

Relative Influence of Parents and Peers on Adolescents in Decision Making

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Abstract: The present study was conducted to study the relative influence of parents and peers on adolescents' in decision making. The sample comprised 200 adolescents of class VII and XII of which 100 were boys and 100 were girls. The sample for the research was selected by the descriptive survey method. The tool that was used for the data collection was Decision Making Test developed by the investigator. The students were given the questionnaire and the responses were collected. The data was analyzed using percentages keeping in mind the aims and objectives of the study. The results of the study show that the adolescents consulted their parents in all the matters but their decisions in few areas only was affected by the parents.

Keywords: Decision making, relative influence, parents, peers, adolescents

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of human development during which a young person moves from dependency to independence, autonomy and maturity. The young person moves from being part of a family group to being part of peer group and to standing alone as an adult. The United Nation World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as all individuals between age of 10 years and 19 years. Within this age range, the category from 10-14 years is classified as early adolescence while that from 15-19 years old is classified as late adolescents. This period is the time of new experiences. Teenage is a period when young people identify their place in the family, peer groups and the larger community. The relationship which the parents have with their adolescents,

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influences their children's susceptibility to negative peer influence. Overall it appears that adolescents face a lot of stress in their transition from a dependent child to an independent adult. Parents and peers play a crucial role in helping the adolescent become socially and emotionally mature. One of the most important human skills is decision making. It is an inevitable function both at personal level and in content of organization.

Dutta, Bratha and Goswami (1998) and Wentzal and Caldwell (1997) reported that peer relationships of young adolescents are related to academic achievements in complex ways. Peer relationship variables are significantly predictors of students' grades both currently and overtime. This served varied functions in academic lives of young adolescents. Peer acceptance is positively related with academic achievement.

Horn (1999) found that adolescents do not become captives of friends. Peers actually reinforce different parental values. Peers do not influence specific areas such as music, fashion, language. However, parents tend to be predominant in areas underlying moral and social values and in understanding the adult parental world.

Parental involvement also leads to self confidence; high self-esteem is thought to support in both friendship and romantic relationship. In late adolescents, they reflect the features of attachment and care giving system. (e.g. communication, seeking support or providing support) (Conolly et al., 2000).

Sandhu (2001) reports that majority of adolescents talk frequently with their parents about their problems related to any issue, personal, educational and vocational.

A comparative study done by Kanchana (2002) reports that Indian college students have lower career decision making and self-efficacy as compared to American counterparts, probably due to lack of adequate exposure to different areas of study/ vocation with greater role that parents and elders play in adolescents decision making.

Hurria (2003) in his study reported that parents give priority to fashion needs of adolescents especially mothers tried to plan and update their adolescent's wardrobe. They often went their way to make special effort for getting party dresses. They tried their level best ensuring that adolescents satisfied with kind of dresses they possess.

A survey report (2000-2004) carried by Government Medical College Hospital, Sector- 32, Chandigarh covering over 300 students in 15 schools and 6 colleges of Chandigarh reports that sex is still forbidden word in schools and colleges. A source of information on sex comes from their friends and peer groups but nothing from their parents.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

There is strong evidence that parents remain highly influential people in the lives of adolescents. Adolescents remain in rich network of peers, but it does not mean they follow the dictates of their peers. They find themselves comfortable in discussing their personal problems with their friends. Too little or less information can be dangerous and can be futile.

Thus, parents need to bring about more openness in their communication with the adolescents. It helps foster closer relationships which help them in making good decision. Adolescents need to be handled with love and care. They need to be monitored appropriately and guided properly for making appropriate decision. Parents need to spend quality time with their children. When adolescents are together with their parents, they are likely to be participating in positive behaviors. Parents also need to pay attention towards their children's peers. It helps children make good choice about with whom to make friends. Parents can approach their children and their friends with confidence and can have positive impact, making their children well adjusted individuals of the society. The study will help in identifying the areas where adolescents are influenced by them and also to make an effort to be closer to adolescents in these areas. The study will also help to understand the importance of parents and peers in long and short term decisions of adolescents.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the relative importance of opinion of parents and peers in early and late adolescents' decision making.
2. To study the relative influence of parents and peers in different areas of adolescents' decision making.
3. To study the gender differences in reference to relative influence parents and peers in adolescents in different areas of decision making.

4. HYPOTHESES

1. There exists relative importance of opinion of parents and peers in early and late adolescents' decision making.
 2. The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents' decision making.
 3. The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents' decision making due to gender differences.
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5. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In the present study, survey method of research was used. The present study was primarily designed to see the relative influence of parents and peers in early and late adolescents' decision making and also to identify particular areas where these groups of adolescents seek the advice of parents and peers.

6. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The data for the present study was collected personally by the investigator. The students of class 7th and 12th were approached through the heads of the institutions. Random sampling was used for the selection of the sample for the study.

7. SAMPLE

In this study, a sample of 200 adolescents, 100 each from early and late adolescents, (50 boys and 50 girls from each group). The early adolescents were in the age group 12-13 years and late adolescents were in the age group 18-19 years. The sample belonged to low socio- economic status.

8. TOOLS USED

Following tools were employed in the present study:

1. Decision Making Test developed by the investigator.

The tool was pre-tested on a pilot sample of 10 early and 10 late adolescents to check the applicability and ease of administration of the questionnaire. But was not standardized by taking the expert opinion.

9. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed with the help of percentages according to aims and objectives of the study.

10. RESULTS

Table 1 shows that in long term plans and serious decisions parental guidance was valued most. Majority of early adolescents (79%) and late adolescents (59%) want to select their subjects for future studies according to their parent's wishes and the choice of career also depends largely upon parents. Similar influence was revealed in spending of number of hours at studying.

Table 1: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in educational/vocational areas.

		Selection of subjects for future studies	Choice of career	Spending of no. of hours on study	To take tuition classes
Parents	Early adolescents	79	89	76	89
	Late adolescents	59	52	50	59
Friends	Early adolescents	03	02	03	04
	Late adolescents	02	04	20	11
Both	Early adolescents	18	09	21	07
	Late adolescents	39	44	30	30

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Table 2: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in educational/vocational area sex wise.

			Selection of subjects for future studies	Choice of career	Spending of no. of hours on study	To take tuition classes
Parents	Early adolescents	Male	38	42	37	45
		Female	41	47	39	44
	Late adolescents	Male	31	30	27	30
		Female	28	22	23	29
Friends	Early adolescents	Male	02	02	02	03
		Female	01	-	01	01
	Late adolescents	Male	02	04	15	06
		Female	-	-	05	05
Both	Early adolescents	Male	10	06	11	02
		Female	08	03	10	05
	Late adolescents	Male	17	16	08	14
		Female	22	28	22	16

The decision to take up tuition classes was again influenced by parents. Early adolescents remain more influenced by parents as compared to late adolescents. Parents were mostly preferred in decision related educational areas that have long term consequences which directly affect the future of the adolescents. Late adolescents however depended on friends for some decisions. So, the hypothesis “there exists relative importance of opinion of parents and peers in early and late adolescents' decision making” is accepted.

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Table 2 shows that majority of both sexes of early and late adolescents remain mostly influenced by their parents in choice of career and selection of future studies. However, late male adolescents consider their friends for spending number of hours at studying and to take up tuition classes, however the percentage of girls remained less. This may be due to the fact that boys and girls show great trust in their parents for their long term decisions such as their educational plans. Moreover, parents are also getting involved in their children's study. So, the hypothesis "the relative difference of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents' decision making due to gender differences" is accepted.

Table 3 shows the decisions related to financial matters. Early and late adolescents are greatly influenced by their parents as compared to friends. Adolescents are influenced by their parents as how and where to spend money, luxury spending and increase in their pocket money. Again early adolescents remained much influenced by their parents as compared to late adolescents. This could be due to the fact that financial matters is a family activity and parents also feel responsible to take care of their children's financial needs. So, the hypothesis "there exists relative importance of opinion of parents and peers in early and late adolescents' decision making" is accepted.

Table 4 shows that there were no major sex differences for both early and late adolescents in regard to financial matters. Results show that both male and female adolescents take their financial decisions under the influence of their parents. This may be due to the fact that boys and girls rely on their parents for their financial matters. So, the hypothesis "The relative difference of parents

Table 3: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers and both in financial matters

		How to spend money	Luxury spending	Where to spend money	Increase in pocket money
Parents	Early adolescents	97	88	88	94
	Late adolescents	66	69	71	82
Friends	Early adolescents	-	03	02	-
	Late adolescents	10	08	07	04
Both	Early adolescents	03	09	10	06
	Late adolescents	24	23	22	14

Table 4: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in financial matters by sex.

			How to spend money	Luxury spending	Where to spend money	Increase in pocket money
Parents	Early adolescents	Male	48	43	43	46
		Female	49	45	45	48
	Late adolescents	Male	34	29	30	40
		Female	32	40	41	42
Friends	Early adolescents	Male	-	02	01	-
		Female	-	01	01	-
	Late adolescents	Male	10	06	05	04
		Female	-	02	02	-
Both	Early adolescents	Male	02	05	06	04
		Female	01	04	04	02
	Late adolescents	Male	06	15	15	06
		Female	18	08	07	08

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Table 5: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in the area of socialization.

		How to spend free time	Where to spend free time	With whom to spend free time	Whether to attend party	Join the club	Whether to attend social function
Parents	Early adolescents	75	76	63	78	72	78
	Late adolescents	43	39	37	41	24	42
Friends	Early adolescents	08	07	15	05	10	05
	Late adolescents	32	37	32	33	39	28
Both	Early adolescents	17	17	22	17	18	17
	Late adolescents	25	24	31	26	37	30

and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents' decision making due to gender differences" is rejected.

Table 5 reveals that in the area of socialization, majority of early adolescents largely remained influenced by their parents. However, majority of late adolescents remained influenced by their friends in as how, where and

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with whom they spend their time; attend parties; social functions and joining of clubs. This may be due to the reason that adolescents shift to their peers with increase in age as they are spending more time with each other and expanding their social worlds. So, the hypothesis “The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents’ decision making” is accepted.

Table 6: Adolescents’ preference to parents, peers or both in the area of socialization by sex.

			How to spend free time`	Where to spend free time	With whom to spend free time	Whether to attend party	Join the club	Whether to attend social function
Parents	Early adolescents	Male	35	36	29	38	35	38
		Female	40	40	34	40	37	40
	Late adolescents	Male	20	22	15	20	10	20
		Female	23	17	2	21	14	22
Friends	Early adolescents	Male	05	04	09	03	05	02
		Female	03	03	06	02	05	03
	Late adolescents	Male	18	20	20	15	24	18
		Female	14	17	12	18	15	10
Both	Early adolescents	Male	10	10	12	09	10	08
		Female	07	07	10	08	08	09
	Late adolescents	Male	12	08	15	15	16	12
		Female	13	16	16	11	21	18

Table 6 shows that majority of male and female in early adolescence remained influenced by their parents in all matters of socialization; however both boys and girls like to spend to spend their free time with their friends. In late adolescence both male and female remained more peer oriented. So, the hypothesis “The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents’ decision making due to gender differences” is accepted.

Table 7 reveals that peers were the most frequent choice for late adolescents in their leisure time activities. In selection of music and TV programs, books, magazines and computer sites to be visited majority of late adolescents remained largely in influence of friends. Early adolescents on the other hand, remained divided in their choice between parents and friends in choice of music and TV programs and computer sites to visit. In their choice of magazines and books to

Table 7: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in leisure time activities.

		Choice of music and TV programs	Choice of magazines and books	Choice of computer sites
Parents	Early adolescents	44	20	10
	Late adolescents	22	14	09
Friends	Early adolescents	26	35	47
	Late adolescents	35	54	61
Both	Early adolescents	30	45	43
	Late adolescents	43	32	30

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read, they again remained more influenced by their parents. This may be due to the fact that late adolescents share common interest, as they share more of their time together in the company of their peers. On the other hand, early adolescents, being still parent compliant because of greater dependency and more parental control. So, the hypothesis "The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents' decision making" is accepted.

Table 8 shows that there were no major sex differences in decision regarding choice of leisure time activities. Majority of both male and female

Table 8: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in leisure time activities by sex.

			Choice of music and TV programs	Choice of magazines and books	Choice of computer sites
Parents	Early adolescents	Male	18	05	06
		Female	26	15	04
	Late adolescents	Male	12	04	04
		Female	10	10	05
Friends	Early adolescents	Male	11	25	25
		Female	15	10	22
	Late adolescents	Male	15	34	32
		Female	20	20	29
Both	Early adolescents	Male	21	20	19
		Female	09	25	24
	Late adolescents	Male	23	12	14
		Female	20	20	16

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early adolescents remained largely influenced by their parents; however the influence was more for females. Both the sexes in late adolescence remained peer oriented in choice of music, TV programs, book and magazines to read and computer sites to visit. This may be due to the reason that adolescents rely on their peers for decisions that have short term values. So, the hypothesis “The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents’ decision making due to gender differences” is rejected.

Table 9: Adolescents preference to parents, peers or both in financial matters.

		Confirming to dressing behavior	Choice of clothes	Choice of hair style	Information of new fashion	Information of latest trends
Parents	Early adolescents	52	72	58	27	26
	Late adolescents	30	51	27	06	13
Friends	Early adolescents	20	08	19	49	50
	Late adolescents	46	19	33	82	61
Both	Early adolescents	28	20	23	24	24
	Late adolescents	24	30	40	12	26

Table 9 shows that majority of early adolescents remained largely influenced by parents in area of fashion. It was observed that late adolescents were mostly under the influence of their peers in confirmation to dressing behavior (46%) and they are getting information on new fashion and trends from them (82%) and (61%) respectively. On the other hand, early adolescents were more parents compliant in the area of fashion. The reason could be again due to similarity of likes and dislikes and dependency on parents for their financial needs. Moreover, it can be due to parents’ interest in their adolescents needs. So, the hypothesis “There exists relative importance of opinion of parents and peers in early and late adolescents’ decision making” is accepted.

Table 10 shows that there are no sex differences in area of fashion. No sexes in early adolescence remain mostly influenced by their parent in regard to their choices. However, they remain influenced by their friends on information on new trends and fashion. Late adolescents, again both sexes remain divided in their choice between parents and friends. This may be again due to the fact

Table 10: Adolescents' preference to parents, peers or both in financial matters by sex.

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			Confirming to dressing behavior	Choice of clothes	Choice of hair style	Information of new fashion	Information of latest trends
Parents	Early adolescents	Male	24	35	28	10	15
		Female	28	37	30	17	11
	Late adolescents	Male	14	25	15	02	05
		Female	16	26	12	04	08
Friend	Early adolescents	Male	08	06	10	27	25
		Female	12	02	09	22	25
	Late adolescents	Male	25	11	16	43	33
		Female	21	08	17	39	28
Both	Early adolescents	Male	18	09	12	13	10
		Female	10	11	11	11	14
	Late adolescents	Male	11	14	19	05	14
		Female	13	16	21	07	14

Table 11: Adolescents preference to parents, peers or both in area of personal matters.

		Choice of friends of opposite sex	Discussion of school problems	Discussion of problems with friends	Discussion of relationship with opposite sex	Information of sex
Parents	Early adolescents	44	41	50	21	28
	Late adolescent	27	25	15	12	05
Friends	Early adolescent	23	27	27	48	39
	Late adolescent	53	39	55	63	73
Both	Early adolescent	33	32	23	31	33
	Late adolescent	20	36	30	25	22

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that with increase in age, there is a shift of conformity to peers in decisions relating to current status. So, the hypothesis “The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents’ decision making due to gender differences” is rejected.

Table 11 shows that majority of early adolescents remained influenced by their parents in decision of choice of friends of opposite sex. Most of the early adolescents relied on their parents in regard to discussion of school problems and problems with friends but in discussion regarding relationship with opposite sex, majority of early adolescents remained influenced by peers. Results also show that majority of late adolescents remained influenced by their friends in all personal matters. However, in question item related to information on sex, showed that majority of early adolescents and also late adolescents refer to their friends. This could be due to the reason that sex is

Table 12: Adolescents’ preference to parents, peers or both in area of personal matters by sex.

			Choice of friends of opposite sex	Discussion of school problems	Discussion of problems with friends	Discussion of relationship with opposite sex	Information on sex
Parents	Early adolescent	Male	20	21	23	08	03
		Female	24	20	27	13	25
	Late adolescents	Male	09	10	03	03	02
		Female	18	15	12	09	03
Friend	Early adolescents	Male	14	14	14	27	27
		Female	09	13	13	21	12
	Late adolescents	Male	36	24	35	37	39
		Female	17	15	20	26	34
Both	Early adolescents	Male	16	15	13	15	20
		Female	17	17	10	16	13
	Late adolescents	Male	05	16	12	10	09
		Female	15	20	18	15	13

still considered to be a taboo in our society and is not discussed much with parents. Peers, on the other hand, act as consultant or guides in their personal matters and relationships. So, the hypothesis “There exists relative importance of opinion of parents and peers in early and late adolescents’ decision making” is accepted.

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Table 12 shows that majority of late adolescents remain more influenced by their peers in the personal matters as compared to females. So, the hypothesis “The relative influence of parents and peers will be different in different areas of adolescents’ decision making due to gender differences” is accepted.

11. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

There is strong evidence that parents remain highly influential people in the lives of adolescents. Further research confirm the fact that tendency to conform to peers increases with age and is situation specific. The study will help parents in identifying the areas where adolescents are influenced by them and also to make an effort to be closer to adolescents in these areas. The study will also help to understand the importance of parents and peers in adolescents short and long term decisions. This study also shows that vocational interests of boys and girls differ partially. Many of their preferences are same, like both of them prefer scientific, executive, artistic, persuasive, social and household fields. The findings of present study have very important implications for teachers, administrators and for guidance workers so that they can offer the students the opportunities to choose their subjects according to their interest in order to prevent misfits in later stages of their lives. Overall, this study suggests that adolescents will seek their parent’s advice and opinion for long term, important and difficult decisions, whereas friends’ opinions and feelings will be more important for decisions in short-term, less important and less difficult areas. As Floyd and South have noted, parents and peers ability and willingness to help meet specific needs for the adolescents are central factors in reference orientation.

12. ANNEXURE

Parents and peers influence on adolescents’ decision making in six different areas

Educational/vocational

1. Your decision of selection of subjects/courses for present and future studies depends upon?

Parents

friends

both parents and friends

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2. Your decision of choosing your career will depend upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 3. Your decision of spending number of hours at studying depends upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 4. Your decision of taking up tuitions will depend upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
-

12.1 Financial matters

5. For you the amount of money spent is largely dependent upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
6. Who will influence you most on your luxury spending?
Parents friends both parents and friends
7. Who influences you as to where to spend your money?
Parents friends both parents and friends
8. The decision for an increase in pocket money is influenced by?
Parents friends both parents and friends

12.2 Socialization

1. Who influences your decision regarding how to spend your time after school/college?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 2. Who influence your decision regarding where to spend your time after school/college
Parents friends both parents and friends
 3. With whom do you like to spend most of your free time?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 4. Your decision of attending a party depends upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 5. If you are join a club whose opinion you consider most important?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 6. Whose opinion you consider most important while deciding any of social event/ function?
Parents friends both parents and friends
-

12.3 Leisure

1. Whose choice of music and TV programs do you depend upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
2. Who influences on your choice of magazines and books to read?
Parents friends both parents and friends
3. Whose opinion will you consider to visit sites on computer?
Parents friends both parents and friends

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12.4 Fashion

1. Your dressing behavior is most likely to be in conformity with?
Parents friends both parents and friends
2. Your choice of clothes depends largely upon?
Parents friends both parents and friends
3. If you are to change to a new hairstyle, whose opinion will you consider most?
Parents friends both parents and friends
4. Who gives you latest information about new fashion?
Parents friends both parents and friends
5. From whom do you get information about latest trends in the market?
Parents friends both parents and friends

12.5 Personal matters

1. In choosing a friend of opposite sex, whose opinion is most important for you?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 2. With whom do you discuss your school/college problems?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 3. With whom do you discuss your problems you are having with your friends?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 4. Your relationship with opposite sex friend is usually discussed with?
Parents friends both parents and friends
 5. To whom do you go for information on sex?
Parents friends both parents and friends
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