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The Role of Negative Peer Pressure on Social Anxiety and Psychological Well-being among Late Adolescent Filipinos

Ruszell Ramos,* Theus Daniel L. Licos, Margaret M. Maniñgat, Aira Anelle S. Reyes,
Angelina Zyrenne C. Zabala, Jade Ibhar V. Cuambot
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

Negative peer pressure is highly prevalent in today's generation, especially among late adolescents, as various harmful and risky behaviors are becoming more common. Hence, understanding the connection of negative peer pressure to a person's psychological well-being and susceptibility to social anxiety is essential, as these facets of an individual are not entirely understood. Using purposive sampling, we gathered 18-to 25-year-old participants, including senior high school students, college students, and recent graduates in their early careers. This predictive cross-sectional study investigates the link of negative peer pressure to social anxiety and psychological well-being among 385 late-adolescent Filipinos using Pearson product-moment correlation. We then used linear regression analysis to predict whether negative peer pressure can predict social anxiety and the psychological well-being of our participants. Our result indicates that negative peer pressure significantly predicts social anxiety and psychological well-being with a weak positive and weak negative correlation, respectively.

Keywords: *negative peer pressure, social anxiety, psychological well-being, late adolescents*

Introduction

Adolescence is crucial for growth. From adolescence to the mid-20s, it shapes a person's biological and psychosocial development (Backes & Bonnie, 2019). Traditionally, adolescence spanned from ages 12 to 18, encompassing the period from puberty to emancipation from a guardian (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015). Contemporary studies diverge on the age range that sufficiently defines adolescence as a developmental stage. Sawyer et al. (2018) attribute the inclusion of individuals in their early to mid-20s to shifts in social roles, such as those who are graduating and starting to work (Backes & Bonnie, 2019). Relationships vary, particularly with acquaintances and love partners. Jaworska and MacQueen (2015) assert that this characterization aligns with the biological and sociological phenomena of extended adolescence, since contemporary teens postpone conventional adult responsibilities, such as starting a family or purchasing a home. Bogaerts et al. (2021) have suggested categorizing those aged 18–25 as late adolescents. Their study found that early to late teenagers' identity declines from 12 to 15, increases from 15 to 23, and decreases from 23 to 25. This study underscores the significance of late adolescence, a period during which individuals explore their identities and exercise autonomy in decision-making.

During these identity-forming years, late adolescents are susceptible to negative peer pressure. Negative peer pressure might compel an individual to partake in perilous and detrimental behaviors, such as risky sexual activities, violent behaviors, and substance abuse, to conform to their peers (Adimora et al., 2018; Karakos, 2014). It may also hinder teenagers' ability to resist temptation, resulting in addictive behaviors (Wubet, 2021). This intense pressure to align with the conduct or opinions of others can result in stress, anxiety, and sadness, adversely affecting adolescent health, both physically and mentally, as well as their social and emotional development and relationships (Cruz et al., 2022).

Consequently, this notion indicates an expected relationship between peer pressure and social anxiety suggesting that higher negative peer pressure also means higher anxiety levels (Blöte et al., 2016; Subroto et al., 2022). Socially confident adolescents are also more likely to resist peer pressure. Bică's (2022) observations that people with high degrees of social anxiety prioritize the standards of their particular social groups over the widely accepted norms of behavior, add valuable context to our subject. In contrast, socially anxious adolescents are more likely to conform to perceived peer pressure because compared to their less anxious peers, they are less likely to be accepted by their peers, have fewer friends, and have a higher probability of experiencing victimization (Blöte et al., 2016; Leigh & Clark, 2018). Moreover, according to Ezenwaji et al. (2021), many teens and young adolescents are dealing with this issue, especially regarding social anxiety. Concerning this, university students had a 53.85% prevalence of anxiety, although the lifetime incidence of anxiety was more than 28%. They also stated that social anxiety is more common than other types of anxiety, according to research, with an incidence of between five and eight percent (Ezenwaji et al., 2021). On this account, the probability of an individual engaging in negative peer pressure is high in hopes that their social status will improve and be accepted by the peer group (Blöte et al., 2016).

Contrary to the belief that engaging in negative peer pressure results in peer acceptance, feelings of isolation and a lack of belonging are frequently caused by negative peer pressure which is also detrimental to an individual's psychological well-being (Anthonyraj & Sasikala, 2017). Negative peer pressure has been demonstrated to lower psychological well-being, frequently leading to despair, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. A study by Makinde et al. (2020) found that peer pressure can increase the likelihood of the development of depression and depressive symptoms among adolescents. Adolescents encouraged by their peers to engage in risky or harmful behaviors may also have reduced self-esteem, and increased levels of anxiety and despair (Monika et al., 2023).

Theories will help us understand how negative peer pressure affects social anxiety and psychological well-being. Our study is based on the self-presentation theory of social anxiety (1995) and the psychological well-being model (1989). The self-presentation hypothesis of social anxiety by Leary and Kowalski (1995) will help us comprehend negative peer pressure in social anxiety. The theory suggests that social anxiety arises when a person wants to make a good impression on others, such as peers, but doubts they will. Therefore, they try to control these impressions through self-presentation. Leary and Schlenker (1982) proposed three self-presentation theories of social anxiety claims. First, they said that social anxiety is worse for people who worry others won't react how they wish. Social anxiety occurs when a person believes they cannot comply with peer norms and fears their peers' negative perception of them. Second, social anxiety can emerge even if a person follows the group's rules but feels their actions are inadequate compared to their peers' reactions (Leary & Schlenker, 1982). Finally, they suggested that people who value peer approval will have more social anxiety. Since impressions are used to judge oneself, these people are motivated to make good ones and avoid bad ones (Vinayak & Arora, 2018). Moreover, normative social pressure, based on self-presentation, reflects humans' natural desire to be liked (Carron et al., 2004). Carron et al. (2004) noted that normative social pressure requires people to conform to group norms to avoid shame and enhance the likelihood of acceptance.

Further, Carol Ryff's (1989b) theoretical model of psychological well-being was used to understand negative peer pressure's involvement in psychological well-being. Ryff (1989a) identified six psychological well-being dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose, and personal progress. This theory highlights that people with high psychological well-being across all six categories can be more self-determined and goal-oriented, resist social constraints on thinking and action, and have an internal locus of evaluation. Individuals with internal locus of evaluation evaluate themselves by their own standards, not peers (Ryff, 1989a). Individuals with high self-acceptance and positive relationships are more socially mature and have positive self-esteem, allowing them to develop warm and trusted relationships. High autonomy and environmental mastery let people govern their conduct and adapt to varied social contexts without compromising their values. Meanwhile, people high in purpose of life and personal growth can behave meaningfully to achieve self-actualization and positive personal progress. Individuals with deficiency in one or more of these psychological well-being characteristics may struggle to develop trusting relationships and become more concerned with peer expectations and evaluations. Thus, they will more easily succumb to peer pressure, altering their thinking and behavior (Ryff, 2013). Carol Ryff's hypothesis states that independence, social competence, and self-acceptance affect psychological well-being. Negative peer pressure and psychological harm are more likely for those lacking one or more of the six qualities.

Considering these factors, negative peer pressure can profoundly impact the growth of late adolescents, a period when they increasingly choose and cultivate relationships with like-minded individuals to attain a sense of belonging and security within their social milieu. When an individual is unable to fulfill this need, they may experience pressure and become eager to appease others for acceptance and to evade rejection, or conversely, they may abstain from pursuing connections due to the fear of rejection. This increased sensitivity to peer responses constitutes social anxiety. This can significantly harm an individual's well-being and social relationships as they find it challenging to establish meaningful connections with others due to diminished self-efficacy and confidence in social contexts. Negative peer pressure is a significant factor affecting social behavior, with enduring implications for people's psychological and physiological development, necessitating additional research.

With all of these considered, this study aimed to determine the role of negative peer pressure on the social anxiety and psychological well-being of late adolescent Filipinos. As such, it was hypothesized that negative peer pressure predicts social anxiety and psychological well-being. More specifically, the study hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between negative peer pressure and psychological well-being, and that there is a positive correlation between negative peer pressure and social anxiety.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a predictive cross-sectional design to determine whether negative peer pressure can predict social anxiety and psychological well-being. The predictive cross-sectional design is a two-dimensional research method used for studies aiming to predict or forecast some future events without the need for alteration and without concerning causality; it is also used for studies that collect data at some period, and the comparison will be conducted through the variables (Johnson, 2001). This method will assess whether the variable of interest can predict other variables. Also, the data collected during a specific period will be used to compare the relevant variables. Additionally, each variable will be studied within the same set of participants.

Respondents

Using Cochran's formula with a precision level of $\pm 5\%$, confidence level of 95%, and an estimated proportion of $p = 0.5$, the sample size of our population was determined to be 385 participants to represent late adolescent Filipinos aged 18 to 25 years old. We initially collected 470 participants, and it was reduced to 385 respondents due to invalid responses, response bias, and data outliers.

Further, we used a purposive sampling method to choose more specified representatives of the population. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique utilizing a set of characteristics in finding participants, which is defined by the research purpose. We decided on the following characteristics as the inclusion criteria for our participants. For our first inclusion criteria, we decided that participants

must be in the age range of 18 to 25 years old because our study targets late adolescents. For our second inclusion criteria, participants must be Filipino citizens who are currently residing in the Philippines since our study focuses on the Southeastern demographics, specifically in the Philippines. Next, they must be either college students, senior high school students, or recent graduate students in their early careers. Then, participants must also belong in any social group, such as peers, community, and clubs. Lastly, participants must understand English in order to understand the questionnaires.

Additionally, individuals clinically diagnosed with mental health concerns were not eligible to participate in our study. While they may be able to give fully informed consent, people with clinically diagnosed mental health issues are excluded because our research deals directly with topics that may affect their psychological well-being and worsen their mental health concerns. Furthermore, while we encouraged our participants to undergo debriefing after answering our questionnaire, individuals with mental illness should not be put at greater risk than benefit.

Instrument

Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being (PWBS). The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being (PWBS) mid-length version is a self-report questionnaire developed by Carol D. Ryff in 1989. It is a self-report measure that intends to assess an individual's level of psychological well-being or the positive aspects of a person's psychological functioning (Van Dierendonck et al., 2008). The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being (PWBS) mid-length version consists of 42 items that measure six dimensions of psychological well-being, namely Autonomy (AUT), Environmental Mastery (ENV), Personal Growth (PERS), Positive Relations With Others (POS), Purpose In Life (PUR), and Self-Acceptance (SELF) where sample items include "I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus (AUT)," "In difficult times, I usually manage to take control of the situation (ENV)," "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world (PERS)," "Most people see me as loving and affectionate (POS)," "I have a sense of direction and purpose in my life (PUR)," "I like most aspects of my personality (SELF)". The test is a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Ratings for each item in subscale and total scale will be summed to calculate their score. Higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological well-being in the respective subscale or overall psychological well-being (Van Dierendonck et al., 2008). The reliability of the PWBS mid-length version, as determined by Cronbach's alpha, varies from .83 to .91 ($\alpha = .83$ to $.91$) for each subscale and $.93$ ($\alpha = .93$) for the total scale, with evidence demonstrating its reliability. Additionally, various research, including factor analysis, criterion-related validity, and construct validity, have confirmed the validity of the six-factor model and its relationship to psychological well-being and mental health (Abbott et al., 2006).

Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPSQ-R). Sunil Saini and Sandeep Singh developed the Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPSQ-R), a revised version of the original PPSQ, first published in 2010. The test consists of 25 items, with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which aims to measure an individual's susceptibility to peer pressure. Sample items include "I cannot say NO to my friends even if my parents do not agree," "I know my limits when with friends," and "I find it difficult to escape peer pressure" (Saini, 2016). The scale is scored by adding the scores for each of the 25 items. While there is no universal threshold for identifying low, moderate, or high levels of susceptibility to peer pressure on the Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised (PPSQ-R), some studies have used a cutoff score of 55 or below to indicate low susceptibility, a score between 56 to 72 to indicate moderate susceptibility and a score above 72 to indicate high susceptibility (Zulkifly et al., 2022). The scale has been found to have strong psychometric properties where it is shown to have a good internal consistency, as evidenced by its high Cronbach's alpha of $.79$ ($\alpha = 0.79$). It also demonstrates satisfactory concurrent validity, which implies that it is positively associated with measures of peer pressure and self-esteem (Saini, 2016).

Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale - Self Report (LSAS - SR). The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale-Self Report (LSAS-SR), developed by Dr. Michael R. Liebowitz, is a self-report version of the original clinician-administered LSAS, first published in 1987 and the self-report version in 2000. The test consists of 24 items that describe different social situations (e.g., "Going to a party where you don't know anyone," "Being watched while you eat," and "Having a romantic encounter.") where participants would rate the degree of fear or anxiety they experience in each situation using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 - none to 3 - severe (Coles, 2016). The LSAS-SR is scored by adding up the ratings for each item. The total score ranges from 0 to 72, with higher scores indicating greater severity of social anxiety. A score of 30 or above is often used as a cutoff for clinically significant anxiety symptoms (Rytwinski et al., 2009). The LSAS-SR has been found to have good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from $.83$ to $.93$ ($\alpha = .83$ to $.93$). Similarly, it has also been shown to have good convergent validity with other measures of social anxiety, such as Social Interaction Anxiety Scale. Additionally, it has good discriminant validity where it can differentiate between individuals with social anxiety disorder and those with other anxiety disorders or no psychiatric diagnosis (Caballo et al., 2019b).

Procedure

This study was subjected to ethical review by the UST Graduate School Review Ethics Committee (USTGS-REC) before data collection to safeguard and ensure the safety and well-being of all participants and evaluate the ethical considerations of the testing methods.

Pre-data collection procedures involved gathering and curating appropriate measures for our independent variable, negative peer

pressure and dependent variables, social anxiety, and psychological well-being of late adolescent Filipinos aged 18 to 25. The Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ-R), Liebowitz Social Anxiety Self Report Scale (LSAS-SR), and Ryff Scales for Psychological Well-being (PWBS) will be used for this purpose. The curated questionnaire integrating these three measures was created and answered online through Google Forms.

Following pre-data collection, actual data collection procedures of the study were conducted either through the administration of an online Google Forms questionnaire link or a physical copy of the questionnaire. Both versions include the informed consent form (ICF) and curated measurement tool, which integrates the PPQ-R, LSAS-SR, and PWBS. For the online version of the questionnaire, the items and order of the tests were randomized for each participant using a link randomizer to minimize biases in the test order. Participant collection was primarily done online through email invitations and public postings inviting potential participants to take part in the study across social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Included in these postings were the criteria for eligible participants and a link to the Google Forms questionnaire to reach more potential test takers for the study. The Google Forms link brought participants to our curated research measurement tool, where they were informed on the general details and purpose of the research study, as well as be able to read the ICF before proceeding to answer the online questionnaire, which should take around 15-20 minutes for participants to complete. Participants were also given the option to answer the survey in person if they wish to do so. They were provided with a physical copy of the survey form to respond. At the end of the duration of data collection, the Google Forms questionnaire link was closed to new responses.

After completion of actual data collection, post-data collection procedures began with the recording of participant responses and data encoding for analysis. Microsoft Excel (ver. 2304) was used to organize and record data with Jamovi (ver. 2.3.28) for the data analysis procedure for Pearson product-moment correlation with two separate linear regression analyses of variables.

Data Analysis

For our research, quantitative data was collected from our participants; thus, statistical techniques were necessary to analyze and compute the data properly. After the data collection, we proceeded with our data analysis, computed using Jamovi Desktop (ver. 2.3.28) and Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Software (ver. 2304). As for the level of statistical significance, we conducted our data analysis with a p-value of .05 ($p < .05$) with a confidence level of 95%.

We also used various statistical techniques necessary to analyze and compute our data. First, Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine whether negative peer pressure is related to psychological well-being and social anxiety.

We then proceeded with a linear regression analysis. A linear regression analysis predicts a dependent variable's value based on the independent variable's value. Using this method, we determined whether negative peer pressure can predict an individual's social anxiety and psychological well-being. We used two separate linear regressions to do our analyses: first, on whether negative peer pressure predicted social anxiety, followed by another linear regression on whether negative peer pressure predicted psychological well-being.

Results and Discussion

We started our data analysis by conducting a Pearson product-moment correlation to identify the relationship of negative peer pressure to psychological well-being and social anxiety.

As seen in Table 1, our results indicated a weak negative correlation between negative peer pressure and psychological well-being (PWB) ($r = -0.34$), and a weak positive correlation between negative peer pressure and social anxiety ($r = 0.23$). Both were tested with a 95% confidence interval.

Table 1. *Correlations for NPP-PWB and NPP-SA*

	1	2	3
1. Negative Peer Pressure	-		
2. Psychological well-being	- 0.34 ***	-	-
3. Social anxiety	0.23 ***	-	-

Note. $N = 385$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Following this, a linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether negative peer pressure predicts psychological well-being and social anxiety.

Table 2. *Linear Regression Analyses for NPP-PWB and NPP-SA*

	B	SE	95% CI		R ²	p
			LL	UL		
Intercept	188.15	4.10	180.09	196.22		<.001
NPP-PWB	-0.44	0.06	-0.56	-0.32	0.11	<.001
Intercept	44.29	4.51	35.24	53.15		<.001
NPP-SA	0.32	0.07	0.18	0.45	0.05	<.001

Note. $N = 385$; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

As seen in Table 2, negative peer pressure explained 11.3% of the variance for psychological well-being ($R^2 = 0.11$, $F(1,383) = 48.9$, $p < .001$) and 5.2% of variance for social anxiety ($R^2 = 0.05$, $F(1,383) = 21.2$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the result indicated that negative peer pressure significantly predicted psychological well-being ($B = -0.43$, $p < .001$) and social anxiety ($B = 0.31$, $p < .001$).

The present study aimed at exploring the relationship involving negative peer pressure, psychological well-being, and social anxiety. The study has two main hypotheses. Our first hypothesis stated that negative peer pressure and psychological well-being have an inverse relationship. The results indicate that an increased level of negative peer pressure will produce a decreased level of psychological well-being, supporting this hypothesis. These results are consistent with the autonomy dimension of psychological well-being by Carol Ryff (1989a), which explains that individuals with low autonomy are susceptible to being overly concerned regarding others' expectations of them. Moreover, negative peer pressure, such as engaging in risky behavior, can cause feelings of isolation, lack of belongingness, and damage to one's self-esteem, which is harmful to a person's psychological well-being (Anthonyraj & Sasikala, 2017; Monika et al., 2023). These effects have the potential to become more pronounced and deep-seated, persisting from adolescence to adulthood, leading to an increased vulnerability toward depressive symptoms and a lack of healthy relationships (Cruz et al., 2022). An inverse of this effect can also be observed where low negative peer pressure can indicate increased psychological well-being in an individual. Increased confidence regarding personal capabilities, boundaries, and social intelligence, as well as having access to more supportive relationships with peers has been associated with individuals who experience less negative peer pressure (Bansal & Bansal, 2022; Liu, 2023).

For the second hypothesis of the study, it was hypothesized that negative peer pressure is a predictor of social anxiety. The data gathered during our study indicated a direct causative relationship between negative peer pressure and social anxiety among late adolescents Filipinos. This relationship can be explained by the self-presentation theory of Leary and Kowalski (1995), which states that social anxiety stems from an individual's doubt of their ability to present a likable impression towards others. Hence, in order to better control these impressions and avoid rejection or embarrassment, they become more sensitive and compliant to group demands, including risky and harmful ones, in turn leading to experiences of anxiety (Carron et al., 2004; Blöte et al., 2016; Vinayak & Arora, 2018). This behavior is widespread during adolescence due to a lack of established and stable social relationships as well as fear of negative social evaluation (Cavanaugh & Buehler, 2015; Pickering et al., 2019; Leary & Jongman-Sereno, 2020; Ezenwaji et al., 2021). As indicated in a study by Bică (2022), individuals with heightened social anxiety tend to prioritize the norms prevailing within their specific social groups over those widely accepted as behavioral standards. The results we gathered support this literature, indicating that the desire for social acceptance and validation are often stronger than concerns about participating in risky or harmful behaviors. Thus, late adolescent Filipinos are more likely to experience social anxiety and give in to negative peer pressure to better secure positive social standing among their peers. Delving deeper into these results, we aim to gain valuable insights through which negative peer pressure affects psychological well-being and social interactions of late adolescent Filipinos, thereby informing targeted interventions aimed at mitigating its detrimental effects.

Conclusions

To conclude, the result supported our hypotheses that negative peer pressure has a significant role in the impairment of late adolescent Filipinos' psychological well-being and social anxiety. Our result also indicated that negative peer pressure affects psychological well-being more than social anxiety due to the fact that psychological well-being encompasses a holistic approach to an individual's life, while social anxiety solely focuses on an individual's psychosocial facet.

With these in mind, negative peer pressure worsens an individual's autonomy and self-acceptance, both of which are significant factors related to psychological well-being and social anxiety. Furthermore, negative peer pressure can impede late adolescents' capability for personal growth, damaging their potential; and ultimately, their psychological well-being. This can be aggravated by others' expectations, as negative peer pressure can result in social anxiety, particularly when late adolescents cannot meet the demands of the group.

Our study significantly contributes to the existing literature by investigating the relationship between negative peer pressure, psychological well-being and social anxiety among late adolescent Filipinos. Overall, although there are studies that delve into the possible influence of peer pressure on psychological well-being and social anxiety, our study expands the literature for Southeast Asian and late adolescent demographics, both of which are lacking in previous studies. More importantly, by highlighting the dynamics of negative peer pressure and its effects on psychological well-being and social anxiety in late adolescent Filipinos, our study was able to provide valuable insights in terms of investigating the influence of negative peer pressure and understanding the well-being of this demographic.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Ruszell Ramos

University of Santo Tomas – Philippines

Theus Daniel L. Licos

University of Santo Tomas – Philippines

Margaret M. Maniñgat

University of Santo Tomas – Philippines

Aira Anelle S. Reyes

University of Santo Tomas – Philippines

Angelina Zyrenne C. Zabala

University of Santo Tomas – Philippines

Jade Ibhar V. Cuambot

University of Santo Tomas – Philippines