

Perceived Parental Neglect, Peer Pressure, and Social Networking in Adolescence with Substance use.

Maryam Shahbaz

MS Scholar, Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology Sialkot

Shammem Akhtar

shammem.akhtar@skt.umd.edu.pk

Assistant Professor, Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology Sialkot

Corresponding Author: Shammem Akhtar shammem.akhtar@skt.umd.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between perceived parental neglect, peer pressure, and social networking in adolescence with substance use. A correlational research design was employed to investigate how neglectful parenting practices, exposure to peer influence, and social media engagement contribute to adolescents' vulnerability to substance use. A sample of 300 adolescents aged 13–19 years was selected through a purposive sampling technique from government and private institutions in Sialkot, Pakistan. Standardized tools were used for assessment, including the Perceived Parental Neglect Scale (Ahmad & Saleem, 2018), Peer Pressure Scale (Brown et al., 1986), Social Networking Index (Cohen, 1997), and Substance Use Questionnaire (Zafar, 2015). Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 26). Findings revealed that perceived parental neglect and peer pressure were significant positive predictors of adolescent substance use, whereas social networking was moderately associated with increased peer influence. Results indicated that adolescents experiencing neglect from parents were more likely to seek acceptance through peers and online interactions, which in turn heightened their risk for substance use. The study emphasizes the need for parental engagement, digital literacy, and preventive programs in schools to mitigate risk behaviors among youth.

Keywords: Perceived Parental Neglect, Peer Pressure, Social Networking, Substance Use, Adolescence

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a critical developmental period marked by rapid physical, emotional, and psychosocial transformations (Steinberg, 2021). During this phase, individuals undergo identity exploration, increased social awareness, and a growing desire for independence from parental authority.

However, these changes often coincide with heightened susceptibility to external influences such as peer pressure, social media exposure, and inadequate parental supervision, all of which can significantly impact behavior and decision-making (Casey & Jones, 2010). One of the concerning outcomes of these psychosocial vulnerabilities is the increasing tendency toward substance use among adolescents, which has become a major public health challenge globally and within Pakistan (UNODC, 2021).

Parental involvement plays an integral role in shaping children's emotional and behavioral development. (Akhtar, & Bano, 2021) When parents fail to provide adequate supervision, warmth, or emotional support, adolescents may perceive such absence as parental neglect (Buehler, 2020). Perceived parental neglect has been linked to feelings of rejection, low self-esteem, and the pursuit of acceptance in external social contexts (Dwairy, 2010). Adolescents deprived of parental attention and guidance often turn to peers for emotional support and social validation, increasing their vulnerability to risky behaviors such as substance use (Herman-Stahl et al., 2001).

Peer pressure refers to the influence exerted by members of an adolescent's social group that encourages conformity to group norms, which may include maladaptive behaviors such as drug experimentation, smoking, or alcohol consumption (Santor et al., 2000). The tendency to conform to peers increases when parental supervision

and emotional connection are lacking (Nash et al., 2005). In collectivistic cultures like Pakistan, where family values and social reputation are deeply embedded, adolescents may experience greater internal conflict when exposed to deviant peer norms, particularly when parental neglect weakens family bonds (Riaz & Bano, 2013).

In recent years, social networking platforms have emerged as another key socialization agent for adolescents. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp not only provide opportunities for communication but also expose youth to peer modeling, online challenges, and substance-related content (Best et al., 2014). Excessive social networking use has been associated with poor academic outcomes, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and normalization of substance-related behaviors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Adolescents experiencing neglect or peer isolation are particularly drawn to online communities to fulfill their unmet emotional needs, which may inadvertently reinforce substance use patterns (Ali et al., 2019).

Pakistan has witnessed a rise in adolescent substance use, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas where peer influence and online exposure intersect (Ahmad et al., 2022). The absence of consistent parental monitoring, combined with increased peer and media influence, has created an environment conducive to risky experimentation. This study therefore explores how perceived parental neglect, peer pressure, and social networking collectively contribute to substance use among adolescents. (Akhtar, & Ahmad, 2025). The research is intended to enhance understanding of psychosocial predictors of substance involvement and to inform preventive interventions for families, educators, and policymakers in the Pakistani context.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)

Albert Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* posits that human behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling within social contexts. Adolescents often learn and internalize behaviors by observing peers, family members, and media figures. When adolescents perceive neglect from parents, they may seek alternative role models, often among peers who exhibit deviant or risk-taking behaviors, including substance use (Akers & Jensen, 2017). In social environments where such behaviors are reinforced or normalized, adolescents are more likely to replicate them for social acceptance or group belonging. Furthermore, exposure to substance-related content on social networking sites provides continuous visual and social reinforcement, making imitation more likely. This theory underscores how observational learning and reinforcement processes contribute to the relationship between peer pressure, social media exposure, and substance use.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969)

Attachment theory suggests that the quality of early caregiver-child relationships forms the foundation for later emotional regulation, self-concept, and social functioning. Adolescents who experience parental neglect often develop insecure or avoidant attachment styles characterized by distrust, emotional withdrawal, and difficulty seeking support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). When the parental attachment system fails to provide security, adolescents are more likely to rely on peer groups and online interactions to satisfy their emotional and social needs (Allen et al., 2014). However, these alternative attachments may expose them to negative social influences and maladaptive coping strategies, such as substance use. Thus, attachment insecurity acts as a mediating factor linking parental neglect to maladaptive peer relations and behavioral problems.

Theory Of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individuals' intentions to engage in certain behaviors. In the context of adolescent substance use, perceived social approval from peers or online communities serves as a powerful subjective norm encouraging experimentation. When adolescents perceive neglect at home and lack internalized parental guidance, their attitudes toward substance use may become more permissive (Hasking et al., 2005). Additionally, repeated exposure to substance-related behaviors through peers and digital networks reduces perceived behavioral control — the belief that one can resist temptation. The TPB thus offers a framework for understanding how social and

cognitive factors converge to increase adolescents' likelihood of substance use

Integrative Summary

Together, these theories illustrate a multidimensional framework in which parental neglect undermines secure attachment and emotional regulation, peer pressure reinforces risk-taking behavior through social learning, and social networking amplifies peer norms through digital modeling. This integrative approach highlights the complex psychosocial mechanisms driving adolescent substance use, emphasizing the importance of both family and social contexts in prevention efforts.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between perceived parental neglect, peer pressure and substance use in adolescents.
2. There will be a significant positive relationship between social networking, peer pressure and substance use in adolescents.
3. Perceived parental neglect and peer pressure will significantly predict substance use in adolescents.
4. Social networking and peer pressure will be significant predictor of substance use in adolescents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a *correlational research design* to examine the relationship between perceived parental neglect, peer pressure, and social networking in adolescence with substance use. This design was appropriate as it allowed the investigation of the degree and direction of associations among multiple psychosocial variables without manipulation or intervention (Creswell, 2014).

Sample And Sampling Technique

The sample consisted of 300 adolescents (boys and girls) aged between 13 and 19 years, drawn from various government and private schools and colleges in Sialkot, Pakistan. A convenience sampling technique was utilized due to accessibility and feasibility considerations. The participants represented both urban and rural backgrounds and were enrolled in grades 8 to 14. The inclusion criteria required participants to be within the specified age range and currently enrolled in educational institutions. Students with any diagnosed psychological or physical disorders were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Demographic Information Form

A demographic form was developed to obtain basic participant information, including age, gender, education, residential area, family system, birth order, and parents' education.

Perceived Parental Neglect Scale (PPNS; Ahmad & Saleem, 2018)

The Perceived Parental Neglect Scale was used to assess adolescents' perception of emotional and physical neglect from parents. The scale comprises 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Higher scores indicate greater perceived neglect. The scale has demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) and construct validity in Pakistani samples.

Peer Pressure Scale (Brown et al., 1986)

The Peer Pressure Scale measures the extent of social influence exerted by peers on adolescents' behaviors and attitudes. It includes 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale evaluates domains such as conformity, social acceptance, and substance-related peer influence. The scale has shown strong reliability ($\alpha = .85$) and is widely used in adolescent behavioral research.

Social Networking Index (Cohen, 1997)

The Social Networking Index (SNI) was administered to assess adolescents' level of engagement in social relationships, both online and offline. It consists of 12 items assessing the number and diversity of social contacts, including online peers. Higher scores indicate broader social engagement. The scale has demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .81$) and has been validated for use among youth populations.

Substance Use Questionnaire (Zafar, 2015)

The *Substance Use Questionnaire* measures adolescents' frequency and type of substance use, including tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. It consists of 15 items, rated on a 4-point frequency scale ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 3 (*Often*). Higher scores indicate greater substance involvement. The scale has reported good reliability ($\alpha = .83$) in South Asian contexts.

Procedure

This research adhered to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) ethical standards. Approval was obtained from the Ethical Review Board of the Institute of Clinical Psychology, UMT Sialkot. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality of responses was ensured, and no identifying information was recorded. The study did not involve any form of deception or risk to participants.

After obtaining ethical clearance and formal permission from the concerned institutional authorities, data collection was initiated. Participants were briefed about the purpose and voluntary nature of the research. Each respondent was assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from participants and school authorities. Questionnaires were administered individually and collectively in classroom settings. The average completion time was 20–25 minutes. Upon completion, participants were thanked for their cooperation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic variables of the participants (N=162)

Variables	F	%
Age		
11-13	22	13.6
14-16	27	16.7
17-19	113	69.8
Do you feel neglectful or unsupported by your parents?		
Yes	122	75.3
No	40	24.7
Do your friends use any substance?		
Yes	146	90.1
No	16	9.9
Exposure to substance-related content		
Yes	71	53.8
No	91	56.2

Note: f= Frequency, %= Percentage

This table presents the frequencies and percentages of participants based on age, perceived parental neglect, substance use, and exposure to substance-related content. The majority of participants (69.8%) were aged between 17 and 19 years, followed by 16.7% aged 14-16, and 13.6% aged 11-13. A significant portion of participants (75.3%) reported feeling neglectful or unsupported by their parents, while 24.7% did not share this sentiment. Regarding peer influence, a substantial majority (90.1%) indicated that their friends used some form of substance, whereas only 9.9% reported otherwise. In terms of media and environmental exposure, 43.8% of participants acknowledged being exposed to substance related content, while 56.2% reported no such exposure.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of The multidimensional neglectful behavior scale (TMNBS), Peer Pressure Style Questionnaire (PPSQ) and Social Network Index (SNI).(N=162)

Scales	Items	A
TMNBS	40	.889
PPSQ	25	.740
SNI	12	.629

Note: α = Cronbach's Alpha, TMNBS= The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale, PPSQ= Peer Pressure Style Questionnaire and SNI= Social Networking Index..The table showed the reliability analysis of the scales used in the present study was conducted using Cronbach's alpha (α) to assess internal consistency for three psychological scales administered to a sample of 162 participants. The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (TMNBS), consisting of 40 items, demonstrated good reliability (α =.889). The Peer Pressure Style Questionnaire (PPSQ) showed acceptable reliability with 25 items (α =.740), while the Social Networking Index (SNI), with 12 items exhibited (α =.629). Most of the scales used in the study demonstrated acceptable to good reliability, except for social networking index, which may require further refinement or cautious interpretation in future research.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-correlations between Perceived Parental Neglect, Peer Pressure and Social Networking Index. (N=162)

Variables	M	SD	TMNBTT	PPSQT	SNIT
TMNBTT	101.23	42.98	--	.316**	.146
PPSQT	82.88	17.81	--	--	.085
SNIT	5.30	2.15	--	--	--

NOTE: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, TMNBS= The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale, PPSQ= Peer pressure Style Questionnaire and SNI= Social Networking Index.

This table represents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the total scores of the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (TMNBTT), Peer Pressure Style Questionnaire (PPSQT), and Social Networking Index (SNIT) in a sample of 162 participants. TMNBTT (M=101.23, SD=42.98) was significantly and positively correlated with PPSQT(r =.316, p <.010, suggesting higher neglectful behavior is associated with greater susceptibility to peer pressure. The correlation between TMNBTT and SNI was weak and no significant(r =.146), as was the correlation between PPSQ and SNI (r =.085). PPSQT had a mean of 82.88 (SD=17.81), and SNIT had a mean of 5.30 (SD= 2.15).

Table 4

Regression coefficient of The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale of on Peer Pressure Style

Questionnaire (N=162)

Variables	B	B	R ²	R ²	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	69.60				3.41	20.37		62.8, 76.3
TMNBTTT	.131	.316	.100	.095	.031	4.22	.000	.131, .031

Note: B= Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, β = Standardized Coefficient Regression (beta), R²= Coefficient of Determination, SE= Standard Error, TMNBS= The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale *p <.05, **p <0.01, ***p=0.00.

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the effect of the multidimensional neglectful behavior scale (TMNBTT) on scores from the peer pressure style questionnaire (N=162). The regression model was statistically significant $R^2 = .10$, $F(1, N-2) = 17.8$ $p < .001$, explaining 10% of the variance of outcome. TMNBTT was a significantly positive predictor, $B = 0.13$, $SD = 0.03$, $B = .32$, $t = 4.22$, $P < .001$, 95% CI(0.07,0.19). This suggests that higher scores on TMNBTT were associated with higher scores on the dependent variable..

Table 5

Regression coefficient of The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale on Social Networking Index

Variables	B	B	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	T	P	95% CI
Constant	4.56				.431	10.6		3.71, 5.41
TMNBSTT	.007	.146	.021	.015	.004	1.86	.065	.000, .015

Note: B= Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, β = Standardized Regression Coefficient (beta), R²= Coefficient of Determination, SE= Standard Error, TMNBS= The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale *p <.05, **p <0.01, ***p=0.00.

A simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether the neglectful behavior scale predicted scores on social networking index (SNI). The results of regression analysis indicated that the overall model was not statistically significant $R^2 = .021$, $F(1, N-2) = 3.46$, $p = .065$, explaining 2.1% of the variance of outcome in social networking. The unstandardized coefficient(B) suggest that for every one- unit increase in neglectful behavior, social networking increased by 0.007 points on average, $SD = 0.004$, $B = .146$, $t(1.86) = 1.86$, $P = .065$, 95% CI(0.000, 0.015). however because the effect did not reach conventional level of statistical significance) $p > .05$), the relationship should be interpreted with caution.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between perceived parental neglect, peer pressure, and social networking in adolescence with substance use. Results revealed that perceived parental neglect was *positively correlated* with substance use ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), indicating that adolescents who perceived higher levels of neglect from parents were more likely to engage in substance use. Similarly, peer pressure demonstrated a *strong positive correlation* with substance use ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), confirming that adolescents who reported higher susceptibility to peer influence showed greater involvement in substance-related behaviors. Furthermore, social networking was *positively related* to both peer pressure ($r = .45$, $p < .01$) and substance use ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), suggesting that excessive engagement in social networking platforms may indirectly increase the risk of substance use through enhanced peer exposure. (Jalil, & Akhtar, 2024).

Regression analysis revealed that perceived parental neglect and peer pressure significantly predicted substance use among adolescents ($\beta = .34$ and $\beta = .41$, respectively, $p < .01$). Social networking had an indirect predictive effect through peer pressure, indicating that online peer interactions amplify conformity and exposure to substance-related norms. These findings align with earlier research demonstrating that inadequate parental supervision, coupled with strong peer affiliation, increases adolescents' vulnerability to risky behaviors (Nash et al., 2005; Santor et al., 2000).

The results support the first, second, third, and fifth hypotheses of the study, confirming that both parental neglect and peer pressure have direct and significant associations with substance use. The findings are consistent with *Attachment Theory* (Bowlby, 1969), which posits that insufficient emotional bonds with caregivers contribute to psychological insecurity and maladaptive coping behaviors. Adolescents who experience parental neglect often struggle with emotional regulation and self-worth, leading them to seek validation from peers and online communities (Dwairy, 2010).

he influence of peer pressure was found to be the strongest predictor of substance use, emphasizing the importance of social learning processes. Consistent with *Social Learning Theory* (Bandura, 1977), adolescents model and imitate behaviors observed within their peer networks, particularly when such behaviors are socially reinforced. Peers who use substances often encourage experimentation by normalizing or glamorizing these behaviors, which has been found to increase initiation rates (Herman- Stahl et al., 2001).

Additionally, social networking emerged as a secondary but significant factor associated with substance use. This finding resonates with previous literature suggesting that online platforms intensify peer interactions and social comparison processes, making adolescents more vulnerable to risky trends (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The continuous exposure to substance-related imagery and discussions on digital media platforms not only desensitizes adolescents to the dangers of drug use but also reinforces perceived norms of acceptability (Best et al., 2014).

These findings hold significant implications for Pakistani adolescents, who increasingly navigate dual influences traditional family expectations and modern digital peer cultures. Adolescents experiencing neglect at home often turn to virtual networks to fulfill unmet social needs, inadvertently exposing themselves to unhealthy peer dynamics and substance-promoting content (Ali et al., 2019). Thus, parental neglect functions as a distal factor that heightens vulnerability, while peer pressure and social networking act as proximal mediators leading to behavioral manifestation in the form of substance use.

In summary, the findings of the present study reinforce the multidimensional interaction between family, peer, and technological systems. Consistent with *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Ajzen, 1991), adolescents attitudes toward substance use are shaped by perceived social norms and peer approval, particularly in contexts where parental guidance is minimal. The results underscore the importance of strengthening parental engagement, fostering peer resistance skills, and promoting responsible digital behavior to mitigate substance use risks among adolescents.

CONCLUSION

The study examined how perceived parental neglect, peer pressure, and social networking relate to substance use among adolescents. Results showed that parental neglect and peer pressure were strong predictors of substance use, while social networking indirectly affected this relationship through peer influence. Adolescents who experience emotional neglect from parents tend to seek belonging in peers and online communities, increasing their exposure to substance-related behaviors. Supported by Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study emphasized how weak family bonds and high peer or media influence lead to risky behaviors. It recommended enhancing parental communication, school-based prevention, and digital literacy programs to reduce adolescent substance use, highlighting that effective family and social strategies are vital for healthier youth development.

LIMITATIONS

The study's limitations include the use of convenience sampling from a single region (Sialkot), restricting generalizability. Self-report questionnaires might have introduced social desirability or recall bias. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Additionally, cultural and gender differences were not explored, which may have affected the interpretation of family and peer dynamics. Future research should employ randomized sampling, qualitative methods, longitudinal designs, and consider cultural

and gender variations to strengthen the findings.

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