy peers grow beautiful, their appearance anxiety	78	34.67%
Envy peers born in first-tier cities have a lot of resources, their birthplace does not give me too much help	42	18.67%
Envy peers rich family, have a lot of living expenses	24	10.67%
Envy peers peach blossom a lot, there are a lot of people to pursue	18	8%
Envy peers for being close to a particular person (e.g. a crush, a mentor)	12	5.33%
Envy peers who got a good internship/job	64	28.44%
Envy peers for their outstanding academic performance in school (high GPA, participation in various competition camps)	112	49.78%
Envy the personality traits of your peers (e.g., gentleness, perseverance)	72	32%
other	18	8%
Valid number of entries in this topic	225	

When asked where they feel their peer pressure is focused, more than 90 %of the participants mentioned academic issues and nearly half mentioned work. Also, when it comes to “what do you think is the most common source of peer pressure”, 49.78% of participants chose to

envy their peers for their outstanding school performance (high GPA, participation in various competitions and summer camps). In the second place, 40.89% of participants chose to envy their peers for earning/achieving wealth freedom.

The third, fourth, and fifth places of the peer pressure source were 34.67% envious of their peers' good looks and their own appearance anxiety, 32% envious of their peers' flashes of character (such as gentleness and perseverance), and 30.67% envious of their peers' ability

to socialize and come to terms with having many friends, but their own relative introversion.

**3.2. The gender sources of the Peer pressure of young adults**

**Table 2.** The situation of feeling more peer pressure from different genders

options	subtotal	The proportion
The opposite gender	26	11.56%
The same gender	109	48.44%
I do not know	90	40%
Valid number of entries in this topic	225	

In the question of whether they feel that the opposite sex puts more pressure on themselves compared to the same sex, the same sex pressure outweighed the opposite sex pressure, which are 48.44% and 11.56% respectively. In the question of which part of the population you feel more influenced by, those who chose friends took the

first place, more than mothers, fathers, and housemates, but the results were not very significant.

**3.3. Young adults' way of dealing with stress**

**Table 3.** The propotion of participants who confide in others (friends or family)

options	subtotal	The proportion
Yes	118	52.44%
No, but I used to post on social media	11	4.89%
No, I kept it to myself	43	19.11%
I do not know	53	23.56%
Valid number of entries in this topic	225	

**Table 4.** The situation of participants who ever sought help from counseling or a psychologist

options	subtotal	The proportion
Yes	21	9.33%
No, but I plan to seek help in the near future	4	1.78%
No, but I thought about it	54	24%
No, I don't think so	119	52.89%
I do not know	27	12%
Valid number of entries in this topic	225	

In the question of “whether you have chosen to talk to others (friends and family) when you have experienced peer pressure”, 52.44% of participants chose yes, but 19.11% chose to silently keep it in their mind. When asked “if you have experienced peer pressure, did you choose to seek help from counseling or psychologists”, only 9.33% chose yes. In contrast, 52.89% of participants chose no and had no thoughts about it. However, in the question “whether you think it is necessary for the school to set up a work activity related to diversion and communication”, 72% of the participants chose yes. Combined with the peer pressure situation of these questionnaire participants, it is necessary for relevant

institutions such as schools and communities to set up psychological counseling institutions.

**4. REASONS FOR PEER PRESSURE**

**4.1. Academic peer pressure**

In terms of the broader employment environment, the economic development in the past two years has not been good due to the impact of the epidemic. In particular, the work stoppage during the epidemic deepened the potential job seekers' pursuit of stable jobs and higher platforms. In addition, the number of college graduates

has surged in the past two years, and there is a lot of pressure on employment and job search. With the dual factors, graduate school, civil service exams, and studying abroad are very popular at the moment. Their required application materials (GPA, letters of recommendation, research and internship experience, standardized scores) increase competition among college students and exacerbate the negative impact of peer pressure on individuals.

#### **4.2. The peer pressure of looks**

Social media, which is filled with single values, has created an information environment that is flooded with feminine sluts. The reasons for this are, on the one hand, the commercialization of the media system, where social media implants advertisements for profit and promotes the consumption of goods in related fields, and, on the other hand, algorithmic recommendations that put individuals in an information cocoon and place them in a traditionally feminine online environment. A plethora of appearance cues dominate women's evaluation systems of themselves. The monolithic aesthetic approach has created anxiety among college women about their bodies and looks.

### **5. SUGGESTIONS FOR RELIEVING STRESS**

The opening of counseling rooms in universities is an important initiative in the face of students who are severely negatively impacted by peer pressure. Opening a counseling room for individual counseling is an effective way for teachers and students to give direct guidance through one-on-one communication about problems in learning and life, to resolve psychological distress, and to diagnose and correct relevant psychological behavioral problems. For the very few students with serious psychological disorders, they can be promptly identified and referred to medical psychological consultation and treatment departments. At the same time, mental health education should be integrated into school education and teaching activities, such as mental health elective courses.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

According to the survey, 18- to 24-year-old women's most common peer pressure comes from their studies, employment and attention to appearance, and they are also more susceptible to same-sex peer pressure than opposite-sex peers. Most respondents can handle peer pressure well, but a certain percentage of respondents have had their own lives affected by peer pressure. To this end, schools and communities should carry out corresponding psychological counseling services and hold regular health talks.

In addition, this study did a survey on the current situation of peer pressure among women attending university and within three years after graduating from

university, and only some women were selected as the sample, which has some limitations on the representativeness of their peer pressure. The study did not group the participants by major, family status, or birthplace, which may also lead to some bias. If the author wants to study more differences in the professional aspects of peer pressure, she need to expand the sample size.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Chen, B., Sun, J., & Feng, Y., How have COVID-19 isolation policies affected young people's mental health?—Evidence from Chinese college students. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 2020, p. 1529.
- [2] Keyzers, A., Lee, S. K., & Dworkin, J., Peer pressure and substance use in emerging adulthood: a latent profile analysis. *Substance Use & Misuse*, vol. 55(10), 2020, pp. 1716-1723.
- [3] Christopher, B., & Maria, S., *Gender differences: Perception of teasing and body image among young adults*, Christ University, 2013.
- [4] Pakki, S. S., & Sathiyaseelan, A., Issues related to body image in young adult women. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 3(2), 2018, pp. 250-254.
- [5] Giles, P., Peer influence and body dissatisfaction amongst college sorority women. *The Eleanor Mann School of Nursing*, 2013.
- [6] Foulkes, L., Leung, J. T., Fuhrmann, D., Knoll, L. J., & Blakemore, S. J., Age differences in the prosocial influence effect. *Developmental science*, vol. 21(6), 2018, p. e12666.
- [7] Chatterjee, S., Sehgal, A., Kundu, A., Ghatak, D., Dotta, N., Patla, P., & Sengupta, P., Effect of age and gender on psychological correlates of peer pressure in adolescents. *Indian Journal of Community Psychology*, 13(1), 2017, pp. 67-82.
- [8] Hogue, J. V., & Mills, J. S., The effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women. *Body image*, vol. 28, 2019, pp. 1-5.
- [9] Makwana, B., Lee, Y., Parkin, S., & Farmer, L., *Selfie-Esteem: The Relationship Between Body Dissatisfaction and social media in Adolescent and Young Women*. *The Inquisitive Mind*, vol. 35, 2018.
- [10] Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M., A systematic review of the impact of the use of social networking sites on body image and disordered eating outcomes. *Body Image*, 2016. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1740144516300912>