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Academic Motivation and Career Aspiration in Students. Examining Role of Perceived Peer Pressure as a Moderator in this Context

Atrayee Saha

Psychologist, St. Judes High School, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Abstract: When students get driven by a force to conduct themselves in that way which would help them to meet academic goals, it is known as academic motivation. Career aspiration is one's desire or orientation to meet goals related to one's career. When an individual feels obliged to act in certain way due to the influence of their peers, it is known as peer pressure. During adolescence period, there is rapid physical, mental, social, and emotional growth and development that an individual goes through and it is that period which includes both exploration and disorientation. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis has been computed to determine whether perceived peer pressure moderates the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students. Between group design is adopted for determining gender differences with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration. For sample selection, a non-probability purposive sampling method was used. During the data collection, 60 students were obtained out of which 30 are males and 30 are females. The findings showed that perceived peer pressure moderates the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students. The findings also showed gender differences with respect to academic motivation and career aspiration where males scored higher than females in both academic motivation and career aspiration. The findings suggest that students should channelize their academic motivation properly so they could deal with peer pressure positively which would help them to flourish in their careers.

Keywords: academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, career aspiration, adolescents, hierarchical multiple regression analysis, between group, channelise, positively, flourish

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the thrust to shine bright in one's career has become part and parcel in everyone's life for which most of the individuals since their school lives, feel motivated to excel in their academics. In this context, peer pressure plays significant role. Fair competition with one's contemporaries with respect to academics, has become inevitable. It's common, many a times peer pressure in various domains of one's life create distress and individuals face various psychological issues like anxiety, depression, frustration, panic attack, mood disorder, social anxiety etc. due to it. But, when positive peer pressure creates eustress or positive stress, then it becomes a boon in a way in one's academic life as students motivate themselves to put in a lot of efforts towards their academics as this would help them to excel more than their peers in academic field and later on in their respective careers, this hard work would help them to be successful.

Motivation is a force within individuals which drives them to achieve a goal to fulfill their needs or expectations (Mullins, 2005). When these forces compel adolescents to excel in their careers through proper education, it is known as academic motivation. These forces include sense of competence, curiosity, persistence, learning hard, taking up challenging tasks (Gottfried, 1990).

When a force drives students to initiate, guide, and sustain behaviors to meet academic goals, it is known as academic motivation (Gopalan et al., 2017)

Types of motivation

In this context certain theories of motivation play important roles. The most important is McClelland's theory of motivation. David McClelland in 1960s proposed about three important needs which are learnt through life experiences rather than being innate (McClelland, 1961).

These three needs are as follows:

- Achievement motivation (nAch): Activities performed out of the drive or thrust to excel in one's field which involves personal goals and aspirations, it is known as achievement motivation.

- Power motivation (nPow): When one desires to exert control, influence, or impact on others or external environment, it is known as power motivation.
- Affiliation motivation (nAff): It deals with the desire of getting accepted in different social groups through affiliation, collaboration, and connections.

Other important theories besides McClelland's theory of motivation which need special mention are Maslow's theory of motivation and Self Determination Theory proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan.

In 1943, Maslow developed hierarchy of needs where he proposed that humans need to fulfill lower order needs also known as deficiency needs first before ascending to higher order needs also known as growth needs (Maslow, 1943).

These needs are:

- Physiological needs- It includes basic biological needs of humans like hunger, thirst, sex which are essential for one's survival.
- Safety and security needs- It includes need of safety and security from threatening stimuli present in one's external environment to feel protected.
- Love and belongingness needs- It includes need of affiliation with others like family, friends, social connections where persons share we feeling with each other.
- Esteem needs- It includes need of achievement, recognition, rewards, confidence, self-respect, and respect from others to enhance one's self- esteem.
- Self actualization needs- It includes need of reaching one's full potential followed by achieving self fulfilment.

On the other hand, in 1960s Edward Deci and Richard Ryan proposed about Self Determination Theory where they proposed about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Edward, 2017).

- Intrinsic motivation: It refers to making oneself get involved into those activities which itself brings joy and satisfaction to oneself.
- Extrinsic motivation: When one performs activities where external rewards are present to avoid negative consequences, it is known as extrinsic motivation.

This theory also highlights three important psychological needs:

- Autonomy- It indicates one's desire of being independent, self – reliant, taking control of one's own actions.
- Competence- It indicates one's desire of being effective, capable to master one's tasks.
- Relatedness- It indicates one's desire to feel connected, affiliated to others.

Peer pressure is the influence of peers in a person's life where they feel compelled to conform to behaviors, attitudes, or values within that particular context (Brown, 2020).

Early peer interactions influence many areas in a person's life mainly the emotional and social domains. For instance, through actions like sharing and helping, children may build up positive relations with their peers. But, negative experiences could also be encountered by them through peers like bullying, abuse, violence (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005).

Adolescents may engage to risky behaviors like alcoholism, smoking, drug abuse due to negative peer pressure just to get accepted in peer group. This can harm their social and emotional well – being by forming social isolation, decreased self-esteem, and difficulty forming healthy relationship. Some of the ethical compromises, such as lying, cheating, or engaging in illegal activities arise due to negative peer pressure. If unnoticed, it could create adverse impact on student's character and moral compass. On the other hand, positive peer pressure fosters student's character and moral compass. If channelized properly, positive peer pressure could shape individual's moral growth and help in forming well- rounded and principled character (Ajidahun, 2011).

Hence, understanding followed by enhancing positive peer pressure and regulating impact of negative peer pressure on students are important for enhancing the productivity of educational processes and school systems design as this would foster academic achievement among students. Some of the ways to mitigate negative peer pressure are-(A) Assertiveness- This is the ability to remain firm in one's own decisions and not letting others create impact on oneself. (B) Building self-efficacy- It deals with making oneself competent enough to deal with various challenging tasks of life and not to get dependent on others. (C) Finding supportive group- It refers to making oneself get involved into that peer group who would provide support at times of need (Moore & Gino, 2013).

Career aspiration is one's orientation towards one's goal related to one's occupation or career where their dreams, motivations, and behavioral objectives with respect to future work get reflected (Sewell et al., 1970). Longitudinal studies have shown that career aspirations and long-term academic achievement share a long term relationship and that career aspiration reflects sense of identity, self-efficacy, and hope for the future in adolescents making it an indicator for their health, well-being, and development. Thus, proper career goals make adolescents less prone to involve themselves in risky behaviors like alcoholism, smoking, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy etc (Dudovitz et al., 2017). Also, academic performances of students and system of schools have major impact on students career aspirations by enhancing the confidence of students (Furlong and Biggart, 1999). Again, students, those who aspire to shine in their careers, engage into certain activities like building up consistent study habits, staying motivated, engaging into active learning Arhin (2018).

Adolescence is that period which is marked by rapid physical, mental, social, and emotional growth and development. But, it could be a time of both exploration and disorientation. Problems in adolescence are related to hormonal imbalances resulting in short and tall adults, menstrual disorders, obesity and acne. Adolescents are commonly seen to be argumentative, non – communicative, moody, flippant. Also, adolescents physical, cognitive, mental, social, and behavioral development are seen to get adversely affected. Environmental factors which create mental illness in adolescents include psychological factors like stress, social isolation, loneliness, drug abuse, depression, hyperactivity, fear, lack of concentration (Jones, 2013).

One of the important biological factors of adolescents is Puberty. Puberty is a hormone driven process through which a child turns adolescent through sexual and emotional maturity. It occurs between the age of 8- 13 in females and 9- 14 in males marked by development of secondary sexual characteristics, rapid growth, and reproductive maturity. Triggered by the brain, hypothalamus releases gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) leading to secretion of hormones like luteinizing hormone and follicle stimulating hormone (LH and FSH) through pituitary gland which produce estrogen or testosterone through stimulation of ovaries or testes. In females, some of the signs are breast development also known as thelarche, rapid growth and change of body shape, growth of pubic or under- arm hair, onset of menstruation also known as menarche. In males, some of the signs are enlargement of testicular and genital organs followed by sperm production. Other signs include growth of body hair, acne, voice deepening, rapid growth, increased muscle mass (Scherf, Behrmann, & Dahl, 2011).

Some of the psychological impacts of puberty include (a) Emotional volatility which again includes irritability, anger, sadness, confusion, and rapid mood change, (b) Body shaming which deals too much preoccupation with one's appearance leading to discomfort, shame, anger anxiety, and (c) Mental health disorder which includes depression, anxiety, antisocial personality disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, borderline personality disorder, eating disorder etc. Some of the important phenomena like reproduction, obligation and job also called as rituals of adolescence are considered less systematic and more fluid by nature. But improvements in schooling, changes in family rules in the sense of autonomy and first-time experiences would help to enhance the above mentioned rituals in adolescents for which economic investments are required (Hashmi, 2013).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Results of one of the studies which focused to determine impact of academic motivation among adolescents, showed academic motivation got impacted by gender, type of management and locality among adolescents where males scored higher than females with respect to academic motivation, and students of urban areas scored higher than students of rural areas with respect to academic motivation. But, no significant differences could be found in management type with respect to academic motivation (Naik, 2021).

On the contrary to the above study, results of another study which focused to explore relation between social support and academic motivation in adolescents, couldn't find any relation between them but females scored higher in academic motivation and perceived social support (Srivastava & Pant, 2015).

Results of analytical studies which focused on occupational preference, career aspiration and career attitude maturity of middle and high school students, showed positive relation between career preference, career aspirations and career attitude maturity in middle and high school students and that career attitude maturity was little higher in case of high school students (Yun & Min, 2015).

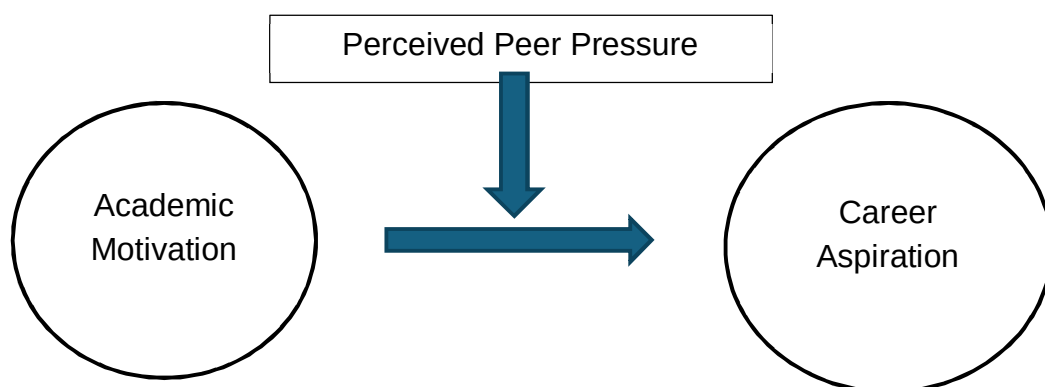
On the contrary, another career aspiration study focusing on the undergraduate students of different colleges affiliated with Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia found career aspiration at a moderate level among the undergraduate students (Mandal, Ghosh, & Maity, 2024).

In a research paper which conducted literature review on peer pressure with respect to risky behaviors, romantic relationships, and academic investment, its results showed that level of influence that peers are having on adolescents is dependent upon the way an adolescent is conducting themselves in front of their peers and the degree to which hard work is being valued by their schools which in turn determine to what extent adolescents would exert effort on their academic work (Lou, 2023).

Again, results of another study which focused to determine whether peers influence, social comparisons, and self confidence exert any kind of impact on career aspiration in adolescents, showed career aspiration gets enhanced or hindered by peer influence and social comparison where both of them acted as social mechanisms and self-confidence acted as protective and empowering psychological trait in adolescents (Sharma, 2025).

In addition to the above studies, results of another study which focused to examine the influence that peers have on academic and personal motivation among university students, showed peer pressure has negative impact on academic motivation and personal growth among university students (Sen et al., 2025).

III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK



A. Research Questions

- 1) Whether any relation exists between academic motivation and career aspiration in students?
- 2) Whether any relation exists between perceived peer pressure and career aspiration in students?
- 3) Whether perceived peer pressure create any impact on the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students?
- 4) Whether any gender differences exist with respect to academic motivation?
- 5) Whether any gender differences exist with respect to perceived peer pressure?
- 6) Whether any gender differences exist with respect to career aspiration?

B. Research Objectives

- 1) To determine relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students.
- 2) To determine relation between perceived peer pressure and career aspiration in students.
- 3) To determine impact of perceived peer pressure on the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students.
- 4) To determine gender differences with respect to academic motivation.
- 5) To determine gender differences with respect to perceived peer pressure.
- 6) To determine gender differences with respect to career aspiration.

C. Research Hypothesis

- H1: There is significant positive relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students.
 H2: There is significant positive relation between perceived peer pressure and career aspiration in students.
 H2: Perceived peer pressure strengthens the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students.
 H3: There is significant gender difference with respect to academic motivation.
 H4: There is significant gender difference with respect to perceived peer pressure.
 H5: There is significant gender difference with respect to career aspiration.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

For sample selection, a non-probability purposive sampling was used. During the data collection, 60 adolescents were obtained out of which 30 are males and 30 are females.

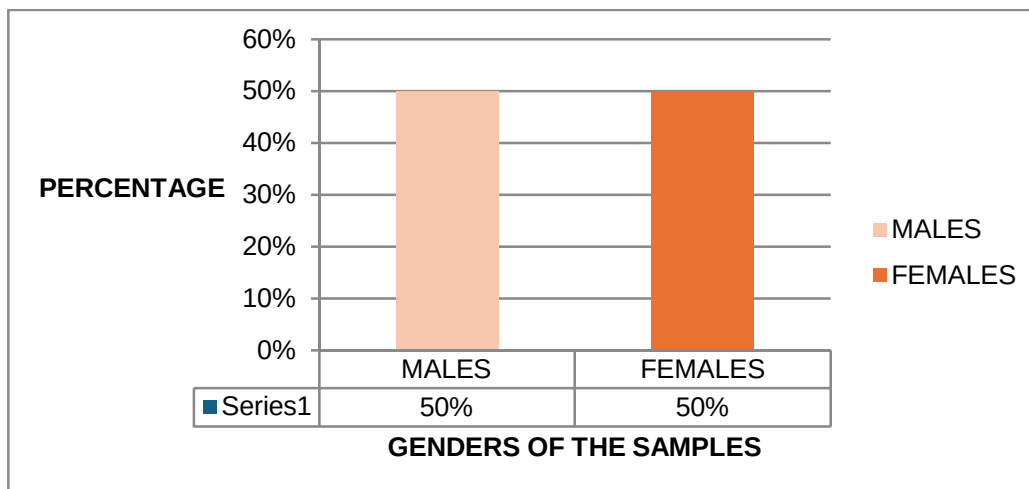


Figure 1: The above bar graph shows percentage of sample belonging to different genders. The graph shows that 50% of samples are males and 50% of samples are females.

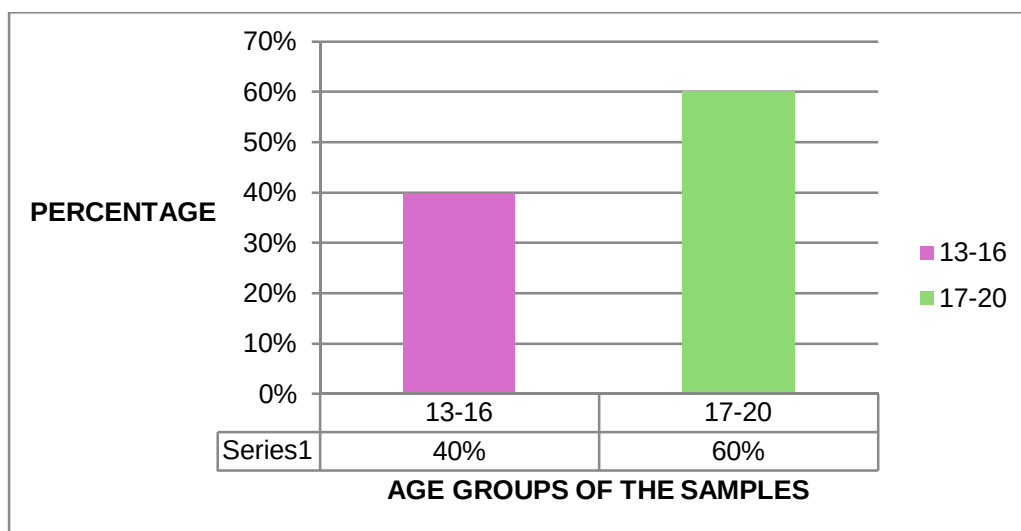


Figure 2: The above bar graph shows percentage of sample belonging to different age groups. The graph shows that 40% of samples are within the age group of 13-16, 60% of samples are within the age group of 17-20.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Participants within the age range of 13- 20.
- Participants who have good understanding of English.
- Participants studying in regular mode.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Participants outside the age range of 13- 20.
- Participants who are not so well versed in English.
- Participants studying in distance mode.

B. Research Design

The quantitative design has been adopted to determine impact of perceived peer pressure on the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students. The between group design is adopted for determining gender differences with respect to academic motivation, career aspiration, and perceived peer pressure.

Measures

Academic Motivation- Developed by Vallerand et al., (1992), the 28 item academic motivation scale determines to what extent a student feels motivated to excel in their academic lives. Item no 2, 9, 16, 23 are related to intrinsic motivation dealing with “to know” component. Item no 6, 13, 20, 27 are related to intrinsic motivation dealing with “towards accomplishment” component. Item no 4, 11, 18, 25 are related to intrinsic motivation dealing with “to experience stimulation” component. Item no 3, 10, 17, 24 are related to extrinsic motivation dealing with “identified” component. Item no 7, 14, 21, 28 are related to extrinsic motivation dealing with “introjected” component. Item no 1, 8, 15, 22 are related to extrinsic motivation dealing with “external regulation” component. Item no 5, 12, 19, 26 are related to amotivation. The responses are rated on a 7 point Likert scale which ranging from 0 (“doesn’t correspond at all”) to 7 (correspond exactly). It shows satisfactory levels of internal consistency (mean alpha value = .81) and temporal stability over a one-month period (mean test-retest correlation = .79). It showed good factorial validity and good discriminant validity with respect to three intrinsic motivation sub scales through confirmatory factorial analysis.

Perceived peer pressure- Developed by Palani & Mani (2016), the 30 item perceived peer pressure scale determines to what extent one feels pressure from their peers to conduct in a certain way. It includes three dimensions- (a) Yielding to peer pressure (11 items), (b) Resistance to peer pressure (13 items), (c) Peer Encouragement (6 items). The rating of responses are done on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“ Strongly Agree “) to 5 (“ Strongly Disagree”). It shows high reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.942) and validity (0.971).

Career Aspiration- Developed by O’Brien & Gregor (2016), the 24 item career aspiration scale determines to what extent students realise their education and career goals. Career aspiration scale has three dimensions- (a) Leadership aspirations (8 items), Achievement aspiration (8 items) and Educational aspirations (8 items). The rating of responses is done on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“not at all true of me”) to 4 (“very true of me”). It shows high reliability (Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from 0.80 – 0.91) and good convergent validity.

C. Procedure

After selecting measures of the study and taking permission from participants, the researcher conducted the study. Then, rapport was established with participants followed by taking responses manually. Researcher made participants aware about confidentiality and voluntary participation. Then, responses were taken manually. This was followed by administering information schedule where instructions were clearly stated in the questionnaires beforehand. Participants took average of 10 minutes to give responses. The responses were then coded, followed by entering it in SPSS, and then statistically analysing it.

Statistical Analysis:

Responses were scored upon completing data collection using IBM SPSS version 22.0, a data analysis software. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis has been computed to determine whether perceived peer pressure moderates the relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students. t test has been computed to compare gender differences with respect to academic motivation, career aspiration, and perceived peer pressure.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of males and females with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration.

VARIABLES	Males (N=30)		Females (N=30)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Academic Motivation	114.10	22.09	88.66	23.98
Perceived Peer Pressure	97.16	20.48	100.13	22.09
Career Aspiration	58.36	9.58	50.03	10.12

Table 1 showing that the mean values of males are 114.10, 97.16, and 58.36 respectively with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration. The mean values of females are 88.66, 100.13, and 50.03 respectively with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration.

Table 1 showing that the standard deviation values of males are 22.09, 20.48, and 9.58 respectively with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration. The standard deviation values of females are 23.98, 22.09, and 10.12 respectively with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration.

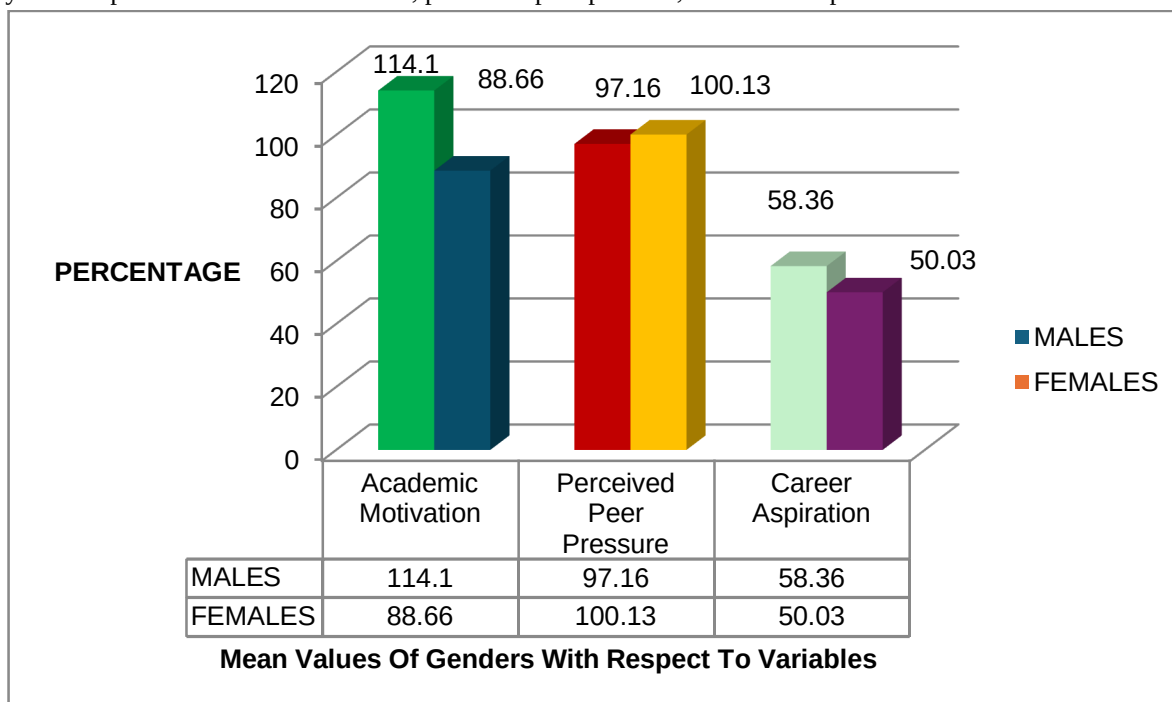


Figure 3: Mean values of males and females with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration can be seen from the bar graph. The bar graph shows that the mean values of males and females with respect to academic motivation are 114.10 and 88.66 respectively. Mean values of males and females with respect to perceived peer pressure are 97.16 and 100.13 respectively. Mean values of males and females with respect to career aspiration are 58.36 and 50.03 respectively.

Table 2: Coefficients^a

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
1	Constant	84.608	10.939		7.735	0.190
	Academic Motivation	0.139	0.105	0.171	1.325	0.000*
2	Constant	10.380	19.266		0.539	0.592
	Academic Motivation	0.691	0.180	1.702	3.842	0.000
	Perceived Peer Pressure	0.511	0.208	1.017	2.458	0.017*
	Academic Motivation × Perceived Peer Pressure	0.006	0.002	1.860	2.894	0.005*

a. Dependent Variable: Career Aspiration

Table 2 shows that there is significant and positive relation between academic motivation and career aspiration in students ($B=0.139$, $\text{sig}=0.000$) which means hypothesis H1 is accepted. The probable reason behind this result could be traced back to the study conducted by Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000) which showed that students who are motivated linked academics to enhanced career planning thus fostering higher ambition and better persistence among students.

Results of the research study conducted by Obias et al. (2025) to determine relation between self-efficacy, academic motivation, and career aspiration among students of private senior high school in Imus city showed positive and significant among self-efficacy, academic motivation, and career aspiration where high self-efficacy resulted in greater academic motivation which in turn enhanced students career aspiration level.

Table 2 shows that there is significant and positive relation between perceived peer pressure and career aspiration in students ($B=0.511$, $\text{sig}=0.017$) which means hypothesis H2 is accepted. The probable reason behind this result could be attributed to the fact that everyone feels motivated to get their status enhanced by comparing oneself with their high achieving peers also known as upward comparison. This would help them in maintaining social conformity (Sharma & Gupta, 2024).

Results of the research study conducted by Hassan et al. (2024) which focused to determine the influence that peer pressure has on career aspiration among in school adolescents of Kwara state found significant and positive relation between peer pressure and career aspiration among the adolescents.

Table 2 shows that relation between academic motivation and career aspiration is moderated by perceived peer pressure and that they share significant and positive relation with each other ($B=0.006$, $\text{sig}=0.005$). The probable reason behind this could be attributed to the fact that pro academic norms where one's high achieving peers set higher academic values and creates competitive yet collaborative learning environment where peer pressure motivates individuals to study in groups and share resources with each other, individuals try to accomplish it through hard work which helps in improving one's academic motivation and in turn directly reinforces one's career aspiration (Boruah, 2016).

Table 3: Model Summary^c

Change Statistics									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig F change
1	0.171 ^a	0.029	0.013	21.04	0.029	1.756	1	58	0.019*
2	0.559 ^b	0.313	0.276	9.05	0.021	1.283	1	57	0.024*

From Table 3, it could be seen that perceived peer pressure is proven to increase the positive relationship between academic motivation and career aspiration (R Square 1= 0.029, R Square 2= 0.313).

Table 4: ANOVA^a

Model	F	Sig
1	1.756	0.01*
2	8.505	0.000*

From Table 4, it could be concluded that the previous regression model is significant through increased and significant F value ($F_1=1.756$ and $F_2=8.505$, $\text{Sig}=0.000$).

Table 5: t values of genders of young adults with respect to academic motivation, perceived peer pressure, and career aspiration.

VARIABLES	Males (N=30)	Females (N=30)	t value	Sig value
Academic Motivation	Mean 114.10	Mean 88.66	4.272	0.000*
Perceived Peer Pressure	97.16	100.13	0.539	0.592
Career Aspiration	58.36	50.03	3.272	0.002*

p*<0.05 level of significance

Table 5 shows that significant gender differences exist with respect to academic motivation ($t = 4.272$, $p < 0.000$). This shows that the null hypothesis is being rejected and hypothesis H4 is being accepted. Mean values show that males scored higher than females with respect to academic motivation ($114.10 > 88.66$).

This difference could be linked to the social role theory which showed males scored higher in extrinsic motivation than females who scored more in intrinsic motivation and that males have been found to take up challenging tasks, showing achievement drive, and performing well in competitive environment more than females. This supports the above findings which showed that males scored higher than females with respect to academic motivation (Eagly, 1987).

Table 5 shows that no significant gender differences exist with respect to perceived peer pressure ($t = 0.539$, $p > 0.05$). This shows that the null hypothesis is being accepted and hypothesis H5 is being rejected. Mean values shows that females scored higher than males with respect to perceived peer pressure ($100.13 > 97.16$).

Table 5 shows that significant gender differences exist with respect to career aspiration ($t = 3.272$, $p < 0.002$). This shows that the null hypothesis is being rejected and hypothesis H6 is being accepted. Mean values show that males scored higher than females with respect to career aspiration ($58.36 > 50.03$).

This difference could be attributed to deep seated gender socialization where males are encouraged more than females to take up things oriented than people oriented jobs and to give priority more to social prestige, high income jobs involving career advancement. Things oriented jobs involve STEM related goals where through integration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation get enhanced (Larson, L. M. et al., 2007).

The quantitative findings of the study suggest that students should be sincere enough to utilise their academic motivation properly so they could deal with peer pressure effectively with respect to performing well in academics as this would push them to excel in their career lives later on.

Critical Analysis:

Excessive pressure from peers in academic field creates distress in one's life which in turn might affect students academic by demoralising them and as a result might hamper their careers later on by reducing their self confidence. This problem brings question on generalization of results. Also, this study used self reported scales which again brings question on generalization of results.

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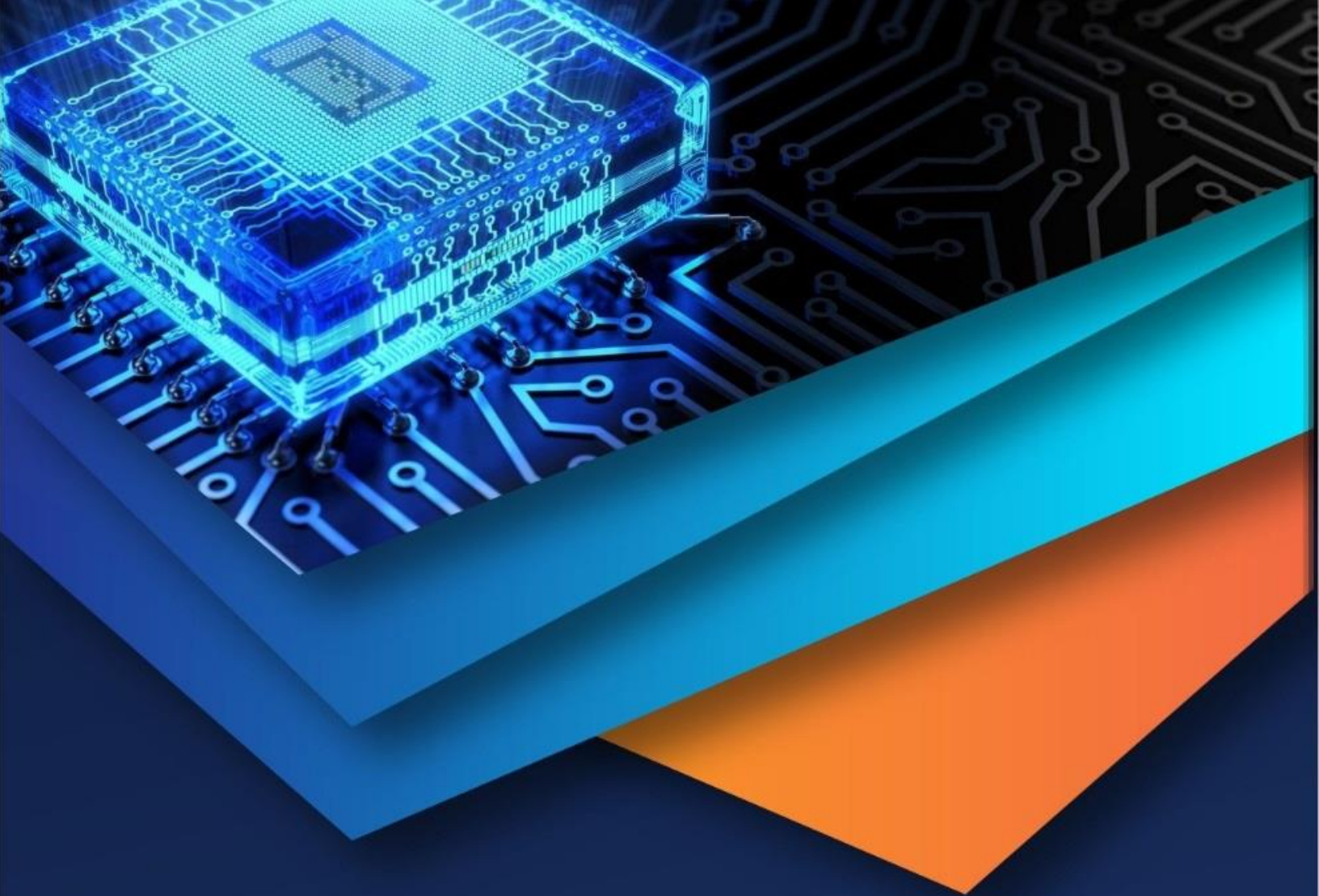
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