

The Influence of Peer Groups on Sexual Behavior among Tenth-Grade Students

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a transitional period characterized by biological, cognitive, and social changes. During this phase, peer groups exert strong influence, often shaping values, attitudes, and behaviors including those related to sexuality. This study aimed to analyze the effect of peer group involvement on the sexual behavior of tenth-grade students. A quantitative analytic design with a cross-sectional approach was employed. A total of 30 students were selected through accidental sampling. Data were analyzed using paired sample *t*-tests to examine differences in sexual behavior between students actively involved in peer groups and those who were not. Findings indicated that 70% of students who participated in peer groups engaged in sexual behaviors such as kissing, petting, and physical intimacy, compared to 40% of students not in peer groups. Statistical analysis revealed a significant effect of peer group membership on adolescent sexual behavior ($p = 0.000, < 0.05$). Peer groups significantly affect the sexual behavior of adolescents. Strengthening reproductive health education and parent-adolescent communication is critical to prevent risky sexual practices. Schools should integrate extracurricular activities and peer education programs that promote healthy relationships and responsible sexual decision-making.

Keywords: adolescents, peer group, reproductive health, sexual behavior

BACKGROUND

Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase marked by rapid biological, psychological, and social transformations. During this period, peer groups become central to identity formation and autonomy, often replacing family as a primary source of support and guidance (Santrock, 2019). Peer influence can provide positive reinforcement, but it can also lead to risky behaviors, including early initiation of sexual activity (Katz & Kessler, 2020).

The World Health Organization (2021) defines adolescence as the age range of 10–19 years, during which individuals undergo sexual maturation, heightened curiosity, and increased susceptibility to peer norms. Studies have shown that adolescents with strong peer attachment are more likely to adopt group-endorsed behaviors, including sexual exploration (Steinberg, 2020).

In Indonesia, adolescent sexual behavior remains a growing concern. Data from the Indonesian Family Planning Board (BKKBN, 2020) revealed that more than 60% of adolescents reported exposure to pornography, with a considerable proportion engaging in premarital sexual activities. Similarly, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2021) highlighted increasing cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents, largely linked to unprotected sexual encounters.

In Tulungagung, East Java, the AIDS Prevention Commission reported several high school students diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases (Arif, 2020). These findings underscore the urgent need to examine the contextual role of peer groups in shaping adolescent sexual practices. This study therefore investigates the influence of peer groups on sexual behavior among tenth-grade students.

METHODS

This study applied a cross-sectional analytic design, which is commonly used in public health and behavioral research to examine the relationship between variables at a single point in time. The choice of this design was based on its ability to provide a snapshot of the association between peer group membership and adolescent sexual behavior without requiring longitudinal follow-up. It is particularly suitable for studies involving sensitive issues such as adolescent sexuality, where time and ethical limitations may restrict more complex designs.

The population of this study consisted of tenth-grade students, an age group considered highly vulnerable to peer influence and experimentation with new behaviors. Adolescence is a developmental stage in which social interactions play a crucial role, making tenth-grade students an appropriate population for analyzing peer-related factors. By focusing on this group, the study aimed to capture early behavioral patterns that may affect long-term health and well-being.

A sample of 30 students was obtained using accidental sampling, also known as convenience sampling. This non-probability sampling method was chosen for its practicality, as it allowed the researchers to recruit participants who were easily accessible during the data collection period. Although this method may limit the generalizability of the findings, it remains effective for exploratory studies seeking to identify patterns and associations within a specific context.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included items designed to measure socio-demographic characteristics (such as age and gender), involvement in peer groups, and sexual behavior indicators. Sexual behavior was assessed through specific and measurable activities such as kissing, petting, and sexual intercourse. The use of a structured questionnaire ensured standardization of responses, minimized ambiguity, and facilitated accurate analysis of the collected data.

For the analysis, data were processed using the paired sample t-test. This statistical test was selected to evaluate whether significant differences existed between students involved in peer groups and those not involved, with respect to their sexual behavior. A p-value < 0.05 was set as the threshold for statistical significance, meaning that results falling below this value would indicate a meaningful association between peer group membership and adolescent sexual behavior. In summary, the methodological approach of this study combined a cross-sectional analytic design, accessible sampling, structured data collection, and rigorous statistical analysis. This design allowed for an effective exploration of how peer group involvement influences sexual behavior among adolescents. Despite its limitations in sample size and sampling method, the study was structured to ensure reliability and validity, providing valuable insights for further research and intervention development.

RESULTS

The study examined the characteristics of the respondents, revealing that the majority were aged **15–18 years** (93.3%). This age range corresponds to mid-to-late adolescence, a critical period for social development and experimentation with peer-influenced behaviors. The gender distribution indicated that 60% of respondents were female and 40% were male, providing a balanced perspective on adolescent experiences across genders.

Analysis of sexual behavior showed a clear association with peer group involvement. Among students who were members of peer groups, 70% reported engaging in sexual behavior, including activities such as kissing, petting, and sexual intercourse. In contrast, 60% of students who were not involved in peer groups reported no sexual behavior, suggesting that peer group membership may play a significant role in shaping sexual decision-making and exposure to risk behaviors.

The results of the paired sample t-test confirmed that there was a statistically significant difference between students involved in peer groups and those who were not in terms of sexual behavior ($p = 0.000$). This finding indicates that participation in peer groups is a significant predictor of adolescent sexual activity, highlighting the influence of social interactions and peer norms on behavioral outcomes during adolescence.

Table 1. Summary of Respondent Characteristics and Sexual Behavior

Variable	Category/Group	Frequency/Percentage
Age	15–18 years	28 (93.3%)
Gender	Female	18 (60%)
	Male	12 (40%)
Peer Group Membership	In peer group (sexual behavior)	21 (70%)
	Not in peer group (no sexual behavior)	6 (60%) no sexual behavior
Statistical Test	Paired sample t-test	$p = 0.000$

Table 1 illustrates that most respondents were mid-to-late adolescents, with slightly more females than males. The data show a strong association between peer group membership and sexual behavior, as students in peer groups were more likely to engage in sexual activities. The paired sample t-test confirmed that this difference is statistically significant, indicating that peer influence is an important factor in adolescent sexual behavior.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates a significant influence of peer groups on adolescent sexual behavior. Consistent with Steinberg (2020), peer groups serve as reference points for adolescents seeking acceptance and belonging. Students involved in peer groups are more likely to experiment sexually due to shared norms, peer pressure, and curiosity (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2019).

The findings align with research by Rahmi et al. (2021), who reported that limited parent adolescent communication about sexuality increases vulnerability to risky sexual practices. In this study, students not engaged in peer groups were less likely to exhibit sexual behavior, suggesting that reduced exposure to peer influence may mitigate risky behaviors.

Globally, similar patterns are observed. A survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019) reported that 38% of U.S. adolescents in grades 9 - 12 had engaged in sexual intercourse, with peer norms strongly influencing onset. In Indonesia, the SKRRI (2020) showed that peer influence accounted for at least 5% of adolescent sexual initiation cases.

Preventive strategies should focus on reproductive health education and peer-led interventions. Schools can create structured extracurricular programs to channel peer influence toward positive outcomes, while parents should foster open communication to counterbalance peer pressures (Widman et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

Peer groups significantly affect adolescent sexual behavior among tenth-grade students. Students active in peer groups are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. Strengthening parental guidance, reproductive health education, and peer-led school programs is essential to reduce these risks.

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