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Peer Influence Experiences and Personal–Social Competencies among Late Adolescents: Evidence from a Private Higher Education Institution in the Philippines

Balut, Ivan Marie[1] | Baltazar, Rohn Kyla[1] | Fronda, Mitchelle1 | Siador, Kimleye[1] | Tandog, Famela Jane B.[1]
Ramon George O. Atento, PhD[1]
[1]First City Providential College
Corresponding Author: ivanmarie.balut@fcpc.edu.ph

Abstract

This study examined the association between peer pressure (peer influence experiences) and adolescents' social behavior, operationalized through personal and social competencies, among late adolescents enrolled in a private educational institution in the Philippines. Using a quantitative descriptive–correlational design, data were collected from 100 senior high school and early college students aged 17–19 through a structured questionnaire covering (a) personal and social competencies (prosocial behavior and empathy; self-regulation and emotional control; responsibility and autonomy; social awareness and respect) and (b) peer influence experiences (social conformity pressure; risky-behavior pressure; boundary and independence difficulties; internal justifications). Descriptive findings indicated generally adequate competency levels, with stronger endorsement of prosocial behavior/empathy and social awareness/respect, while emotional control and responsibility items showed comparatively more neutral responses. Participants reported more neutral experiences of conformity-related pressure and boundary difficulties and generally disagreed with risky-behavior pressure and internal-justification items. Pearson correlation indicated a positive association between peer pressure and social behavior, $r(98) = .347$, $p < .001$, suggesting that variations in perceived peer influence are meaningfully related to adolescents' day-to-day social functioning. Findings support the development of a targeted enhancement program focusing on emotional regulation, responsibility, assertiveness, and resilience to promote healthier peer relations and adaptive social behavior.

Keywords: *peer pressure; peer influence; social behavior; personal and social competencies; adolescents; descriptive–correlational; Philippines.*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is widely recognized as a pivotal developmental period characterized by heightened social sensitivity, increasing autonomy, and intensified orientation toward peer relationships. As young people transition from family-centered influence toward peer-centered social environments, acceptance, belonging, and reputational standing become salient psychological needs that shape everyday choices and interactions (Sawyer et al., 2018). In school contexts—where adolescents spend considerable time negotiating friendships, group membership, and social norms—peer influence becomes a central developmental force, functioning as both an opportunity for prosocial growth and a potential risk factor for maladaptive behavior.

Peer pressure may be understood as a specific form of peer influence involving perceived or explicit social demands that encourage individuals to align attitudes and behaviors with group expectations (Knoll et al., 2015). Importantly, peer pressure is not inherently detrimental. Peer contexts can reinforce constructive behaviors such as cooperation, school engagement, and responsibility when group norms are prosocial and supportive. However, peer pressure becomes problematic when adolescents experience pressure to conform in ways that conflict with personal judgment, values, or long-term welfare. In such cases, adolescents may exhibit diminished self-regulation, impaired boundary-setting, and heightened susceptibility to social conformity—all of which can shape how they behave in routine social situations (Ciranka & van den Bos, 2019).

Social behavior, in turn, refers to adolescents' patterns of interaction, communication, and behavioral adjustment across social settings. It includes the capacity to maintain relationships, respond appropriately to social cues, handle interpersonal conflict, and participate constructively in group contexts. A growing body of work suggests that social behavior is not merely an outcome of personality or temperament, but also reflects competencies that develop through social learning and repeated peer interaction. Adolescents who display stronger social functioning typically demonstrate higher levels of empathy, prosociality,

emotional control, and social awareness—skills often grouped under personal and social competencies or social-emotional competencies (Lapsley et al., 2025). Conversely, adolescents who struggle with social functioning may exhibit excessive conformity, impulsive decisions in group settings, withdrawal, or poor communication—patterns that can undermine well-being and social adjustment in school and community life (Orben et al., 2020).

Although peer pressure research remains substantial, much of the literature continues to concentrate on high-risk outcomes such as delinquency, substance use, and overt antisocial behavior (Tompsett et al., 2013). These emphases are important, yet they can narrow the conceptual lens through which peer influence is understood, underrepresenting the ways peer pressure may shape routine social behavior—such as day-to-day communication, relationship maintenance, boundary negotiation, and group participation. This limitation is increasingly salient in contemporary environments where peer influence occurs not only in face-to-face interaction but also through persistent digital connectivity, social media, and online peer norms that amplify visibility, comparison, and conformity dynamics (Nesi et al., 2018). In such contexts, even moderate forms of peer pressure may be consequential because adolescents' social experiences are more frequent, more public, and often more difficult to disengage from than in earlier eras.

From an applied perspective, understanding peer pressure in relation to social behavior has direct implications for educators, guidance personnel, and mental health practitioners seeking to strengthen adolescents' adaptive functioning. International guidance on adolescent well-being emphasizes the importance of supportive environments and competence-building approaches that strengthen emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and resilience (World Health Organization, 2023). Within educational institutions, prevention and developmental programming are commonly framed around skills that help learners manage emotions, make responsible decisions, and navigate social challenges. However, program design is most defensible when anchored in local empirical evidence—particularly evidence clarifying how adolescents in a given setting experience peer pressure and how such experiences relate to their social functioning.

Within this rationale, the present study examines late adolescents enrolled in a private higher education institution (HEI) in the Philippines, focusing on how experiences of peer pressure relate to adolescents' social behavior. In this study, social behavior is approached through the lens of personal and social competencies, including prosocial behavior and empathy, self-regulation and emotional control, responsibility and autonomy, and social awareness and respect. Peer pressure is examined through reported experiences of peer influence, including pressure toward social conformity, pressure toward risky behavior, boundary and independence difficulties, and internal justifications. By analyzing both constructs together in a descriptive–correlational framework, the study seeks to provide a grounded account of adolescents' competency patterns and peer influence experiences, and to determine whether variations in peer pressure are meaningfully associated with adolescents' everyday social functioning.

Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to contemporary peer influence research by emphasizing the relationship between peer pressure and adolescents' routine social behavior rather than limiting attention to high-risk behavioral outcomes. The findings are intended to support the development of a school-based enhancement initiative that strengthens emotional regulation, responsibility, assertiveness, and resilience, thereby helping adolescents maintain healthier peer relationships and more adaptive social behavior.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between peer pressure and social behavior among late adolescents enrolled in a private higher education institution (HEI) in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to determine the level of students' personal and social competencies in terms of prosocial behavior and empathy, self-regulation and emotional control, responsibility and autonomy, and social awareness and respect. It also aimed to determine the extent of students' experiences with peer influence (peer pressure), particularly with respect to pressure toward social conformity, pressure toward risky behavior, difficulties in maintaining boundaries and independence, and internal justifications associated with peer-driven decisions. In addition, the study tested whether students' peer pressure experiences are significantly associated with their social behavior as reflected in their personal and social competency profiles. Finally, the study aimed to develop a feasible enhancement program derived from the empirical findings to strengthen personal and social competencies and support healthier navigation of peer influence among adolescents.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Peer pressure and adolescents' social behavior

Empirical research generally supports a statistically significant association between peer pressure (or broader peer influence) and adolescents' social behavior and social functioning. Longitudinal meta-analytic evidence indicates that peer influence effects are typically small in magnitude but robust across multiple behavioral domains, including externalizing outcomes, internalizing outcomes, and academic functioning (Giletta et al., 2021). Consistent with this, peer pressure has been linked to adolescents' decision-making processes, risk-taking tendencies, academic engagement, and the formation of social identity, indicating that peer dynamics operate not only as a risk mechanism but also as a developmental force shaping day-to-day social functioning (Kumudha, 2025; Liu, 2025; Lou, 2023). At the interpersonal level, both friendship influence and wider normative pressure exerted by peer groups have been shown to shape attitudes and behaviors in school contexts, underscoring the relevance of peer environments as active socialization settings (Zingora & Flache, 2025). Beyond immediate behavioral choices, peer pressure also appears consequential for longer-term psychosocial development, including the development of autonomy and the quality of relationships over time (Allen et al., 2024). Contemporary syntheses converge on the view that peer influence is a pervasive and developmentally heightened force during adolescence, affecting both positive and negative domains of behavior while being conditioned by individual and contextual factors (Brown & Anistranski, 2020; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Sharma & Charulatha, 2024).

Although not directly measuring peer pressure, Agang-Ang et al. (2025) provides relevant contextual support by demonstrating that student populations exhibit measurable variations in lifestyle behaviors and distress indicators (e.g., stress-related and health-related outcomes) in settings where peer proximity is high (e.g., dormitory residence), outcomes that are frequently shaped by peer environments and social norms.

2.2 Personal–social competencies and lower susceptibility to peer pressure

The literature generally indicates that stronger personal–social competencies—such as self-confidence, assertiveness, empathy, social awareness, and responsibility—are associated with lower susceptibility to peer pressure and improved resistance to maladaptive peer influence. For instance, adolescents with stronger self-confidence and assertiveness tend to demonstrate greater capacity to resist peer pressure and avoid risky behavioral participation (Oghounu, 2025). Similarly, dimensions of social-emotional well-being—including self-assertiveness, emotional stability, and social performance—have been linked to stronger coping resources in peer-influence contexts (Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024). Self-esteem also appears to function as a meaningful protective correlate, with higher self-esteem associated with stronger resistance to peer influence in models that examine resistance pathways (Yu et al., 2025). Beyond individual traits, family and caregiving contexts contribute indirectly: parenting practices that foster autonomy and relatedness may reduce susceptibility by strengthening the very competencies that enable adolescents to navigate peer environments with greater independence and self-directed decision-making (Crespo-López & Koning, 2025). Collectively, these findings support the proposition that cultivating personal–social competencies is a viable protective pathway against harmful peer influence during adolescence (Crespo-López & Koning, 2025; Oghounu, 2025; Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024; Yu et al., 2025).

In a related but more contextual contribution, Bermido et al. (2025) argue that contemporary higher education environments—particularly those shaped by intergenerational dynamics and Generation Z learning preferences—require leadership and curriculum responses that account for social pressures and peer dynamics. While not an empirical test of empathy or social awareness as predictors of conformity, this work provides an applied rationale for examining social competencies as functional resources for adolescent adjustment in modern educational settings (Bermido et al., 2025).

2.3 Peer pressure, social conformity, and risky behavior in late adolescence

Studies commonly indicate that peer pressure in late adolescence is strongly tied to social conformity behaviors, often reflecting adolescents' motivation to avoid exclusion and maintain peer approval. Developmental evidence suggests adolescents are particularly sensitive to social risks such as rejection, which can heighten conformity tendencies in both prosocial and antisocial directions depending on prevailing group norms (Blakemore, 2018; Tomova et al., 2021). At the same time, peer pressure is also implicated in risky behaviors (e.g., substance use, delinquency), and the motivational substrate of social acceptance can plausibly underlie both conformity-driven behaviors and risk-related behaviors in peer contexts (Liu, 2025; Lou, 2023). Research further suggests that gender and socialization may shape manifestations of susceptibility—such as higher prevalence of certain risk behaviors among males—yet susceptibility to peer influence remains relevant across both sexes and across conformity and risk domains (Junaid et

al., 2025; McCoy et al., 2019). Neurocognitive accounts reinforce these patterns by highlighting how the social reward of acceptance is linked with activation of systems implicated in mentalizing and emotion regulation, thereby strengthening conformity tendencies through social-reward mechanisms (Andrews et al., 2020). Overall, the evidence supports the view that peer pressure's linkage to social conformity is at least as salient as its linkage to risky behavior among late adolescents, reflecting a complex interaction between belonging needs and behavioral outcomes (Blakemore, 2018; Ciranka & Van Den Bos, 2019; Tomova et al., 2021).

Agang-Ang et al. (2025) does not compare conformity and risk pathways attributable to peer pressure; however, its documentation of risky lifestyle behaviors and psychological outcomes (e.g., alcohol intake patterns, screen time, exhaustion, depersonalization) supports the broader point that risk-related behavioral and well-being outcomes are measurable and consequential within student populations (Agang-Ang et al., 2025).

2.4 Self-regulation/emotional control as a protective factor against negative peer pressure effects

Research generally supports the protective role of self-regulation and emotional control in mitigating negative peer pressure influences on social behavior. Evidence suggests that emotional self-regulation contributes meaningfully to how students manage peer pressure, including among college-age populations (Fatima & Rizvi, 2025). In behavioral risk contexts, perceived self-regulatory efficacy has been shown to buffer pathways from impulsivity to harmful behaviors by reducing moral disengagement, including under conditions where deviant peer dynamics are salient (Paciello et al., 2023). Parallel evidence indicates that self-control and emotion management are mechanisms through which parenting practices support positive peer interactions and social adjustment, further underscoring self-regulation as a developmental pathway relevant to peer-related social functioning (Li et al., 2025). Although some studies report null or mixed findings for direct effects of self-regulation on outcomes such as social anxiety or academic stress, the broader pattern of evidence supports that stronger self-regulatory capacities facilitate more adaptive coping with peer influence and may be linked with prosocial behavioral tendencies (Adiawaty, 2025; Mathew & Simon, 2024; Yang & McGinley, 2022). Consistent with these claims, peer-based intervention research suggests that emotion regulation can be strengthened in adolescence through peer-facilitated mechanisms, indicating a plausible prevention and resilience-building pathway against harmful peer pressure (Sahi et al., 2023).

Finally, while not an empirical peer-pressure study, Atento et al. (2025) offers a useful conceptual parallel: within narrative health analytics, interpretability and ethical governance are framed as safeguards that prevent dehumanizing outcomes from data-driven processes. This framing mirrors the protective-factor logic in psychology (i.e., moderators that reduce harm from exposure), although it should be treated as an analogy rather than direct evidence about individual self-regulation under peer pressure.

2.5 Synthesis of Literature

Across contemporary adolescent-development and social-psychological research, peer influence is consistently positioned as a salient socialization force that shapes adolescents' attitudes, decision-making, and behavioral adjustment. Meta-analytic and integrative reviews indicate that peer influence effects are typically modest in magnitude yet reliable across domains, including externalizing behaviors, internalizing outcomes, and school-related functioning, with meaningful variation attributable to individual differences and contextual conditions (Giletta et al., 2021; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Sharma & Charulatha, 2024). Conceptually, peer influence operates through multiple channels, including direct friendship influence and broader normative pressure within peer groups, both of which can shape adolescents' behavioral tendencies and social judgments in educational settings (Brown & Anistranski, 2020; Zingora & Flache, 2025). Importantly, the developmental significance of peer pressure extends beyond immediate behavioral decisions and is linked to longer-term psychosocial trajectories involving autonomy development and relationship quality, suggesting that peer pressure is relevant not only to "risk behavior" models but also to routine social functioning and interpersonal adjustment (Allen et al., 2024).

The literature further converges on the view that susceptibility to peer influence is not uniform and is systematically related to personal–social competencies and protective resources. Studies examining self-confidence, assertiveness, self-esteem, and broader socio-emotional functioning generally support the proposition that adolescents with stronger competencies are better able to resist negative peer demands and maintain adaptive

decision-making under social pressure (Oghounu, 2025; Ogelman & Kahveci, 2024; Yu et al., 2025). Family socialization processes also appear relevant insofar as parenting practices that enhance autonomy and relatedness indirectly support resistance to peer pressure by strengthening adolescents' personal-social resources and self-directed coping (Crespo-López & Koning, 2025). In parallel, research on self-regulation and emotional control supports a protective-factor pathway: emotional self-regulation and perceived self-regulatory efficacy are associated with reduced engagement in harmful behavior under deviant peer contexts, often by buffering impulsivity-related processes and limiting moral disengagement (Fatima & Rizvi, 2025; Paciello et al., 2023). While some findings on self-regulation show mixed direct effects across certain outcomes (e.g., academic stress, social anxiety), the overall evidence base remains consistent in treating self-regulatory capacities as developmentally important resources for navigating peer pressure and promoting prosocial adjustment (Adiawaty, 2025; Mathew & Simon, 2024; Yang & McGinley, 2022). Emerging work also supports the plausibility of peer-facilitated approaches to emotion regulation, suggesting that adolescent peer contexts can be leveraged not only as risk environments but also as developmental contexts for strengthening resilience (Sahi et al., 2023).

With respect to the specific behavioral expressions of peer pressure, the literature indicates that conformity motivations are deeply embedded in adolescents' belonging needs and sensitivity to social exclusion. Developmental and neurocognitive accounts emphasize that avoidance of social rejection and pursuit of social reward can intensify conformity to group norms, potentially shaping both prosocial adherence and maladaptive participation depending on peer-group values (Blakemore, 2018; Tomova et al., 2021). Formal and neurodevelopmental models further explain how social influence can alter adolescent decision-making through processes associated with mentalizing and emotion-regulation systems, reinforcing conformity-linked behavioral adjustment in peer contexts (Andrews et al., 2020; Ciranka & Van Den Bos, 2019). At the same time, empirical studies continue to show that peer pressure is also meaningfully associated with risk-related behaviors, with some evidence suggesting gender-linked patterns in susceptibility and behavioral manifestation—although susceptibility remains relevant across groups and behavioral domains (Junaid et al., 2025; McCoy et al., 2019). Taken together, the literature supports an integrated position: peer pressure is consequential for adolescent social behavior and functioning, while personal-social competencies and self-regulatory capacities function as protective resources shaping how adolescents respond to peer demands, and conformity/risk outcomes reflect a shared motivational substrate centered on belonging and social approval (Allen et al., 2024; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Paciello et al., 2023).

Finally, literature within student and higher-education contexts underscores that peer-proximal environments (e.g., dormitory residence, contemporary learning ecologies) are associated with measurable variations in lifestyle behaviors, distress indicators, and adjustment-related outcomes, reinforcing the practical relevance of studying peer dynamics in educational settings even when peer pressure is not directly measured (Agang-Ang et al., 2025; Bermido et al., 2025). Conceptual parallels from applied analytics scholarship further reinforce a general protective-factor logic (i.e., mechanisms that reduce harm from exposures), although such analogies should be treated as conceptual support rather than direct empirical evidence on peer pressure and self-regulation (Atento et al., 2025).

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

Despite a strong cumulative literature on peer influence, several gaps remain salient for research designs examining peer pressure in relation to adolescents' routine social behavior—particularly in late-adolescent school settings.

First, there remains a measurement gap between broad peer-influence models and domain-specific peer-pressure experiences. Many studies operationalize peer influence in general terms or focus on narrow outcomes (e.g., delinquency, substance use), while fewer studies map peer pressure into differentiated dimensions such as conformity pressure, risky-behavior pressure, boundary/independence difficulties, and internal justifications in a single integrated measurement model (Brown & Anistranski, 2020; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Sharma & Charulatha, 2024). This limits explanatory precision when researchers seek to identify which facets of peer pressure are most implicated in everyday social behavior rather than only in high-risk behavior endpoints (Allen et al., 2024; Liu, 2025; Lou, 2023).

Second, there is an integration gap between peer pressure and "routine social functioning" constructs. A considerable portion of the literature privileges risk outcomes and problem behavior, while fewer studies directly connect peer pressure to social-behavioral functioning as expressed in personal and social competencies (e.g., empathy, social awareness, responsibility, emotional control) that are central to school-based adjustment and interpersonal functioning (Giletta et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2024). This gap is particularly consequential

for education-facing research that aims to inform competency-based enhancement programming rather than only risk prevention.

Third, evidence on whether peer pressure is "more strongly" linked to social conformity than risky behavior remains mixed and context-dependent. While belonging needs and rejection sensitivity clearly motivate conformity tendencies, peer influence is also substantively linked to risky behavior, and the relative strength of these associations can vary by peer group, gender norms, developmental timing, and setting (Blakemore, 2018; Junaid et al., 2025; McCoy et al., 2019; Tomova et al., 2021). This implies a need for studies that explicitly compare these peer-pressure subdomains within the same sample and measurement framework, ideally aligned to the developmental stage of late adolescence and to specific educational contexts (Andrews et al., 2020; Ciranka & Van Den Bos, 2019).

Fourth, protective-factor modeling is still uneven, particularly regarding self-regulation/emotional control as a buffering mechanism. Although self-regulation and self-regulatory efficacy are frequently implicated as protective resources—and peer-facilitated emotion regulation is an emerging intervention-relevant direction—studies vary in whether self-regulation is modeled as a direct predictor, mediator, or moderator, and some findings remain mixed across outcomes such as academic stress and social anxiety (Fatima & Rizvi, 2025; Mathew & Simon, 2024; Paciello et al., 2023; Sahi et al., 2023; Yang & McGinley, 2022). This suggests a practical need for clearer analytic alignment between peer-pressure exposures, self-regulatory capacities, and social-behavioral outcomes.

Fifth, contextual and locale gaps remain important for education settings. Much peer-pressure evidence is not anchored in specific institutional contexts or in samples that directly represent private higher-education environments where peer proximity, norms, and contemporary learning dynamics may intensify social influence processes (Bermido et al., 2025). Related student-context research demonstrates that health-risk behaviors and distress outcomes are measurable in peer-proximal student populations (Agang-Ang et al., 2025), but such work often does not attribute pathways to peer pressure or link them to social-competency outcomes—leaving a gap for institution-relevant, psychologically grounded evidence.

Collectively, these gaps justify correlational work that (a) operationalizes peer pressure using differentiated subdomains, (b) anchors social behavior within measurable personal and social competencies, and (c) positions self-regulation/emotional control as a theoretically grounded protective resource, thereby producing evidence that can credibly inform a competency-focused enhancement program in an educational setting (Allen et al., 2024; Crespo-López & Koning, 2025; Oghounu, 2025; Paciello et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationship between adolescents' peer pressure (peer influence experiences) and their social behavior, operationalized through personal and social competencies. A correlational approach was selected because the study aimed to estimate the direction and strength of association between the constructs as they naturally occur, without manipulating exposure to peer influence or assigning participants to experimental conditions.

3.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in a private higher education institution (HEI) in the Philippines. The institution provides a structured educational environment in which students routinely engage in peer interactions that can shape social functioning and decision-making. Consistent with competence-based education perspectives, school settings are viewed as viable contexts for examining social–emotional development and peer-related experiences (Elias et al., 1997). To protect institutional confidentiality, the name of the school is not disclosed.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

The participants were 100 students aged 17–19 years, drawn from both senior high school and early college levels. To improve representativeness while minimizing selection bias, the sample was selected using random sampling with stratification by educational level (i.e., senior high school and college strata), followed by simple random selection within each stratum. This approach ensures that each subgroup is represented while maintaining the probabilistic properties of random selection (Taherdoost, 2021).

3.4 Research Instrumentation

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire developed for the study and subjected to validation and pilot testing procedures prior to full administration. The instrument consisted of two major sections:

Section A: Personal and Social Competencies (Social Behavior). This section measured typical behaviors and dispositions in social and personal situations across key competency domains, including:

(a) Prosocial behavior and empathy,

(b) Self-regulation and emotional control,

(c) Responsibility and autonomy, and

(d) Social awareness and respect.

Section B: Peer Influence Experiences (Peer Pressure). This section assessed experiences and perceptions related to peer influence across domains, including:

(a) Pressure toward social conformity,

(b) Pressure toward risky behavior,

(c) Difficulty with boundaries and independence, and

(d) Internal justifications.

Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). For interpretation of central tendency, the study used an anchored descriptive range consistent with the manuscript's scaling (e.g., 3.41–4.20 = Agree; 2.61–3.40 = Neutral).

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Following institutional coordination, the researchers administered the questionnaire to eligible participants within the target age range. Participants were informed of the study purpose and the voluntary nature of participation. The questionnaires were collected upon completion, and responses were encoded for analysis. Data were stored in a de-identified format to preserve confidentiality.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity of reporting, and the right to decline or withdraw without penalty. No personally identifying information was included in the dataset used for analysis. Given that the participant pool included late adolescents, appropriate consent protocols were applied consistent with institutional standards for research involving students.

3.7 Statistical Treatment of Data

Data analysis proceeded in two stages:

Descriptive analysis. Means (and related descriptive summaries) were computed to determine the levels of personal and social competencies and peer influence experiences across the specified domains, with interpretations guided by the predefined Likert descriptive ranges.

Inferential analysis. To test the study's primary relationship, Pearson's Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was computed between the composite measure of peer pressure (peer influence experiences) and the composite measure of social behavior (personal and social competencies). Statistical significance was evaluated using conventional thresholds ($\alpha = .05$).

4. Results and Discussion

For interpretation, mean scores were classified as Strongly Disagree (1.00–1.80), Disagree (1.81–2.60), Neutral (2.61–3.40), Agree (3.41–4.20), and Strongly Agree (4.21–5.00).

4.1 Personal and Social Competencies (Social Behavior)

Overall, respondents reported generally favorable personal and social competency profiles, with the strongest endorsements concentrated in prosocial behavior/empathy and social awareness/respect.

Prosocial behavior and empathy showed consistently high endorsement (average item mean $\approx$ 4.06, Agree). The strongest item was complimenting the accomplishments of others (M = 4.34, Strongly Agree, SD = 0.592), followed by sensitivity to others' feelings (M = 4.19, Agree, SD = 0.857) and active participation in family and group activities (M = 3.66, Agree, SD = 0.808). These results indicate that respondents generally perceive themselves as interpersonally supportive and socially engaged in everyday contexts.

Self-regulation and emotional control was moderately endorsed (average item mean $\approx$ 3.43, Agree), but with a clear internal contrast. Respondents generally agreed that they remain calm when faced with a difficult problem (M = 3.55, Agree, SD = 0.909). However, the item on controlling temper when angry was rated Neutral (M

= 3.31, SD = 1.196), suggesting comparatively less consistency in emotional control under anger-related conditions.

Responsibility and autonomy also reflected moderate endorsement (average item mean ≈ 3.44, Agree), with a similar pattern of unevenness across items. Students reported Agree levels for completing tasks independently without reminders (M = 3.51, SD = 0.975), while the item on completing tasks and assignments on time was rated Neutral (M = 3.37, SD = 1.071). This indicates that perceived autonomy may be somewhat stronger than punctual task completion.

Social awareness and respect was strongly endorsed (average item mean ≈ 4.06, Agree). Respondents reported high agreement with asking for clarification respectfully when instructions are unclear (M = 4.18, SD = 0.833) and with following rules at home and in the community (M = 3.94, SD = 0.814). These findings suggest generally positive self-perceptions of respectful communication and rule adherence.

4.2 Peer Influence Experiences (Peer Pressure)

Across peer influence domains, respondents generally reported low-to-moderate peer pressure, with neutral tendencies in conformity-related and "resistance difficulty" items and disagreement toward risky behavior pressure and internal justification items.

Pressure toward social conformity registered the highest peer influence levels among domains, but remained largely Neutral (average item mean ≈ 2.76, Neutral). Respondents reported neutral tendencies for feeling pressured to skip responsibilities to hang out with friends (M = 3.06, SD = 1.071), finding it hard to say "no" to friends (M = 2.96, SD = 1.079), and doing things they did not want to do to fit in (M = 2.66, SD = 1.136). In contrast, pressure to stay up late online to keep up with friends was rated Disagree (M = 2.36, SD = 0.995). Taken together, the pattern suggests that conformity pressure is present but not strongly endorsed, and appears more salient in interpersonal compliance (e.g., difficulty saying no) than in routine online behavior.

Pressure toward risky behavior was consistently rated Disagree (average item mean ≈ 2.15, Disagree). The lowest endorsement was for pressure to try smoking or drinking (M = 1.91, SD = 1.069). Similarly, respondents disagreed that they felt pressured to engage in behaviors they knew were wrong "to be accepted" (M = 2.07, SD = 1.049), that it was difficult to stop doing something harmful when with friends (M = 2.45, SD = 0.989), and that turning down alcohol when friends are drinking would be very difficult (M = 2.15, SD = 1.019). Overall, direct peer pressure toward health-risk behavior was comparatively weak in this sample.

Difficulties with boundaries and independence fell near the Disagree – Neutral boundary (average item mean ≈ 2.48). Respondents were Neutral on difficulty resisting peer pressure (M = 2.61, SD = 0.999) and on putting off important tasks due to peer invitations (M = 2.66, SD = 1.081). However, they Disagreed with ignoring parents' advice about friends (M = 2.16, SD = 0.914). This combination suggests that while some peer-related boundary challenges may be experienced situationally, there is also a meaningful tendency toward maintaining family guidance in peer selection.

Internal justifications were rated Disagree overall (average item mean ≈ 2.13, Disagree). Respondents disagreed that they did things they knew were wrong to look cool (M = 2.01, SD = 0.945) and that one must "do what friends want" to maintain close friendships (M = 2.24, SD = 1.031). These results indicate limited endorsement of cognitive rationalizations that normalize unethical or unwanted behavior for social acceptance.

4.3 Relationship Between Peer Pressure and Social Behavior

Pearson correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant positive association between peer pressure (peer influence experiences) and social behavior (personal and social competencies), $r = 0.347$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed; $n = 100$). This reflects a moderate positive relationship, indicating that higher reported peer influence experiences tend to co-occur with higher reported social behavior/competency scores within this sample. The association should be interpreted as correlational (i.e., not causal), but it supports the study's central claim that peer dynamics are meaningfully related to adolescents' social functioning.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

This study examined late adolescents' personal and social competencies, their reported experiences of peer influence (peer pressure), and the relationship between these constructs in a private higher education setting in the Philippines. Overall,

the findings indicate that respondents report generally strong social-functioning profiles, relatively low endorsement of overt risk-based peer pressure, and a statistically significant positive association between peer influence experiences and social behavior competencies ($r = 0.347$, $p < .001$). Interpreting these patterns requires careful attention to (a) which domains were most strongly endorsed, (b) how peer influence manifests in late adolescence, and (c) what a positive correlation plausibly reflects in a self-report correlational design.

4.4.1 Personal and social competencies: strengths with targeted vulnerability points

The competency results suggest that respondents view themselves as broadly socially functional, especially in prosociality/empathy and social awareness/respect. The strongest endorsement observed for items reflecting positive interpersonal behavior (e.g., recognizing others' achievements and being sensitive to others' feelings) is consistent with research emphasizing that adolescent peer contexts can promote prosocial interaction and relational competence, not only problem behavior. Syntheses of peer influence research increasingly emphasize that peer effects can operate across "positive" and "negative" developmental domains, depending on peer norms and the social environment (Brown & Anistranski, 2020; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Sharma & Charulatha, 2024).

However, the data also suggest specific competency domains that may require strengthening. In particular, self-regulation/ emotional control showed a comparatively weaker pattern (notably in temper control), while responsibility/autonomy exhibited mixed results (e.g., a neutral tendency in punctual task completion). These findings align with the view that self-regulation is a practical constraint during late adolescence—particularly under emotionally salient or socially demanding conditions. From a developmental standpoint, adolescents' emotion regulation and self-control are still consolidating, and are sensitive to social reward and belonging dynamics, which can complicate self-management under peer-related stressors (Andrews et al., 2020; Blakemore, 2018; Tomova et al., 2021).

4.4.2 Peer influence experiences: modest conformity pressure, limited risky pressure

Peer influence domain results show a clear distinction between conformity-related pressures and explicit pressures toward risky behavior. Respondents reported neutral tendencies in social conformity and boundary/independence difficulties, while generally disagreeing with risky behavior pressures and internal justifications. This pattern is consistent with the proposition that late adolescent peer influence often manifests through subtle social mechanisms—such as difficulty saying "no," compliance to maintain group acceptance, and occasional task displacement—rather than through overt coercion to engage in health-risk behaviors (Ciranka & Van Den Bos, 2019; Liu, 2025; Lou, 2023).

The modest endorsement of conformity-related pressures is theoretically coherent with "belongingness" accounts: adolescents are strongly motivated to avoid rejection and maintain peer approval, and conformity is a common behavioral route to preserve social inclusion (Blakemore, 2018; Tomova et al., 2021). In contrast, the relatively low endorsement of risky-behavior pressure suggests that, in this sample, peer dynamics may be more salient in everyday social compliance and boundary negotiation than in pushing students into behaviors such as smoking, drinking, or overt wrongdoing. This does not negate the relevance of risk-oriented peer influence, but it indicates that risk pressure may be context-dependent and not strongly normative within the respondent group.

It is also notable that internal-justification items were generally rejected. This suggests that many respondents do not strongly endorse cognitive rationalizations such as "doing wrong to look cool" or treating compliance as necessary for friendship maintenance. From an applied standpoint, this may reflect a protective normative climate or individual-level values that reduce the acceptability of such rationalizations, which may partially explain why risky-pressure endorsement was low. The broader literature indicates that peer influence can still operate in subtle ways even when explicit rationalizations are rejected, reinforcing the importance of examining multiple peer-influence dimensions rather than treating "peer pressure" as a single undifferentiated construct (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Sharma & Charulatha, 2024).

4.4.3 Interpreting the positive correlation: peer influence and social functioning move together

The central inferential result showed a statistically significant, moderate positive association between peer influence experiences and personal/social competency-based social behavior ($r = 0.347$, $p < .001$). The direction of this relationship is important: rather than indicating that higher peer pressure necessarily corresponds to poorer social behavior, the observed pattern suggests that adolescents who report greater peer influence experiences also report higher personal-social competency levels.

Several psychologically plausible interpretations can explain this positive association without invoking causality. First, adolescents with stronger social competencies may be more socially

engaged and more embedded in peer networks; greater social participation can naturally increase exposure to peer influence situations, including conformity demands and boundary negotiations. In this sense, higher peer influence experiences may partly reflect greater peer involvement, not necessarily maladaptive peer control. This interpretation is compatible with evidence that peer influence effects are robust across domains and that peer contexts operate as active environments for learning, identity development, and social functioning (Giletta et al., 2021; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021).

Second, the positive association may reflect that peer influence is not uniformly negative; peers can reinforce prosocial behavior, respectful interaction, and social responsibility when norms are constructive. When peer environments provide social reinforcement for positive behaviors, adolescents can experience peer influence (pressure to fit in, comply with group norms) while simultaneously exhibiting stronger social competencies. This aligns with syntheses emphasizing that peer influence can drive both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes depending on normative context and social learning pathways (Brown & Anistranski, 2020; Sharma & Charulatha, 2024).

Third, the result may also reflect common-method and perception effects inherent in self-report designs. Adolescents who are generally more attentive to social dynamics may both (a) notice and report peer influence experiences more readily and (b) evaluate themselves more positively on social-competency items. This possibility does not invalidate the relationship but underscores the need for cautious interpretation, including avoidance of causal claims.

4.4.4 Implications for competency-based enhancement programming

The results provide a defensible basis for a targeted enhancement initiative. Even though competency levels were generally positive, the comparative weakness in temper control and punctual responsibility suggests specific developmental targets aligned with protective-factor frameworks. Research commonly supports that self-regulation and emotional control contribute to adaptive coping under peer contexts and can buffer pathways from social influence to harmful behaviors, even if direct effects vary across outcomes and samples (Fatima & Rizvi, 2025; Mathew & Simon, 2024; Paciello et al., 2023; Yang & McGinley, 2022). Related intervention-oriented work suggests that peer contexts can be leveraged constructively to strengthen emotion regulation and resilience (Sahi et al., 2023). Consequently, an enhancement program that strengthens emotional regulation, assertiveness, and boundary-setting is justified not only as a prevention strategy but also as a competency-building intervention supporting healthy peer relations.

In addition, contextual literature on student populations reinforces that peer-proximal environments can be associated with measurable patterns in lifestyle behaviors and distress outcomes, emphasizing the practical need for structured support systems within educational institutions even when overt risky-peer-pressure endorsement is low (Agang-Ang et al., 2025). Bermido et al. (2025) similarly highlight that contemporary educational leadership must adapt to the social pressures and dynamics shaping student experience, which strengthens the institutional relevance of programs supporting social competencies.

Finally, Atento et al. (2025) offers a conceptual analogy useful for framing program safeguards: just as ethical governance and interpretability are positioned as moderating safeguards against harmful outcomes in data-driven systems, competency-based safeguards (e.g., emotional regulation, autonomy, assertiveness) can be framed as protective moderators that reduce harm from peer influence exposures. This remains an analogy rather than empirical evidence about peer pressure, but it supports the broader logic of designing structured protective mechanisms in environments where social pressures are unavoidable (Atento et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined late adolescents' personal and social competencies, their reported peer influence experiences, and the relationship between peer pressure and social behavior within a private higher education setting in the Philippines. Overall, respondents reported generally favorable personal and social competency profiles, particularly in prosocial behavior/empathy and social awareness/respect, indicating broadly adaptive social functioning. At the same time, the results suggested specific vulnerability points in self-regulation/emotional control (especially temper control) and responsibility-related behaviors (particularly timely task completion), where

responses tended to be comparatively weaker or more neutral.

With respect to peer influence experiences, the findings indicate that respondents generally reported low endorsement of direct pressure toward risky behaviors and internal justifications for wrongdoing, while reporting more neutral experiences of conformity-related pressures and certain boundary/independence challenges. This pattern suggests that peer pressure, in this context, is more evident in everyday social compliance dynamics (e.g., difficulty refusing peer requests, occasional displacement of responsibilities) than in overt coercion to engage in harmful or deviant acts.

Importantly, the analysis found a statistically significant, moderate positive association between peer pressure and social behavior ($r = 0.347$, $p < .001$). This indicates that higher reported peer influence experiences co-occur with higher self-reported personal and social competencies. As a correlational finding, this result does not establish causality; rather, it suggests that peer influence is meaningfully intertwined with adolescents' social functioning, potentially reflecting greater peer involvement, norm-based social participation, or the dual nature of peer influence operating through both adaptive and non-adaptive pathways depending on context.

5.2 Recommendations and Practical Implications

On the basis of the findings, schools and student support units may consider implementing a competency-focused enhancement program that strengthens domains where comparatively weaker patterns were observed. In particular, structured modules on emotional regulation and anger management, self-control under social provocation, and responsibility and task follow-through are recommended, as these appear to be practical leverage points for improving adolescents' stability in peer-intensive environments. Given that conformity-related pressures and boundary challenges were more salient than overt risky-behavior pressure, interventions should prioritize assertiveness training, refusal skills, and boundary-setting strategies that enable adolescents to maintain autonomy while preserving healthy peer relationships.

Because peer influence is not uniformly harmful, the program should also intentionally leverage prosocial peer dynamics by incorporating peer-led activities, mentoring, or group norm-setting exercises that reinforce constructive behaviors and respectful interaction. Guidance offices and homeroom/adviser systems may further integrate periodic reflective exercises that help students recognize social influence cues, evaluate peer-driven choices, and practice decision-making aligned with personal values and academic responsibilities. Finally, institutional leadership may use the results as evidence supporting sustained investment in student development initiatives that treat social competencies not as peripheral traits but as measurable capacities linked to how adolescents navigate peer contexts and school life.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study used a descriptive–correlational design; therefore, the observed association between peer pressure and social behavior cannot be interpreted as causal. Second, the measures relied on self-report, which may be subject to social desirability, self-perception bias, and common-method variance, potentially influencing the strength and direction of associations. Third, the sample was drawn from a single private higher education context and within a narrow age band (17–19), which may limit generalizability to other adolescent populations, school types, or cultural settings. Fourth, although peer influence was measured across multiple domains, the study did not directly account for potentially important moderators such as peer network structure, social media exposure intensity, socioeconomic background, or family functioning, which may shape both susceptibility to peer pressure and the expression of social behavior.

Future research may address these limitations by using multi-source assessment (e.g., peer ratings, teacher observations, behavioral indicators), comparing multiple institutions or educational tracks, and incorporating analytic models that test mediators and moderators (e.g., self-regulation as a buffering factor, family functioning as a contextual moderator). Longitudinal designs would be particularly useful to clarify temporal ordering and to examine how peer influence experiences interact with developing social competencies across late adolescence.

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