



Influence of Peer Pressure on Academic Performance and Social Behaviour of Students with Physical and Health Impairment

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ABSTRACT

This write up focuses on the influence of peer pressure on the academic performance and social behaviour of students with physical and health impairment in Oyo metropolis. The paper discusses the concept of peer pressure as it relates to students with physical and health impairment. It further discusses the types and causes of peer pressure among students with physical and health impairment before going on to discuss the impacts and risk factors of peer pressure among students with physical and health impairment. The paper concludes by discussing how students with physical and health impairment can deal with negative peer pressure. Based on this write up, it was recommended among other things that there should be counselors in all secondary schools and higher institutions of learning to help students guide against and ward off the influence of negative peer pressure; parents should provide proper monitoring of their children so as to prevent the influence of bad friends; teachers, lecturers, schools and institutions should enact rules and provide adequate supervision for students to guide against peer pressure influence; and government should ensure that subjects and courses to guide against bad behaviours are included in the curriculum.

Keywords: Academic performance, social behavior, students, peer pressure

INTRODUCTION

Peer group is a group of people of same age or social status. The peer group is the first social group outside the home in which a student with physical and health impairment attempts to gain acceptance and recognition. Peer group is an important influence throughout one's life but they are more critical during the developmental years of childhood and adolescence as it is an important socialization agent for student with physical and health impairment (Castrogiovanni, 2012). Peer pressure refers to the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his/her attitudes and values in order to conform to group norms (Kirk, 2014). Adeagbo (2013) stated that students with physical and health impairment always emulate their mates in whatever form of behaviour they exhibit, particularly that which interest them.

According to Peterson (2011), peer pressure is when student with physical and health impairment are influenced by other people (their peers) to act in a certain way; it is direct influence on people by peers. This type of pressure differs from general social pressure because it causes an individual to change in response to a feeling of being pressured or influenced from a peer or peer group (Black, 2012). The way pressure is applied by peers can vary (Adeagbo, 2013). A peer might pressure other students directly by asking them to do something, or they might tease or coax them so that they will fall in line with the peer's behaviour. They may not say anything at all; instead, they may pressure them by treating them as outcasts or by ignoring them (Kirk, 2014).

According to Ryan (2015), the peer group influences are more pronounced and noted in higher institutions of learning than in secondary and primary schools, partly because some of the students go away from home and stay in hostels or residents close to school where parental supervision and contact is very limited. The influence of peer group on students with physical and health impairment is great both socially and academically in the school, because there is the tendency for members to be

comfortable with the group norms and values. Sometimes, influence of peer groups may lead to aggressive behaviour such as rioting in school. Peer group influence also prompt students to form social clique with nicknames. Students with physical and health impairment are always anxious to initiate their peers socially whether in a good or bad way, they would want to go to the church or mosque due to their peers' influences. They may also join different clubs like Girls' Guides, Boys' Scout, Brigade, Red Cross, to mention but few (Owuamanam, 2011).

Adeola (2013) posited that the attitudes may influence students' social and academic achievement either positively or negatively. The negative aspect which could be detrimental to students' social and academic work are the cases of group behaviour such as truancy, persistent lateness to school, juvenile delinquency, stealing, absenteeism from school, disobedience, laziness, disregarding school rules and regulations and so on. On the other hand, the influence could be geared towards positive aspect of students' social and academic achievement. For instance, students could be influenced socially, psychologically, intellectually to mention but few, and all these can boost academic performance as well as good social behaviour. For instance, forming a reading group, going to the library, anxious to join others in answering questions in the classroom, and making friends with brilliant students (Coleman, 2014).

Castrogiovanni (2012) stated that at adolescence stage, one's sense of identity is unstable. A peer-labelling process may be contributing to the construction of positive identities for some adolescents with physical and health impairment but negative identities for others (Ademorokun, 2013). Best friends have been found to be similar in regards to frequency of cutting class and time spent on homework. Thomas and Landau (2012) asserted that students with physical and health impairment who care about learning are more likely to associate with peers who share this interest in academics than those who have less interest in learning. The personal value that an individual attaches to a characteristic also affects the individual's response to change.

Concept of Peer Pressure

According to Black (2012), peer pressure is influence that a peer group, observers or individuals exert to encourage others to change their attitudes, values or behaviours and conform to the group norms. Peer pressure is the influence of a social group on an individual. Babawale (2015) indicated that peer pressure refers to the way the people of the same social group act or believe in order to influence one another, often in negative ways. Peer pressure is something everybody has to deal with at some time in one's life. How successful one handles peer pressure depends to a greater extent on the individual's self-concept and position in the world (Ademorokun, 2013). Peer pressure is defined as when people of one's age encourages or urges one to do something or to keep off from doing something else, irrespective of the person's desire to or not to (Uche, 2010). Peer pressure according to Seel (2009), comprises a set of group dynamics where by a group in which one feels comfortable may override personal habits, individual moral inhibitions or idiosyncratic desires to impose a group norm, attitudes or behaviour.

Peer pressure is emotional or mental force from people belonging to the same social group (such as same age grade or status) to act or behave in a manner similar to themselves (Ryan, 2015). Peer pressure has a great influence on the behaviour of students with physical and health impairment and reflects young people's desire to fit in and be accepted by others (Okeyode, 2010). Peer pressure is also known as peer influence, and it involves changing one's behaviour to meet the perceived expectation of others (Adeagbo, 2013). Black (2012) stated that most teen students with physical and health impairment conform to peer pressure like music, clothing or hair styles. When it comes to important issues like moral values, parents still remain more influential than the peer group (Black, 2012). Peer pressure may have a positive influence and help to motivate students with physical and health impairment to do their best. Peer pressure may also result in people doing things that may not fit into their sense of what is right and wrong (Black, 2012).

Peer pressure for students with physical and health impairment may be influenced in a number of ways: fashion choice, alcohol and smoking and other drugs use, decision to have a boyfriend/girlfriend, choice of who one's friends are, organizing and extending parties. Peer pressure may be pressure in the work place, at school or within the general community. It can affect people of all ages and backgrounds. Research such as peer cluster theory (Adetunji, 2003) has shown that peer

pressure has a much greater impact on the behaviour of adolescents with physical and health impairment than any other factor.

According to Adeagbo (2013), peer pressure can lead to experimentation with drugs and alcohol, sex, skipping school and various high-risk behaviours. If there is a sudden change in a child's appearance, clothing and attitude, especially if accompanied by secretive behaviour, he or she may be succumbing to the influences of peers (Kirk, 2014). Everyone, during a period of their life experiences peer pressure. Peer pressure can be either positive or negative, although it is portrayed mostly as negative. Friends, family and people all around can influence teenagers in a negative or positive way (Ryan, 2015). Positive effects of peer pressure are doing well in school, eating healthy, exercising, joining after-school programmes and much more. Negative effects of peer pressure include using drugs, smoking, shoplifting, cutting class, having sex, drinking alcohol, physical violence, doing badly in school, and so on (Ogunwale, 2013).

Types and Causes of Peer Pressure

According to Owuamanam (2011), there are three different forms of peer pressure in secondary schools and higher institutions namely;

- **Direct Peer Pressure:** This is when a student or a group of students is/are actually telling another student what he/she should be doing or what is okay to do. In this type of peer pressure, friends of a student confront and directly tell him or her what to do and how to do it.
- **Indirect Peer Pressure:** This is not necessarily verbal peer pressure but optical peer pressure. One student who is hanging out with a group of students who smoke or do drugs is exposed to this kind of negative behaviour and may think it is acceptable.
- **Individual peer pressure:** Individual peer pressure is when a student is trying too hard to fit in and doing things because other students are doing them.

According to Castrogiovanni (2012), peer pressure can have many causes, some of which are:

- **Curiosity:** This refers to the desire to know. Most students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions are very curious to know many things, they have interest in many things their mates are doing. They also want to do things their friends are doing, and this is a major cause of peer pressure which leads them to do what they do not want to do.
- **The desire to fit in:** Many students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions want to feel accepted by their peers, so they do certain things to fit in among their peers. Students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions think that by following what their friends do, like smoking or drinking alcohol, they will seem 'cool' or they fear that they will look clueless or completely out of it if they do not.
- **Lack of structure at home:** Students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions coming from troubled homes may be more susceptible to peer pressure. Families that are dysfunctional and lack a clear set of guidelines or belief structures may produce children who are more likely to turn to social groups for their norms and guidelines.
- **Insecurity:** Majority of students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions feel insecure. As a result of this, they follow their peers and perform actions they are not comfortable with.
- **The overwhelming need to be accepted among same age or social group:** This is also a major cause of peer pressure, many students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions always think of the need to be accepted among same peers and this makes them to do what they do not want to do.

Consequences and Risk Factors for Peer Pressure among Students with Physical and Health Impairment

Contrary to what many people think, peer pressure can affect students with physical and health impairment by more than just influencing them (Uche, 2010). Peer pressure can cause depression and doing drugs, abusing alcohol and smoking can lead to life-long problems. Students with physical and health impairment can begin to feel lonely, helpless, and even more hopeless because they realize that their efforts to gain acceptance are not working. Students that feel rejected feel powerless and unimportant. These feelings can trigger depression. Depression can be expressed in anger, agitation and sometimes suicide (Cherniss, 2011).

According to Babawale (2015), getting involved with smoking, drinking, and doing drugs can lead to many negative issues. Smoking is an addictive habit and can lead to health problems such as lung cancer and emphysema. Drugs, also being addicting, destroy brain cells. Drug users or junkies have an extremely hard time trying to stop doing drugs. Along with drugs and smoking, abusing alcohol is very addictive. Alcoholism is a disease and alters the lives of people affected by it (Ademorokun, 2013).

Negative peer pressure has great consequence on academic performance of secondary school students with physical and health impairment. As a minor, smoking, abusing alcohol, doing drugs, cutting class, and having sex are all felonies. Students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions performing these acts can be in serious trouble, to the point where they can be arrested and put into juvenile hall (John, 2014).

Dealing with Negative Peer Pressure

According to Kirk (2014), students with physical and health impairment are faced with a lot of peer pressure in higher institutions of learning. He stated, however, that there are some ways they can deal with peer pressure in school. These include:

- Students with physical and health impairment should avoid putting themselves in situations that make them feel uncomfortable. For example, if they do not want to start smoking, they should stay away from areas where they know friends go to smoke. They should try as much as possible to make themselves comfortable and move with friends that are positive.
- They should have self-confidence because self-confidence is very essential in dealing with negative peer pressure. Students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions should be self-confident enough to resist negative peer influence in school. They should not be shivering because they need to be assertive.
- Students with physical and health impairment should choose their friends wisely. The type of friends students with physical and health impairment choose to move with within the school determines their behaviour. Choosing a friend is very important. For instance, if a student hang around with peers who share the same values, such student will never be asked to do something he/she do not want to do.
- Students with physical and health impairment should always think about the consequences whenever they are asked to do something they are not sure about. They should stop for a moment and ask: Will this activity get me in trouble? Will it be harmful to my health? They should be true to themselves and think about the reasons why they are considering doing something they are uncomfortable with.
- Students with physical and health impairment should be assertive and learn how to say “no”. This is perhaps the most difficult thing in the world for many people to do, but it is an essential skill if they are to successfully fend off negative peer pressure.
- Students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institution should stay away from peers who pressure them to do things that seem wrong or dangerous. They should learn how to avoid or get out of situations which feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- They should spend time with other students who resist peer pressure. They can have at least one friend who is faithful. If they have problems with peer pressure, they should talk to a grown-up they trust, like a parent, teacher or school counselor.

CONCLUSION

Peer group plays significant role in the social behaviour and academic performance of students with physical and health impairment in secondary schools and higher institutions, as peer pressure is seen as a key part of the developmental process of the students. Also, the kind of attitudes exhibited by students with physical and health impairment secondary schools and higher institutions always depend on the type of peers they move with within the school and peer pressure has more negative influence than positive influence on social and academic performance of students with physical and health impairment.

A number of factors are responsible for peer pressure influence on social and academic performance of students with physical and health impairment which include desire to fit in, isolation, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, lack of parental care among others. It was, however, agreed that through proper enlightenment and effective counselling in schools, problems of negative peer pressure can be reduced or solved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the write up, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be trained counsellors in all secondary schools and higher institutions so as to help counsel students with physical and health impairment who are moving with peers to counteract negative influences.
- Parents should have effective supervision on their children and should not allow any bad friends to distract their children in school.
- There is a need for teachers, lecturers and the institution authority to have greater supervision, rules and regulations to guide against bad gangs in the school environment.
- Government can also help by including subjects and courses that can curb bad behaviours in secondary schools and higher institutions so as to enlighten students more and let them know the consequences of bad peer group.

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