

## Abstract

- In the United States, the *college* experience is often associated with engaging in high-risk behaviors like drinking, recreational drug use, and even sexual activity.
- This study explores the role that college peer relationships and dynamics have in the decision to engage in high-risk behaviors like alcohol consumption, drug use, and sexual activity
- The current study is a secondary data analysis of the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study Series (CAS), from wave 4 in 2001
- In this study, chi-square tests were computed to determine the relationship between peer pressure and engagement in high-risk behaviors
- The current study resulted in indicating clinically significant and/or association between nearly all forms of peer pressure and engagement in high-risk behaviors among college students.

## Introduction

### Significance of Study

- This study is relevant to the field of social welfare because understanding the underlying aspects of the social and cultural conditions college students are confronted with will allow for better inventions and strategies to serve them.
- In the United States, it is estimated that 19.9 million students attended colleges and universities at the beginning of Fall 2019.

### Purpose

- Previous research has targeted its efforts on understanding substance use and sexually risky behaviors at an individual level, which does not consider the influence of high-level factors such as peer relationships and dynamics.

### Research Question

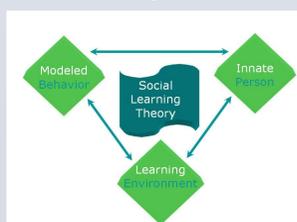
- What is the correlation between peer relationships and high-risk behaviors among college students in the United States?

### Hypothesis

- The hypothesis for this study predicts that the presence of negative peer pressure influences college students to engage in high-risk behaviors.

## Literature Review

- Several research studies have established the association between peer influence/peer pressure and adolescent health risk behaviors.
- Most research conducted on peer pressure focuses on adolescents and teenage youth because this developmental period is marked by forming friend groups and facilitates socialization and belongingness.
- Peer pressure has been accepted as a risk factor or “causative agent” for engagement in substance use and risky sexual behavior among adolescents
- The theoretical framework used to approach peer pressure among college students was Social Learning Theory because of its concepts of role-modeling, imitation, and conformity.



## Methods

### Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis that used original research data from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study Series (CAS).
- The CAS is a multi-round survey that interviewed students from four-year universities and colleges throughout the United States.
- The current research is a cross-sectional study utilizing secondary data analysis specifically, from wave 4 of the CAS that was completed in 2001.
- The purpose of the survey was to examine key issues surrounding alcohol abuse and other high-risk behaviors among college students from various institutions.

### Sample

- The study's sample size in 2001 consisted of 10,904 full-time undergraduate students enrolled in four-year universities from 119 schools in the United States, representing 38 states and the District of Columbia.
- The original sample method was a random sampling of students using probability proportionate to size sampling of colleges and universities.
- The sampling frame comprises a random sample of college and university campuses in the United States, including both public and private schools, all-female schools, historically African American Schools, large/medium/small schools, and schools located in urban/suburban/rural areas.
- The current study sample utilizes only wave 4 in 2001 of the original study. Hence, the type of random sampling remained the same across all four waves. Thus, the final sample includes 119 schools and 10,904 college students.
- Demographics:** 64% Female, 35% Male, Mean age=20.82, Majority Juniors (3<sup>rd</sup> year) in college, Majority Undergraduates, Majority White, Majority live on campus, Majority never married

### Measures

#### Independent Variable: Peer Pressure

- Because everyone else is drinking
- Fit in with friends
- Have a good time with friends

#### Dependent Variables: High-risk Behaviors

- Alcohol Consumption
- Drug Use
- Sexual Activity

## Results

### Peer Pressure & High-risk Behaviors

- Several chi-square tests were computed to determine the relationship between peer pressure and engagement in high-risk behaviors.
- The analysis showed there was a significant relationship between the peer pressure of everyone else drinking and victim of sexual assault,  $X^2(9) = 60.03, p = .00$ .
- The analysis exhibited there was a significant relationship between peer pressure and smoking cigarettes,  $X^2(3) = 500.13, p = .00$ .
- Analysis of the peer pressure (fit in with friends) and marijuana showed no significant relationship,  $X^2(9, N = 8,918) = 7.531, p > .05$ .

**Table 1 Peer Pressure & High-risk Behaviors**

High-risk Behaviors	Peer Pressure				df	Chi-Square	Sig
	Very Important (n)	Important (n)	Somewhat Important (n)	Not Important at all (n)			
<b>Victim of Sexual Assault</b>					9	60.03	.00**
Not at all	116	575	2226	5854			
Once	6	19	39	70			
2-3 Times	3	4	7	8			
4+	1	2	4	10			
<b>Unplanned Sex</b>					3	80.27	.00**
Not at all	50	238	1049	5489			
1 or more x	32	108	353	1232			
<b>Use cigarettes within last year</b>					3	500.13	.00**
No	838	1407	1727	1198			
Yes	1077	1245	984	316			

Note, \*\*p<.01

## Discussion

- The findings of this study supported the hypothesis because college students who identified various types of peer pressure such as: fit in with friends, to have a good time with friends, or because everyone else is drinking, were more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors.
- This study's findings support the continuum of peer pressure through college.

### Strengths:

- Sample size was a major strength for the current study because it increased the generalizability of peer pressure and its effect on college students' behavior.
- Participants were selected randomly eliminating the majority of selection bias by leaving all students the equal chance of being selected for the study.
- A strong external validity exists for adolescents faced with peer pressure and engagement in risky behaviors, which reflects the conclusions from the current college population study.

### Limitations:

- Secondary data analysis, research design, time of data collection, and self-reported data
- Lack of clarity with the definition of peer pressure

### Implications & Future Research

- Due to the various reasons that lead college students into conforming to peer pressure and engaging in high-risk behaviors, it is important to consider what factors make young adults more susceptible to this type of negative pressure.
- Most of the current research on peer pressure and peer relationships is associated with adolescent development, so it is crucial that this issue be researched through early adulthood, middle adulthood, and older adulthood to determine if its impact is across the lifespan.
- Future research on peer relationships will allow social workers to understand a client's motivation behind their behavior when peer pressure or relations are a factor in one's decision making process.
- On a more macro level, research highlighted issues around substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual assaults in which there is high prevalence of these incidents among college age students. In this case, social workers must learn to provide therapeutic interventions, psychoeducation, and program development surrounding the topics of peer relationships/ dynamics and their impact.

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