

The Influence of Free Social Interaction and Peer Pressure on Adolescent Behavior in Helvetia Village, Labuhan Deli District

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by heightened vulnerability to social influence, particularly peer pressure and unregulated social interaction. This study examines the influence of free social interaction and peer pressure on adolescent behavior in Helvetia Village, Labuhan Deli District. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation involving adolescents, parents, and community representatives. The findings indicate that adolescents are increasingly exposed to unregulated social environments, manifested in late-night socializing, experimentation with cigarettes and alcohol, school absenteeism, and excessive engagement with social media trends. Peer pressure emerges as a dominant factor shaping these behaviors through mechanisms of persuasion, conformity, and fear of social exclusion. The study further reveals that weak parental supervision and limited community control exacerbate adolescents' susceptibility to negative peer influence. As a follow-up intervention, a structured counseling program was implemented to enhance adolescents' awareness of social risks and develop assertive skills in resisting negative peer pressure. The results underscore the importance of integrated efforts involving families, schools, and communities in fostering healthy adolescent development and preventing social deviance.

ABSTRACT

Masa remaja adalah tahap perkembangan kritis yang ditandai dengan kerentanan yang meningkat terhadap pengaruh sosial, terutama tekanan teman sebaya dan interaksi sosial yang tidak teratur. Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh interaksi sosial bebas dan tekanan teman sebaya terhadap perilaku remaja di Desa Helvetia, Kecamatan Labuhan Deli. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi non-partisipan, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan remaja, orang tua, dan perwakilan masyarakat. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa remaja semakin terpapar lingkungan sosial yang tidak diatur, yang dimanifestasikan dalam bersosialisasi larut malam, eksperimen dengan rokok dan alkohol, ketidakhadiran sekolah, dan keterlibatan berlebihan dengan tren media sosial. Tekanan teman sebaya muncul sebagai faktor dominan yang membentuk perilaku ini melalui mekanisme persuasi, konformitas, dan ketakutan akan pengucilan sosial. Studi ini lebih lanjut mengungkapkan bahwa pengawasan orang tua yang lemah dan kontrol masyarakat yang terbatas memperburuk kerentanan remaja terhadap pengaruh teman sebaya yang negatif. Sebagai intervensi lanjutan, program konseling terstruktur diterapkan untuk meningkatkan kesadaran remaja akan risiko sosial dan mengembangkan keterampilan asertif dalam melawan tekanan teman sebaya negatif. Hasil penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya upaya terpadu yang melibatkan keluarga, sekolah, dan masyarakat dalam mendorong perkembangan remaja yang sehat dan mencegah penyimpangan sosial.

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Introduction

Adolescence represents a transitional period marked by profound biological, psychological, and social changes. During this stage, individuals actively construct their identity,

expand social networks, and seek acceptance from peers. While peer relationships play a crucial role in social development, excessive dependence on peer approval may increase adolescents' vulnerability to negative social influences (Santrock, 2011). This vulnerability becomes more pronounced when adolescents lack adequate guidance from family and social institutions.

In recent years, concerns regarding free social interaction among adolescents have intensified, particularly in semi-urban and rural communities experiencing rapid social change. Free social interaction refers to patterns of association that are weakly regulated by social norms, parental supervision, or community control, thereby allowing adolescents to engage in risky behaviors without clear boundaries (Fahrudin, 2019). Such interactions often include late-night gatherings, exposure to substance use, and participation in behaviors that deviate from prevailing social values.

Peer pressure constitutes a critical social mechanism influencing adolescent behavior. Adolescents frequently experience pressure to conform to group norms in order to maintain social acceptance and avoid exclusion (Sarwono, 2016). Research indicates that peer pressure can significantly shape adolescents' attitudes, decision-making processes, and behavioral patterns, particularly in contexts where peer groups function as primary reference points (Ismail, 2022). The fear of social rejection often leads adolescents to comply with group expectations, even when these expectations conflict with personal or societal values.

In Helvetia Village, Labuhan Deli District, preliminary observations suggest an increasing trend of unregulated adolescent socialization. Adolescents are frequently observed spending extended hours outside the home, engaging in peer-dominated activities with minimal parental oversight. The growing influence of digital media further amplifies this phenomenon by normalizing risky behaviors and reinforcing peer-driven social norms. These conditions raise concerns regarding the long-term implications for adolescents' academic engagement, moral development, and psychosocial well-being.

Given the complexity of these dynamics, this study aims to analyze the influence of free social interaction and peer pressure on adolescent behavior in Helvetia Village. Beyond documenting behavioral patterns, this research seeks to explore the underlying social mechanisms that drive adolescent conformity and risk-taking. The study also integrates a community-based counseling intervention as a form of applied social research, contributing practical insights for preventive strategies against adolescent social deviance.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of adolescents' social experiences and behavioral patterns within their natural context. The research was conducted in Helvetia Village, Labuhan Deli District, an area characterized by increasing adolescent social mobility and limited community supervision.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, involving adolescents aged 13–18 years who were actively engaged in peer group interactions. Additional informants included parents and community figures to enhance data triangulation and contextual validity. Data collection techniques consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews focused on patterns of social interaction, experiences of peer pressure, and perceived behavioral consequences. Observations were conducted to capture adolescents' daily social activities, while documentation supported the interpretation of field data.

Data analysis followed an interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques, prolonged engagement in the field, and peer debriefing. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive examination of the relationship between free social interaction, peer pressure, and adolescent behavior.

Result and Discussion

Patterns of Free Social Interaction

The findings reveal that adolescents in Helvetia Village frequently engage in unregulated social activities, particularly late-night gatherings with peer groups. These activities often occur without clear time boundaries or parental monitoring. Such patterns reflect a shift toward greater peer autonomy, which, while developmentally normative, becomes problematic when not accompanied by adequate social control. Consistent with Hurlock (1991), adolescents' heightened curiosity and desire for independence increase their susceptibility to environmental influence. The findings of this study demonstrate that peer pressure operates as a powerful social force shaping adolescent behavior in Helvetia Village. Adolescents' tendency to conform to peer expectations reflects a fundamental developmental need for social acceptance and belonging. According to Santrock (2011), peer relationships become increasingly salient during adolescence, often surpassing parental influence in daily decision-making. In this study, adolescents frequently complied with peer invitations to engage in risky behaviors, not due to intrinsic motivation, but to avoid social exclusion and maintain group solidarity.

This phenomenon aligns with Sarwono's (2016) assertion that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to normative social influence, where conformity is driven by the desire to be perceived as "normal" within a peer group. The fear of being labeled as different or disloyal reinforces compliance, even when adolescents are aware of potential negative consequences. Such dynamics indicate that peer pressure functions not merely as external persuasion but as an internalized social control mechanism.

Peer Pressure as a Behavioral Reinforcement Mechanism

Peer pressure emerged as a central factor reinforcing adolescents' involvement in risky behaviors. Participants reported experiencing direct persuasion, subtle coercion, and social ridicule when attempting to refuse peer invitations. The need to maintain group membership frequently outweighed personal judgment, leading adolescents to conform to behaviors such as smoking, alcohol experimentation, and school truancy. This finding supports previous studies indicating that peer pressure functions as a powerful mechanism of social conformity during adolescence (Azizah, 2020; Ismail, 2022). Free social interaction, characterized by minimal parental supervision and weak community regulation, emerged as a critical contextual factor facilitating adolescents' exposure to risky behaviors. The absence of clear boundaries regarding time, space, and acceptable conduct allows peer norms to dominate adolescents' behavioral choices. Fahrudin (2019) emphasizes that social environments lacking normative control tend to normalize deviant behavior, particularly among youth populations.

In Helvetia Village, adolescents' frequent late-night socialization reflects a broader shift in social regulation, where traditional forms of supervision are gradually replaced by peer-based regulation. This transition is further amplified by digital media, which introduces alternative value systems and behavioral models that may conflict with local cultural norms. As noted by Putri and

Hartono (2022), digital culture often accelerates the diffusion of permissive social behaviors, increasing adolescents' exposure to risky lifestyles.

Behavioral and Psychosocial Impacts

The influence of free social interaction and peer pressure manifested in observable behavioral changes, including declining academic engagement, reduced self-regulation, and emotional stress. Adolescents reported fatigue, decreased motivation, and difficulty concentrating in school. Psychologically, the constant demand to meet peer expectations contributed to anxiety and internal conflict. These findings align with social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of social environments in shaping behavior through observation and reinforcement (Ahmadi, 2009). The interaction between free social interaction and peer pressure produces significant behavioral and psychological consequences for adolescents. Participants in this study reported declining academic engagement, reduced self-discipline, and increased emotional strain. These outcomes are consistent with social learning theory, which posits that behavior is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts (Ahmadi, 2009).

Psychologically, adolescents experience internal conflict as they attempt to reconcile personal values with peer expectations. Continuous exposure to peer pressure may lead to stress, anxiety, and diminished self-efficacy, particularly when adolescents feel incapable of asserting personal boundaries. Hurlock (1991) highlights that prolonged exposure to such stressors can disrupt emotional development and weaken adolescents' capacity for autonomous decision-making.

The Role of Family and Community as Protective Systems

The findings also underscore the importance of family and community as protective systems against negative peer influence. Weak parental supervision and limited community engagement were found to exacerbate adolescents' susceptibility to peer pressure. Mulyadi (2020) argues that consistent parental monitoring and emotional support serve as critical buffers that strengthen adolescents' self-regulation and moral reasoning.

Community institutions, including schools and youth organizations, play a strategic role in establishing positive social norms and providing structured activities that reduce adolescents' reliance on peer-dominated spaces. When families and communities fail to coordinate their efforts, adolescents are more likely to seek validation exclusively from peer groups, increasing the risk of deviant behavior.

Counseling Intervention and Preventive Implications

As a follow-up to the research findings, a structured counseling program was implemented involving 22 adolescents. The program focused on identifying risky social situations, understanding peer pressure dynamics, and developing assertive refusal skills. Post-intervention evaluations indicated improved awareness and increased confidence among participants in resisting negative peer influence. This outcome highlights the potential of educational and counseling-based interventions as effective preventive measures in adolescent social development. The counseling program implemented as a follow-up intervention demonstrates the potential of preventive social action in mitigating the negative effects of peer pressure. The program focused on increasing adolescents' awareness of risky social situations, enhancing assertive communication skills, and strengthening self-control. Post-intervention observations

indicated improved confidence among participants in refusing negative peer invitations.

This finding supports Azizah's (2020) argument that psychoeducational interventions can effectively enhance adolescents' resilience by equipping them with cognitive and behavioral coping strategies. Rather than positioning adolescents as passive victims of social influence, counseling interventions empower them to become active agents in managing their social environment.

Implications for Policy and Future Research

From a policy perspective, the results suggest the need for integrated adolescent development programs that involve families, schools, and community stakeholders. Preventive strategies should prioritize early intervention, peer education, and the creation of safe social spaces that promote positive peer interaction. Future research may adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of peer pressure and social interaction patterns on adolescent development across different sociocultural contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that free social interaction and peer pressure exert a significant influence on adolescent behavior in Helvetia Village. Unregulated social environments, combined with strong peer conformity demands, contribute to the emergence of risky and socially deviant behaviors. Peer pressure acts as a reinforcing mechanism that weakens adolescents' self-control and decision-making capacity. However, the implementation of targeted counseling interventions demonstrates that adolescents can develop greater resilience when provided with appropriate guidance and support. Therefore, collaborative efforts involving families, schools, and community institutions are essential in fostering healthy adolescent development and mitigating the negative impacts of peer-driven social influence.

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