

Do Gender and Residential Status Really Matter? A Study of Peer Pressure, Emotional Maturity and Interpersonal Support among University Students

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between peer pressure, emotional maturity and interpersonal support, and the differences between male and female students and between those living in the city and those living in the countryside in the university. It is important to be aware of these psychosocial factors because peer pressure can affect the emotional development of students and their interpersonal relationships. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 students from the university aged 18-25 years, of which 50 were males and 50 were females. The Peer Pressure Scale Questionnaire – Revised (PPSQ-R), Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS), and Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) were used for data collection. Pearson's product-moment correlation and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to analyse the data. The results indicated that there was a weak positive correlation between peer pressure and emotional maturity ($r = .219, p = .029$). No significant relationships were found between peer pressure and interpersonal support ($r = -.152, p = .132$) or emotional maturity and interpersonal support ($r = -.194, p = .053$). In addition, there were no statistically significant gender differences in peer pressure ($t = 1.849, p = .067$), emotional maturity ($t = 0.224, p = .824$), or interpersonal support ($t = 0.404, p = .687$). The results indicate that there is a slight correlation between higher peer pressure and slightly higher emotional maturity among the university students, but there is no significant difference between the peer pressure, emotional maturity and interpersonal support of the two genders.

Keywords: peer pressure, emotional maturity, interpersonal support, gender differences and residential status.

The student population is a special group because most students are in the developmental phase of young adulthood (18-25 years), which is a time of identity exploration, increased independence and the development of meaningful interpersonal relationships. At this point, students face academic, social, and emotional difficulties that demand appropriate emotional management, coping, and interpersonal interactions. During this time, peer relationships are a key factor in psychological adjustment. Positive peer interactions promote self-confidence,

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social competence, and well-being, whereas negative peer pressure may contribute to emotional distress, maladaptive behaviours, and risky decision-making (Rawat & Gulati, 2019; Fatima, Hirani, et al., 2023).

According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, identity development during this stage is strongly influenced by social interactions and peer acceptance (Erikson, 1963). Emotional maturity helps people manage their emotions, deal with social demands, and have healthy relationships (Jobson, 2020; Fatima, Hirani, et al., 2023). Likewise, interpersonal support from family, friends, and significant others enhances resilience, psychological well-being, and social adjustment by fulfilling individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Slemp et al., 2024). Thus, the study of the role of gender and residential status is significant in the context of the psychosocial adjustment of university students.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is the pressure or influence that is exerted by a peer or group of peers who encourage a person to take on certain attitudes, behaviors, or values to be accepted or to avoid rejection. Singh and Saini (2010) defined peers as people who are part of the same social group, while peer pressure has been defined as the perceived pressure to conform to behaviours endorsed by one's peer group (Verma & Bansal, 2019). Peer pressure is not a one-off event but a social process in which people change their attitudes and behaviours to fit in with social expectations (Gulati, 2017).

Studies have shown that peer pressure can have positive and negative effects. Positive peer influence fosters cooperation, prosocial behaviour, academic motivation and psychological well-being, while negative peer pressure has been linked to risky behaviours, emotional distress, poor decision-making and low self-esteem (Moldes et al., 2019). Peer groups also shape students' academic decisions, motivation, and aspirations in educational environments (Roy & Swargiary, 2024).

Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity is the capacity of an individual to identify, manage and express emotions at the right time and place and in the right manner, and to keep them stable in various circumstances. It allows people to think before they act, helping them to cope, make decisions and adjust psychologically. Ghosh (2019) defined emotional maturity as one of the important factors in personality development.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) provides a framework for understanding the development of emotional maturity in terms of family systems. Likewise, Attachment Theory proposes that secure early relationships promote emotional regulation and healthy interpersonal functioning in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969). These views suggest that emotional maturity is a result of ongoing relationships with family and social contexts.

Research findings show that emotionally mature people are more resilient, have more effective coping mechanisms and better interpersonal relationships. The relationship between higher emotional maturity and better academic adjustment, emotional intelligence and adaptive functioning among university students has been found (Herwandha & Prastuti, 2021).

Moreover, emotionally mature people are more capable of coping with the current psychosocial problems, such as quarter-life crises and emotional responses to social media, which can improve psychological health (Suprayogi & Santoso, 2024; Zaini et al., 2023).

Interpersonal Support

Interpersonal support is the emotional, informational, appraisal, and tangible support provided by family, friends, peers, teachers, and other important people. It serves as an important psychosocial resource that enhances emotional well-being, resilience, and psychological adjustment. Interpersonal support is defined as the feeling of being loved, valued, and cared for by trusted others (Khulbe & Bartwal, 2024).

According to the Stress-Buffering Model, interpersonal support buffers the impact of stressful life events by enhancing coping resources and decreasing psychological stress (Delistamati et al., 2006). Likewise, Self-Determination Theory suggests that supportive relationships foster psychological well-being by meeting the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Rouse et al., 2016).

Research has consistently found that interpersonal support is related to improved mental health, emotional resilience, and adaptive functioning. Emotional maturity and interpersonal functioning are also improved by supportive relationships, which also lower symptoms of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress (Barragán Martín et al., 2021). In the school context, interpersonal support has been associated with better academic adjustment, motivation and wellbeing (Virtanen & Isotalus, 2011).

While there are studies that have explored emotional maturity, interpersonal support, and how they relate to peer influence, few studies have explored the interrelationships between all three variables in a single study. Furthermore, the results on the impact of the demographic characteristics (such as gender and place of residence) are inconclusive. The gaps highlight the need for further research to gain a deeper understanding of these aspects of adulthood.

Objectives of the Study

1. Exploring the relationship among peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support among university students.
2. Exploring gender differences in peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support.
3. Exploring differences in peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support based on residential status (hostellers and day scholars).

Hypotheses

H1: Peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support will be significantly related among university students.

- a. Peer pressure will be correlated with emotional maturity
- b. Peer pressure will be correlated with interpersonal support

- c. Emotional maturity will be correlated with interpersonal support

H2: There will be significant gender differences in peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support among university students.

- d. There will be a significant gender difference in peer pressure.
- e. There will be a significant gender difference in emotional maturity.
- f. There will be a significant gender difference in interpersonal

H3: There will be significant differences in peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support based on residential status among university students.

- g. There will be a significant difference in peer pressure between hostellers and day scholars.
- h. There will be a significant difference in emotional maturity between hostellers and day scholars.
- i. There will be a significant difference in interpersonal support between hostellers and day scholars.

Method

Sample and Sampling

The study was conducted on a sample of 100 university students aged between 18 and 25 years. The sample comprised 50 male and 50 female students. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the inclusion criteria that they were currently enrolled in a university and willing to participate in the study.

Tools

Peer Pressure Scale Questionnaire–Revised (PPSQ-R): Peer pressure was assessed using the Peer Pressure Scale Questionnaire–Revised (PPSQ-R) developed by Sunil Saini and Sandeep Singh. The scale consists of 25 items designed to measure the extent to which individuals experience influence and pressure from their peers in different social situations.

Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS): Emotional maturity was measured using the Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) developed by Dr. Yashvir Singh and Dr. Mahesh Bhargava. The scale contains 48 items and assesses an individual's level of emotional stability, emotional control, personality integration, social adjustment, and independence.

Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL-12): Interpersonal support was measured using the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List–12 (ISEL-12) developed by Cohen, S., Mermelstein, R., Kamarck, T., and Hoberman, H. M. (1985). The scale comprises 12 items and measures perceived availability of social support from family, friends, and significant others across different life situations.

Procedure

Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and their participation was made voluntary prior to data collection. All participants gave informed consent and data collected were kept confidential and anonymous. Participants filled out a self-report questionnaire that included the Peer Pressure Scale Questionnaire – Revised (PPSQ-R), the Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS), and the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL). The questionnaires were given one by one and the respondents were asked to answer the questions honestly according to their experiences. The data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Result

Table 1 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients among peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support. The findings revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between peer pressure and emotional maturity ($r = .219, p = .029$). However, peer pressure was not significantly related to interpersonal support ($r = -.152, p = .132$). Similarly, the relationship between emotional maturity and interpersonal support was weak and negative but did not reach statistical significance ($r = -.194, p = .053$).

Table 1

Correlation between Peer Pressure, Emotional Maturity, and Interpersonal Support

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Peer Pressure	100	65.71	11.26	—		
2. Emotional maturity	100	120.79	31.78	.219*	—	
3. Interpersonal support	100	34.73	5.68	-.152	-.194	—

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients are reported.

Table 2 presents the results of the independent-samples *t*-test analysing gender differences in peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support among university students. The findings indicated that male and female students did not differ significantly in peer pressure ($t = 1.574, p = .119$), emotional maturity ($t = 1.383, p = .170$), or interpersonal support ($t = -1.583, p = .117$).

Table 2

Gender Differences in Peer Pressure, Emotional Maturity, and Interpersonal Support

Variables	Male (50)		Female (50)		t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
1. Peer Pressure	67.48	12.78	63.94	9.47	1.574	.119	0.3

2. Emotional maturity	125.14	36.08	116.44	26.02	1.383	.170	0.2
3. Interpersonal support	33.84	4.94	35.62	6.23	-1.583	.117	0.3

Note. M= Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation. For peer pressure and emotional maturity, the values reported are based on the equal variances not assumed test because Levene's test was significant. For interpersonal support, the equal variances assumed results are reported because Levene's test was not significant.

Table 3 presents the results of the independent-samples *t*-test comparing hostellers and day scholars on peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups in peer pressure ($t = 1.849, p = .067$), emotional maturity ($t = 0.224, p = .824$), or interpersonal support ($t = 0.404, p = .687$).

Table 3

Residential Status (Hostellers vs. Day Scholars): Differences in Peer Pressure, Emotional Maturity, and Interpersonal Support

Variables	Residential status				t	p	Cohen's d
	Hostellers	Day- scholars	Hostellers	Day- scholars			
	M	SD	M	SD			
Peer Pressure	67.78	11.38	63.64	11.00	1.849	.067	0.3
Emotional maturity	121.50	33.56	120.08	29.83	0.224	.824	0.0
Interpersonal support	34.96	6.05	34.50	5.30	0.404	.687	0.0

Note. M= Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation. Equal variances were assumed for all analyses because Levene's test was not significant.

Discussion

The present study focused on the relationships between peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support among university students, and on the possible gender and residential differences in these relationships. Overall, the results indicated that emotional maturity was positively associated with peer pressure, but the associations between interpersonal support and emotional maturity and between interpersonal support and peer pressure were not statistically significant. In addition, there were no significant differences between gender or residential status in terms of peer pressure, emotional maturity, or interpersonal support. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported while Hypotheses 2 and 3 were not supported.

The first hypothesis was that there would be a significant relationship between peer pressure, emotional maturity and interpersonal support among university students. This hypothesis was

partially confirmed as only a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($H1; a$) was found between peer pressure and emotional maturity ($r = .219, p = .029$), with the others being non-significant ($H1; b \text{ \& } c$). Even though peer pressure is seen as a negative influence, the present results indicate that peer relations can also be a positive influence on emotional development in emerging adulthood. Students at university often face a variety of situations where they need to manage social expectations, make independent choices, and manage their emotions. Such experiences can foster emotional maturity through self-awareness, emotional control, and coping skills. Thus, exposure to peer influence can be a developmental experience that supports emotional competence instead of compromising it.

The present findings are in line with the findings of Rawat and Gulati (2019), who found that positive peer interactions foster emotional development through cooperation, empathy and effective interpersonal communication. Likewise, Fatima et al. (2023) concluded that emotionally mature people have a better ability to deal with peer influence due to their emotional regulation and independent decision-making ability. The studies confirm that emotional maturity helps young adults to react to social pressures in a constructive way rather than merely conforming to them.

The correlation, however, was not very strong, suggesting that peer pressure accounts for only a small percentage of the variance in emotional maturity (**H1; a**). Emotional maturity is a multidimensional concept that is affected by various factors such as personality, family environment, parenting styles, cultural values, and life experiences (Ayasrah et al., 2022). Thus, while peer interaction is one of the factors that influence emotional development, it is not the only one that influences emotional maturity in university students. Relationship between Peer Pressure and Interpersonal Support

The **b** part of the first hypothesis was that interpersonal support among university students would be significantly related to peer pressure (**H1; b**). The results showed, however, that there was a weak negative, non-significant correlation between the two variables ($r = -.152, p = .132$). Hence, this hypothesis was rejected.

The results indicate that perceived interpersonal support has no direct effect on the level of peer pressure that university students feel. Students can get the emotional and practical support they need from family, friends, or others and still experience peer influence in academic and social environments. This is in line with the results of Esen and Gündoğdu (2010), who stated that personality, self-esteem and social competence are factors affecting susceptibility to peer pressure.

The results may also be interpreted in terms of the Stress-Buffering Model (Cohen & Wills, 1985) which proposes that social support is a buffer rather than a preventative factor in coping with stressful experiences. Therefore, interpersonal support can help students cope with the impact of peer pressure without decreasing the frequency of peer pressure. The overall results suggest that peer pressure is not only a matter of interpersonal support, but may be influenced by other psychological and social factors, which should be explored further.

The first hypothesis also proposed that emotional maturity would be significantly related to interpersonal support among university students (**H1; c**). However, the results showed a weak

negative, non-significant relationship between emotional maturity and interpersonal support ($r = -.194, p = .053$). Therefore, this hypothesis was not supported.

The findings suggest that emotionally mature students do not necessarily perceive higher levels of interpersonal support. This result contrasts with the findings of Barragán Martín et al. (2021), who reported that supportive relationships contribute to emotional maturity and emotional stability.

The second hypothesis suggested that there would be significant differences between the male and female university students in terms of peer pressure, emotional maturity and interpersonal support. The results, however, did not show any statistically significant difference between the genders in any of the three variables. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

The results showed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students with respect to peer pressure (H2; d). This implies that the influence of peers is similar for male and female university students. This may be due to the fact that the academic requirements, social experiences, and peer relationships in modern universities are comparable for both sexes. As a result, boys and girls can be subjected to similar social expectations and group influences, irrespective of their gender. The present finding is consistent with previous studies that have reported no significant gender differences in peer pressure among university students (Chen & Deng, 2022).

Likewise, there was no significant difference between the genders in emotional maturity (H2; e). The mean scores for male students were slightly higher than those for female students, but the difference was not statistically significant. This discovery indicates that emotional maturity is a process that occurs as a result of experiences that are shared by both men and women, including higher education, socialization, family life and personal development. This finding is supported by previous research by Ayasrah et al. (2022), who concluded that emotional maturity is influenced by multiple developmental and environmental factors rather than biological sex alone.

The study also revealed that there was no significant difference between the genders in interpersonal support (H2; f). The mean scores were slightly higher for female students than for male students, but the difference was not statistically significant. This result suggests that boys' and girls' experiences of emotional and social support from family, friends and significant others are similar. A possible reason is that opportunities for university students to build supportive relationships are similar across genders, whether in the family, peer group, or academic setting. Consequently, the availability and perception of interpersonal support may be more related to the quality of social relationships than to gender. These results are consistent with those of other studies. For instance, Zimet, Gregory D. et al. (1988) reported that perceived social support as assessed by the MSPSS was relatively consistent across demographic groups, such as gender. Similarly, Dahlem, Nancy W., et al. (1991) found that the MSPSS had similar perceptions of social support among male and female participants. More recently, Kazarian, Shahe S. and McCabe (1991) reported little difference between men and women in their perceptions of social support, indicating that men and women can access and utilize supportive social networks equally.

The third hypothesis proposed that there would be a significant difference in peer pressure between hostellers and day scholars (**H3; g**). However, the results showed no statistically significant difference, $t = 1.849$, $p = .067$, Cohen's $d = 0.36$. Although hostellers reported slightly higher peer pressure ($M = 67.78$, $SD = 11.38$) than day scholars ($M = 63.64$, $SD = 11.00$), the difference was not statistically significant.

This result is in line with earlier studies that have shown that the nature and quality of peer relationships are more important than demographic or residential factors in influencing peer pressure. Steinberg, Laurence, and Monahan (2007) found that developmental processes and characteristics of peer groups have a significant influence on susceptibility to peer influence, whereas demographic variables do not. In addition, Prinstein, Mitchell J. and Dodge (2008) noted that peer influence is felt by students regardless of whether they reside in the hostels or commute from home, and that peer influence is manifested in three ways: friendship quality, social acceptance, and interpersonal dynamics. These findings, combined with the present finding, suggest that there may be a similar level of peer pressure for both hostellers and day scholars.

The third hypothesis also proposed a significant difference in emotional maturity between hostellers and day scholars (**H3; h**). The results revealed no significant difference, $t = 0.224$, $p = .824$, Cohen's $d = 0.04$. The mean scores of hostellers ($M = 121.50$, $SD = 33.56$) and day scholars ($M = 120.08$, $SD = 29.83$) were almost identical.

The third hypothesis proposed that there would be a significant difference in interpersonal support between hostellers and day scholars (**H3; i**). The results showed no significant difference, $t = 0.404$, $p = .687$, Cohen's $d = 0.08$. Hostellers ($M = 34.96$, $SD = 6.05$) and day scholars ($M = 34.50$, $SD = 5.30$) reported similar levels of interpersonal support.

The results indicate that the perceived interpersonal support of university students may not be significantly affected by their residential status. Hostellers get most support from their peers and roommates, but day scholars may get more support from family members. Such variations in the source of support can lead to similar overall levels of perceived interpersonal support. The present finding is in line with Munir et al. (2016) who found that there were not significant differences between hostellers and day scholars in some of the psychological outcomes, indicating that the residential status does not have a strong impact on the psychosocial experiences of students.

The results, however, are different from Jawed et al. (2021) who found that hostellers had higher emotional disturbances than day scholars, suggesting that the psychological functioning may be influenced by the difference in living arrangements. Likewise, Mufina Begam et al. (2025) revealed that there were significant differences in the level of stress and emotional maturity between hostellers and day scholars, and Kabra and Totuka (2016) reported that there were differences in the mental health of hostellers and day scholars. The contrasting results could be due to differences in cultural context, institutional context, sample characteristics, and the psychosocial factors studied.

Overall, the study suggests that gender and residential status may not be major determinants of these psychosocial characteristics among the present sample of university students. Instead,

these variables appear to be influenced by a combination of personal experiences, social relationships and individual coping abilities.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationships among peer pressure, emotional maturity, and interpersonal support, while also investigating the influence of gender and residential status among university students. The findings revealed that peer pressure was positively associated with emotional maturity, suggesting that peer interactions may contribute to emotional growth when experienced in a constructive environment. No significant relationships were found between peer pressure and interpersonal support or emotional maturity and interpersonal support, suggesting that these variables may operate independently and that other personal and contextual factors may influence them.

The study also revealed that there were no significant differences between the three variables when broken down by gender or residential status. The results indicate that the interpersonal support received by the university students is similar in both hostels and their homes. Day scholars might get more support from their families, whereas hostellers might get more support from their peers and roommates. These differences in the source of support may balance one another, resulting in similar overall perceptions of interpersonal support.

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