

Self-Esteem as a Moderator of the Influence of Peer Pressure on Adolescent Aggression

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This study aims to investigate the effect of peer pressure on adolescent aggression with self-esteem as a moderator. Data in this regression quantitative study were collected through online self-report using questionnaires from junior high school adolescents (N=348) whose ages ranged from 12-15 years old. Data were analyzed using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The research subjects completed the research instrument, namely the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire Scale (BPAQ), Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The results showed that peer pressure had a significant positive effect on adolescent aggression, but self-esteem did not serve as a moderator in the relationship. The findings showed that the more often adolescents received peer pressure, the higher the level of involvement in the aggressive behavior of their peer group. However, self-esteem could not to weaken or strengthen the effect of peer pressure on adolescent aggression.

Keywords: adolescent; aggression; peer pressure; self-esteem.

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Самооценка как модератор подростковой агрессии

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Целью этого исследования является изучение влияния давления со стороны сверстников на агрессию подростков с самооценкой в качестве модератора. Данные в этом регрессионном количественном исследовании были собраны с помощью онлайн-самоотчета с использованием анкет подростков младших классов средней школы (N=348), возраст которых варьировался от 12 до 15 лет. Данные были проанализированы с помощью модерированного регрессионного анализа (MRA). Испытуемые заполнили исследовательский инструмент, а именно шкалу опросника агрессии Басса-Перри (BPAQ), инвентаризацию давления со стороны сверстников (PPI) и шкалу самооценки Розенберга (RSES). Результаты показали, что давление со стороны сверстников оказало значительное положительное влияние на агрессию подростков, но самооценка не служила модератором в отношениях. Результаты показали, что чем чаще подростки подвергались давлению со стороны сверстников, тем выше уровень вовлеченности в агрессивное поведение их группы сверстников. Однако самооценка не могла ослабить или усилить влияние давления со стороны сверстников на агрессию подростков.

Keywords: подросток; агрессия; давление сверстников; самооценка.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a critical development period marked by significant physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. During this period, adolescents often face significant challenges in forming self-identity and adapting to an increasingly complex social environment [29]. A notable concern during this stage is the prevalence of aggressive behaviour, a multifaceted phenomenon with significant short and long-term consequences for individuals and society [19]. Aggression is defined as any behaviour intended to harm or hurt others and can manifest during childhood and adolescence [20].

In Indonesia, the prevalence of violence in schools highlights the urgency of addressing adolescent aggression. In 2023, the Indonesian Federation of Teacher Unions reported 30 cases of violence in educational institutions, with the majority occurring at the junior high school level, followed by elementary, high school, and vocational schools [14]. The most common cause of these incidents was bullying. East Java Province reported the highest number of cases, totalling 360, emphasizing the regional variability in aggression-related challenges [14].

Aggression during adolescence has serious implications for the well-being of individuals and their environments [11]. For individuals, it can lead to physical and mental health performance, and increase the risk of criminal behaviour. At the societal level, aggression disrupts family relationship

and creates unsafe social environments [34]. It can take various forms, including verbal aggression, such as threats, insults, and ridicule, as well as physical aggression, such as hitting, kicking, and fighting [3]. Buss and Perry categorized aggression into four types: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility [25].

Several factors contribute to adolescent aggression, including internal and external influences [31]. Internal factors, such as low self-esteem and poor emotional regulation, can lead to impulsive actions that increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour. External factors include peer conformity, low parental communication, authoritarian parenting styles, and the intensity of playing online games. Peer pressure, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping adolescent behaviour [12; 33]. Negative peer pressure, such as associating with peers who engage in risky behaviours like bullying, substance abuse, or delinquency, directly influences aggressive tendencies. Conversely, positive peer pressure can encourage healthy behaviours and academic success [13]. The influence of negative peer pressure directly affects adolescents' decisions to commit aggressive acts, especially in situations of provocation and conflict between them [35]. Based on these findings, this study focuses on negative peer pressure as it can influence aggressive behavior in adolescents.

To be accepted by peers, adolescents are often asked or forced to conform to their peer group. Peer pressure can influence adolescents' behavior to avoid being subjected to ridicule, harassment, or rejection from their peer group, which involves encouraging or persuading someone to take part in certain actions [22]. This can occur directly or indirectly. In previous research, peer pressure has a direct influence on adolescents' decisions to commit aggressive acts [33]. Aggressive adolescents tend to seek out peers who engage in delinquent behaviour and support fighting can increase the likelihood of an adolescent being aggressive.

Aggressive behaviour can increase if an adolescent has low self-esteem which makes it difficult for them to adapt to existing social norms [12]. Previous research states that low self-esteem can increase aggressive behaviour in adolescents [21]. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviour as a way to cope with feelings of worthlessness or to gain recognition from the peer group. The lower one's self-esteem, the higher the frequency of aggressive behaviour exhibited. Conversely, individuals who have high self-esteem show lower levels of aggression [13].

Despite the growing understanding of the interplay between peer pressure and aggression, limited research has explored the moderating role of self-esteem in this relationship. Most studies have focused on the direct impact of peer pressure on aggression, without considering how internal factors like self-esteem might strengthen or weaken this dynamic. As a moderator variable, self-esteem has been used as a moderator variable on the effect of peer pressure on adolescents' mobile social media addiction [8]. In addition, in another study, self-esteem was used as a moderator of family interpersonal relationships and academic pressure on depression [18]. However, its role in the context of peer pressure and adolescent aggression remains underexplored.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the effect of peer pressure on aggression, with self-esteem as a moderating variable. Researchers propose that high self-esteem can buffer the negative effects of peer pressure, while low self-esteem may exacerbate them. By integrating the variables of peer pressure, aggression, and self-esteem into a single research framework, this study seeks to provide new insights into the complex mechanisms underlying adolescent aggression. The findings are expected to contribute to development and educational psychology by offering practical implications for designing interventions and guiding future research on these topics.

Methods

This study is a non-experimental quantitative research design, where no special treatment is applied to the variables. Its goal is to explore the moderating role of certain variables in the relationship between independent and dependent variables, based on previous studies.

Participants

The participants are junior high school students aged 12 to 15 years from Malang City, which has a total of 34274 students according to the Ministry of Education and Culture [15]. A cluster random sampling technique was used to select participants, dividing Malang City into five sub-districts: Blimbing, Kedungkandang, Klojen, Lowokwaru, and Sukun. Two schools (one public and one private) with the largest student populations were selected from each sub-district to ensure broad and even representation.

Table 1

Subject Demographic Data (N=348)

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	145	41,67%
Female	203	58,33%
Age		
12-13	161	46,27%
14-15	187	53,73%

Based on Table 1, it is known that the subjects in this study were female junior high school students (58,33%) and male students (41,67%), with an age range of 12-13 years old (46,27%) and 14-15 years old (53,73%).

Instrument

The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) assesses four aspects: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. The Indonesian-adapted scale, with a validity score of 0,868, consists of 29 Likert-scale items ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree [21]. It is widely used for comprehensive measurement of aggression in adolescent populations.

Peer Pressure Inventory (PPI) evaluates peer involvement, school involvement, conformity to peer norms, and misconduct. This 19-item scale uses response options from "Always" to "Never". A modified version with a reliability score of 0,788 was adopted for this study [32].

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) measures feelings of worth and self-acceptance. Adapted for Indonesian populations, it demonstrated validity scores between 0,319-0,656 and a reliability score of 0,824 [28]. The RSES uses a 4-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, with higher scores indicating greater self-esteem.

Results

Description of Research Data

The statistical analysis means values, standard deviations, and relationships between variables. If the empirical mean exceeds the hypothetical mean, the results are considered high or better than expected. Conversely, if the empirical mean is below the hypothetical mean, the results

are deemed low, indicating they fall short of expectations or standards.

Table 2

Description of research variables

Variable	Min. Score	Max. Score	Hypothetical Mean	Empiric Mean	Standard Deviation
Aggression	44	107	72,5	77,15	10,61
Peer Pressure	43	92	57	68,92	7,05
Self-Esteem	15	45	25	25,47	4,45

Categorization of each variable was made in two categories low and high, based on the normal curve distribution.

Table 3

Data Distribution Classification

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Aggression	High	231	66,4%
	Low	117	33,6%
Peer Pressure	High	339	97,4%
	Low	9	2,6%
Self-Esteem	High	212	60,9%
	Low	136	39,1%

Data distribution was classified using *t-score* calculations. Results indicate that most respondents (66,4%) fall into the high category overall, while 33,6% are in the low category. For the peer pressure variable, 97,4% of respondents were in the high category, and only 2,6% were in the low category, showing a strong skew towards high peer pressure. For the self-esteem variable, 60,9% were in the high category, while 39,1% were in the low category. Overall, the high category dominated across all variables.

The correlation test aims to determine the relationship between the three variables in this study. The information is in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlation Test Results

Variable	Aggression	Peer Pressure	Self-Esteem
Aggression	1	0,44**	-0,41**
Peer Pressure		1	-0,02**
Self-Esteem			1

Note: $p=0,00$.

Table 4 shows that there is a correlation value between peer pressure and aggression variables with an *R-value* of 0,44. This indicates that the influence between the two variables is significant and shows a positive relationship. In contrast, the correlation value between the variables of self-esteem and aggression shows a negative relationship, with a value of $r=-0,41$. In addition, there is also a

negative relationship between peer pressure and self-esteem variables with an *r value* of -0,02.

Hypothesis testing

In this study, the Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) test was conducted to reveal the results of hypothesis testing, which the following results:

Table 5

Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) test results

Variable	β	p-value	R ²
Model 1			0,118
Peer Pressure (X) → Aggression (Y)	0,23	0,00	
Self-Esteem (Z) → Aggression (Y)	0,24	0,00	
Model 2			0,122
Peer Pressure (X)	0,62	0,05	
Self-Esteem (Z)	0,92	0,09	
Interaction (X*Z) → Aggression (Y)	-0,79	0,22	

Based on the results of the analysis in Table 5, peer pressure significantly influences aggression (p=0,00, p<0,05) with a contribution of 11,8%. When self-esteem is considered, the contribution increases slightly to 12,2%. However, the interaction between self-esteem and peer pressure on aggression is not significant (p=0,22, p>0,05), indicating that self-esteem does not act as a moderator. Therefore, the study's hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion

This study examines the effect of peer pressure on aggression and whether self-esteem moderates this relationship in junior high school adolescents in Malang City. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between peer pressure and aggression. however, self-esteem does not moderate this effect, as the hypothesis was rejected.

This study confirms that peer pressure significantly influences adolescent aggression, aligning with Thompson's findings that adolescents in peer-pressure environments are more prone to aggressive behaviour [33]. Peer pressure drives adolescents to conform to group norms, often leading to actions like bullying, brawling, or other aggressive behaviours to gain group acceptance [8].

Based on Bandura's social learning theory, adolescents learn and intimate aggressive behavior from peers, reinforced by social acceptance or approval [4]. Adolescents under peer pressure show higher levels of aggression than those without such pressure [30]. This is supported by research data showing high levels of both peer pressure and aggression, reinforcing their positive relationship.

Adolescents often respond to peer group pressure with aggressive behaviour to maintain their social position or fit in [6]. Peer group norms, as unwritten expectations, strongly influence adolescents behaviour due to their need for acceptance [9]. Those unable to meet these expectations may resort to aggression as self-defence or a means of belonging. Groups displaying aggressive behaviour reinforce the idea that such actions lead to social acceptance.

The study shows that peer influences all aspects of aggression. Physical aggression, like hitting and kicking, occurs when adolescents feel provoked by peers, while verbal aggression, such as taunting and insulting, increase under group pressure [3]. Emotional responses, including anger and hostility, also emerge. Adolescents pressured into aggression but experiencing internal conflict

exhibit higher anger, while hostility grows with feelings of resentment and distrust toward the social environment [7].

Aspects of peer pressure, such as peer involvement, involvement in school, conformity to peer norms, and misconduct, also have an influence on adolescent aggression. Peer involvement can increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour in adolescents when they belong to groups that support aggressive actions. Adolescents spending time with friends who engage in aggressive behaviour tend to imitate these actions, leading to physical and verbal aggression [33].

Adolescents in positive school environments tend to exhibit lower aggression levels. While those in negative or risky environments are more prone to aggression under peer pressure [5]. Conformity to group norms plays a key role, as groups that accept or reward aggression encourage physical or verbal aggression for peer acceptance [5; 22]. Additionally, deviant behaviours, such as rule violations or illegal activities, are linked to higher aggression, as these adolescents are more prone to conflict, anger, and hostility toward peers [11].

The study finds a negative relationship between self-esteem and adolescent aggression, aligning with previous research [12; 26]. Adolescents with low self-esteem are more prone to aggression, using it as a defence mechanism or a way to fit in [23]. In contrast, those with high self-esteem are better at resisting negative peer pressure, maintaining emotional control, and making independent decisions without resorting to aggression for social acceptance [13].

Although previous research suggests that high self-esteem can reduce the negative impact of peer pressure [24], in practice the social situations adolescents face are often stronger than internal factors such as self-esteem [16]. Adolescents experiencing peer pressure may feel compelled to adapt to group norms, regardless of how they rate themselves.

Research suggests that adolescents with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to negative influences from the social environment, which may reinforce aggressive behaviour in response to such pressures [12]. Furthermore, when adolescents experience peer pressure, aggressive norms may be absorbed in an attempt to gain social acceptance, suggesting that external influences can be stronger than personal judgment [6]. Thus, although self-esteem has the potential to serve as a protective factor in the context of strong peer pressure, its influence may not be sufficient to prevent aggressive behaviour.

Furthermore, in this study, self-esteem was tested as a moderator variable in the relationship between peer pressure and aggression. However, the results of the analysis showed that self-esteem did not function as a moderator. This suggests that although self-esteem has an influence on aggression, self-esteem does not strengthen or weaken the relationship between peer pressure and aggression.

Several factors may influence the relationship between peer pressure and adolescent aggression. The family environment, such as authoritarian parenting and poor communication, can increase the risk of aggressive behaviour. Additionally, a high intensity of online gaming is associated with a greater tendency toward aggression [17]. A negative school climate further contributes to heightened aggression, particularly verbal aggression [27]. These factors interact within adolescents' social dynamics, creating a complex interplay that affects their behaviour.

This can be influenced by contextual factors, such as the culture or social environment in which the research was conducted. According to Liao et al. [18], the role of self-esteem as a moderator may vary depending on other factors such as family support or school environment conditions. In the context of this study, peer pressure may have a more dominant influence so that self-esteem cannot

moderate the relationship significantly.

Self-esteem does not moderate the effect of peer pressure on aggression due to extreme data distribution. Most respondents had high self-esteem, with few in the low category, differing from previous studies suggesting a negative relationship between peer pressure and self-esteem [2]. This imbalance indicates that the sample mostly consisted of adolescents with relatively good self-esteem, limiting the variation needed to observe a moderating effect.

The extreme distribution of data on self-esteem and peer pressure resulted in self-esteem not being able to function effectively as a moderating variable. In this study, peer pressure showed a direct effect on aggression, but the role of self-esteem as a control for the relationship became insignificant due to the lack of variation in the data distribution.

This study faced limitations, including the use of online surveys that may affect response accuracy, uneven data distribution, and limited sample diversity. Future research should include broader regional samples and diverse data collection methods, such as interviews or observations. Exploring other potential moderators, like social support or emotion regulation, and examining self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between peer pressure and aggression is recommended. These efforts aim to better understand adolescent aggressions and develop effective interventions to foster positive social environments and support adolescent psychological development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that peer pressure significantly influences aggression, with adolescents often exhibiting aggressive behaviour to adjust to their group or gain social recognition. Conversely, self-esteem has a negative relationship with aggression; adolescents with low self-esteem are more prone to aggression than those with high self-esteem. However, self-esteem does not moderate the relationship between peer pressure and aggression, indicating it neither strengthens nor weakens the effect of peer pressure on adolescent aggression.

The study highlights key implications for intervention programs aimed at reducing peer pressure and aggressive behaviour among adolescents. Since peer pressure significantly influences aggression, collaboration between schools and families is essential to fostering a supportive environment for positive behaviour. Programs focused on character education and social skills can help adolescents resist negative peer pressure. Additionally, interventions to boost self-esteem are crucial, as they empower adolescents to handle social pressure confidently. Counsellors can also play a protective role, supporting adolescents in navigating peer pressure in a healthy and constructive way.

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