

An examination of perceived pressure among National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) aspirants

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ABSTRACT

This study, adopting an ex-post facto research design, explored the perceived levels of parental and peer pressure among 200 adolescents (100 NEET and 100 JEE aspirants) purposively selected from colleges in the Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. The findings revealed that both parental and peer pressure were widespread and significant factors in the lives of these students, with a notable absence of low-level pressure. A distinct and alarming gender disparity was observed across the board: female aspirants consistently reported higher levels of both parental and peer pressure than their male counterparts. While boys were more likely to perceive a medium level of pressure, a majority of girls felt high pressure. This indicates that female students in this high-stakes environment bear a significantly greater emotional burden, highlighting a critical area for targeted support.

Keywords: Competitive exams; gender disparity; NEET; JEE; parental pressure; peer pressure

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial developmental period that bridges childhood and adulthood, typically spanning from ages 13 to 19. This is a time of significant physical and mental growth, including the formation of emotional and cognitive abilities. While the core stage is well-defined, the initial physical and psychological changes can begin earlier, often between ages 9 and 12 (Agarwal et al 2000). The behaviours adopted during this period have major implications for an adolescent's future health and overall well-being (Mmari et al 2014).

The role of family and peer relationships serve as the first and most critical connections in an adolescent's life (Xu 2023). However, peer relationships gradually grow in significance, becoming a primary source of social influence. Peers can guide adolescents in both positive and negative directions, depending on the group they associate with (Brown

and Larson 2009, Wentzel 2009, Rubin et al 2015). During this period, adolescents also spend considerably more time with their friends than with their parents (Ashbourne and Daly 2012). This susceptibility to peer influence peaks in adolescence and remains elevated, though to a lesser extent, into young adulthood (Somerville 2013, Steinberg and Monahan 2007).

Parental pressure refers to the expectations and demands parents place on their children to achieve academic success and meet specific performance standards. This pressure is often displayed through constant reminders, comparisons with peers, insistence on high grades and aspirations for prestigious careers (Kumari and Maikhuri 2016). Parents may push their children to excel in many aspects, particularly in academics, which can cause students to feel anxious and fearful of disappointing them if they fail to meet expectations (Deb et al 2015). Students often feel obligated to succeed academically to satisfy their

parents' requirements, which can be linked to a family's social standing or a parent's financial investment in their education. While moderate parental encouragement can foster motivation and discipline, excessive pressure can lead to negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety and diminished well-being (Irfan and Hussain 2014).

Peer pressure is the direct influence peers have on individuals, encouraging them to change their habits, values and behaviours to align with their group. While it plays a significant role during the teenage years, peer pressure can be either a positive or negative force (Dhull and Beniwal 2017).

In India, a number of adolescents face high academic stress due to excessive parental expectations. The added influence of peers further contributes to their emotional burden (Pienyu et al 2024, Mayya et al 2022). This highlights the complex interplay of parental and peer influences on the academic and mental well-being of young students.

For students preparing for competitive exams like National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), these pressures can be even tougher. There is an increasing interest in the relationship between stress and resilience in the lives of students getting ready for competitive tests (Sarkar 2024).

The aim of this study was to explore the perceived levels of parental and peer pressure experienced by adolescents preparing for the NEET and JEE examinations.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the nature of the research problem and the objectives of the present study, an ex-post facto research design was adopted. The sample consisted of 200 adolescents (100 NEET and 100 JEE aspirants), with an equal distribution of boys and girls. Participants were purposively selected from colleges in the Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Prior to data collection, official consent was obtained from the respective college authorities as well as from the respondents themselves. Data were gathered using four instruments: a general information schedule for collecting background details, the modified Kuppaswamy socioeconomic scale (Saleem 2019) to assess socio-economic status, the parental pressure

scale (Kumari and Maikhuri 2016) to measure parental influence and the peer pressure scale by Kaur (2020) to evaluate peer-related pressures.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Perceived pressure among NEET and JEE aspirants

Parental pressure: Data on parental pressure revealed a significant gender-based difference in perception among both NEET and JEE aspirants.

NEET aspirants: Fig 1 depicts that more than two-third of boys (70%) perceived a medium level of parental pressure, while nearly 30 per cent felt a high level. In contrast, over two-third of girls (68%) perceived high parental pressure, with 32 per cent reporting a medium level. Overall, 51 per cent of NEET aspirants felt medium pressure and 49 per cent felt high pressure. No aspirant reported low parental pressure.

JEE aspirants: Data in Fig 2 show that more than half of the boys (56%) perceived medium parental pressure, with the remaining 44 per cent feeling a high level. Among girls, a majority (68%) reported high pressure and 32 per cent felt a medium level. In total, 56 per cent of JEE aspirants perceived high pressure, while 44 per cent experienced medium pressure. Like their NEET counterparts, no student in the JEE group reported low parental pressure.

Peer pressure: Similarly, a clear disparity in perceived peer pressure was observed between genders for both examinations.

NEET aspirants: Data in Fig 3 detail that about half of the boys (52%) perceived medium peer pressure, while 48 per cent felt high pressure. Among girls, more than three-fourth (78%) reported high peer pressure and only 20 per cent felt a medium level. Overall, 63 per cent of NEET aspirants perceived high peer pressure and 36 per cent experienced a medium level. Low peer pressure was reported by only 2 per cent of girls and no boys.

JEE aspirants: Fig 4 depict that slightly more than half of the boys (52%) perceived high peer pressure, with 48 per cent feeling a medium level. For girls, a vast majority (88%) reported high pressure and only 12 per cent felt a medium level. In total, 70 per cent of

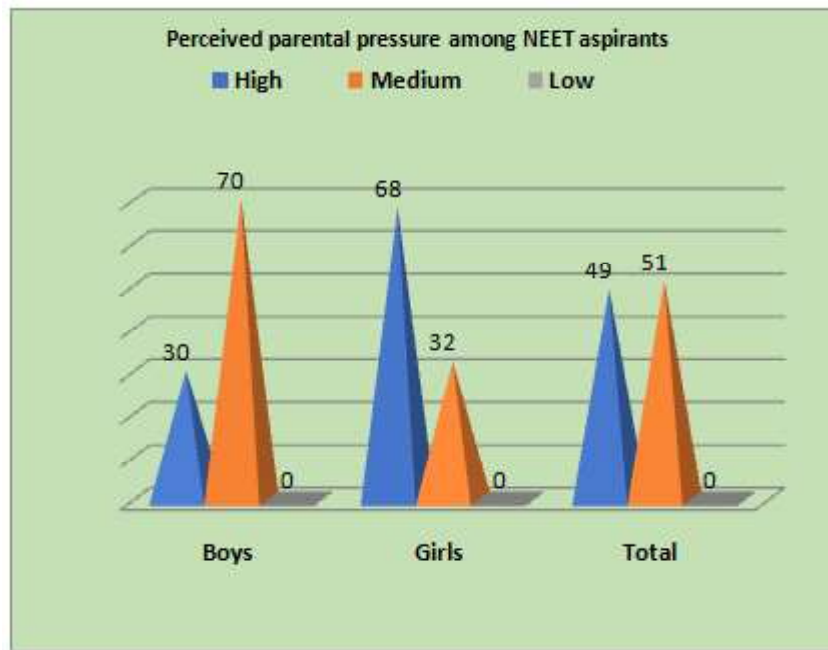


Fig 1. Distribution of NEET aspirants based on their perceived levels of parental pressure

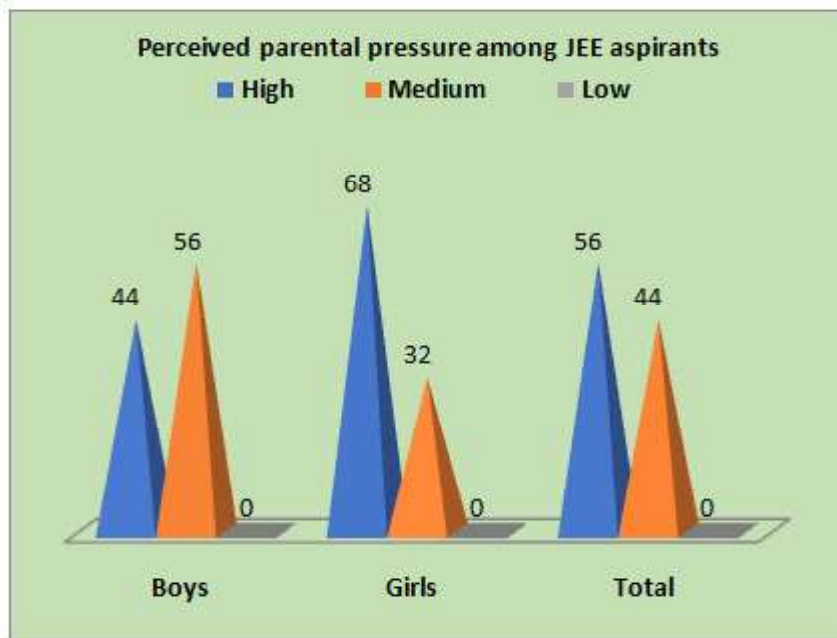


Fig 2. Distribution of JEE aspirants based on their perceived levels of the parental pressure

JEE aspirants perceived high peer pressure, while 30 per cent felt a medium level. No aspirant in this group reported low peer pressure.

It was thus found that both parental and peer pressure were widespread and significant factors in the lives of students preparing for NEET and JEE examinations. A notable finding is the near absence of low-level pressure, suggesting that a baseline of at least medium pressure was an almost universal experience

for these aspirants. The data also reveal a distinct and alarming gender disparity in the perception of this pressure. In all four scenarios, parental and peer pressure for both female NEET and JEE aspirants consistently reported higher level of pressure than their male counterparts. While boys were more likely to perceive a medium level of pressure, a majority of girls across the board felt a high or extremely high level. This indicates that female students bear a significantly greater emotional burden from the high-stakes

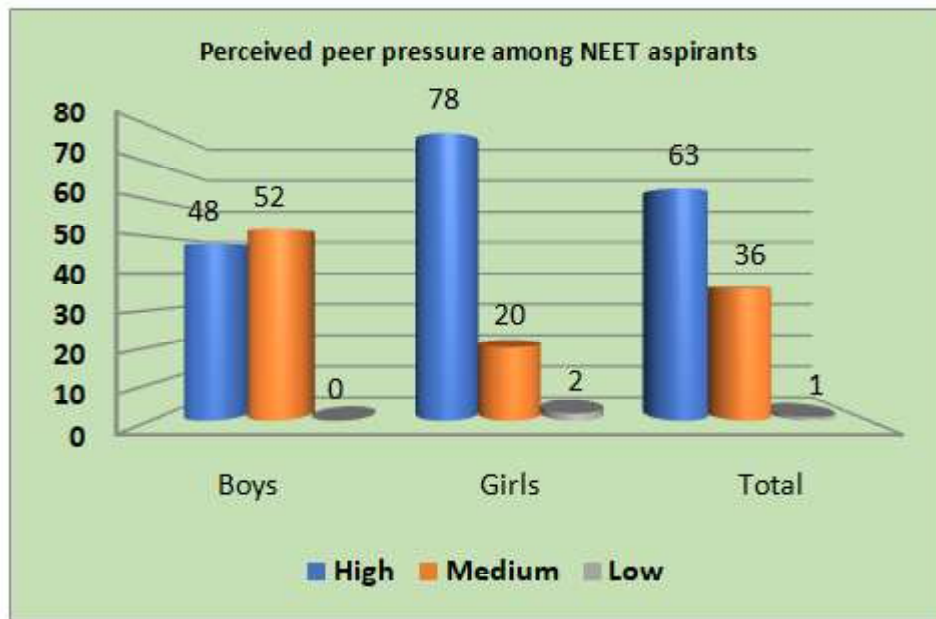


Fig 3. Distribution of NEET aspirants based on their perceived levels of peer pressure

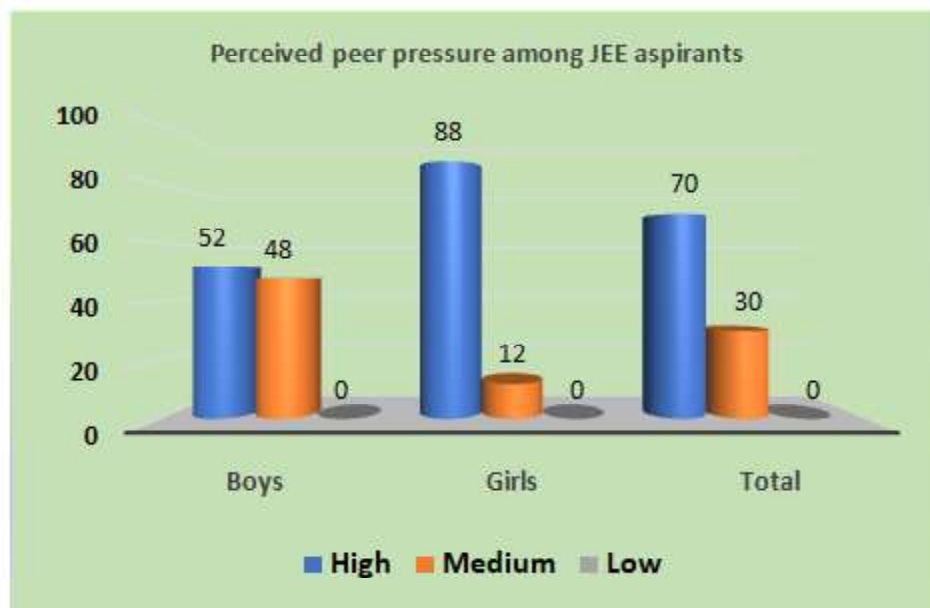


Fig 4. Distribution of JEE aspirants based on their perceived levels of peer pressure

environment of these competitive exams, highlighting the need for targeted support to address this disparity.

Recent studies indicate that both parental and peer pressures are significant stressors for adolescents, a trend that is consistently accompanied by a notable gender-based disparity.

Parental pressure is a key stressor for students preparing for competitive exams like NEET and JEE, often leading to negative outcomes. Shrivastava and Rajan (2018) found that parental pressure was one of

the most significant stressors, with a majority of students feeling immense pressure to meet parental expectations, which resulted in stress, anxiety and reduced academic satisfaction. A study by Pienyu et al (2024) reinforced this by reporting that a majority of adolescents experienced high academic stress (86.0%) and high perceived parental pressure (87.0%), along with moderately high anxiety and low general well-being.

Notably, Soni and Anchal (2024) reported that female students perceived significantly higher levels

of parental pressure compared to their male counterparts, attributing this to a societal perception that female children require more intense parental care and attention.

Similarly, peer pressure was more noticeable among girls than boys, with a much higher percentage of girls reporting high level. This might be due to the reason that girls often display an increased level of sensitivity to distress in other peers, more empathy and fear rejection by peers than their male counterparts (McDonald et al 2010, Rose and Rudolph 2006), causing significant internalizing symptoms (Purdie and Downey 2000).

Social changes have made the role of women different. Still there are cultural pressures on the ideal role to be played by them in the society (Subramanian 2018). Cultural expectations in India may also strengthen this, as girls may face additional societal pressure to meet both academic and social standards, which can intensify their perceived peer pressure.

Schroeder and Liben (2021) reported that cultural norms and societal expectations place strong pressure on adolescents, especially girls, to conform to traditional gender roles and that this felt pressure can significantly shape their peer interactions and behaviour.

The results of this study are in contrast to the findings of Alexander et al (2024), who reported that 43.9 per cent of adolescents in southern India were highly influenced by peers. Notably, Alexander's research found that peer influence, conduct problems and peer-related behavioural issues were significantly higher in male adolescents than in female adolescents. Similarly, Umashankari et al (2020) also reported that male adolescents in urban samples across India experienced a higher level of peer pressure than their female counterparts.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that both parental and peer pressure were widespread and significant factors for students preparing for NEET and JEE exams. The most striking finding is the significant gender disparity in how this pressure was experienced. Female aspirants consistently reported higher levels of both parental and peer pressure than their male

counterparts. While most boys felt a medium level of pressure, the majority of girls reported a high or extremely high level. This suggests that female students bear a substantially greater emotional burden from the high-stakes environment of these competitive exams. The near absence of low-level pressure indicates that a baseline of moderate to high pressure is a universal experience for these students.

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