

Peer Pressure as the Dominant Predictor of Adolescent Promiscuity: Evidence of Ineffective Social Support Among Students

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent promiscuity is an increasing public health concern in Indonesia, reflected in rising cases of premarital sexual activity and unintended pregnancies. In 2025, Magetan Regency recorded 60 marriage dispensation applications, 34 of which involved unintended pregnancies. These trends highlight the need to understand psychosocial factors that may contribute to risky adolescent behavior, particularly peer pressure and social support, which are known to influence decision-making and emotional regulation during adolescence. This study aimed to analyze the simultaneous influence of peer pressure and social support on adolescent promiscuity among students at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan. This analytical quantitative study employed a cross-sectional design with a total of 193 respondents selected through proportional random sampling in 2026. Data collection utilized three standardized instruments: the Peer Pressure Scale Questionnaire-Revised (PPSQ-R), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and The Emotional Promiscuity Scale. Data were analyzed using Chi-Square tests and binary logistic regression to determine both individual and simultaneous influences of peer pressure and social support on promiscuity behavior. The analysis showed that both peer pressure ($p = 0.000$) and social support ($p = 0.000$) had significant relationships with adolescent promiscuity behavior. Logistic regression further identified peer pressure as the most dominant factor influencing promiscuity ($p = 0.000$). The findings also suggest that social support did not function effectively as a protective factor, likely due to insufficient supervision or guidance within adolescents' social environments. In conclusion, peer pressure plays a critical role in shaping adolescent promiscuity behavior, surpassing the influence of social support. The limited protective effect of social support indicates gaps in parental and school supervision. Strengthening communication, monitoring, and guidance within families and educational institutions is essential to reduce adolescents' engagement in risky behaviors.

Keywords: adolescent; peer pressure; promiscuity behavior; social support

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical transitional phase characterized by rapid physical, psychological, and social changes. During this period, individuals experience heightened emotional sensitivity, increased cognitive exploration, and expanding social interactions. Adolescents tend to search for identity, autonomy, and belonging, making them more vulnerable to external influences, particularly from their social environment. One significant issue that often emerges during this developmental stage is promiscuity, which encompasses a range of risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption, smoking, premarital sex, and drug abuse. These behaviors can negatively impact adolescents' physical and mental health, disrupt their social development, and increase their vulnerability to long-term adverse outcomes [1,2].

National data illustrate the seriousness of this issue. The Indonesian Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey (SKRRI) 2021 reported that 29.5% of male adolescents and 6.5% of female adolescents had engaged in sexual touching with a partner, while 48.1% of male and 29.3% of female adolescents had experienced lip kissing. More than 70% of adolescents had held hands with a partner, a seemingly harmless behavior that can serve as a gateway to premarital sexual activity [3]. Complementary data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (2022) further highlight the severity of the problem: 62.7% of senior high school adolescents were not virgins, 22.6% had engaged in sexual intercourse, 97% had watched pornography, and 21.26% had undergone abortion. In East Java, early marriage cases reached 5,285 between January and May 2022, reflecting the broader social consequences of adolescent sexual risk-taking [4]. At the local level, Magetan Regency recorded 60 marriage dispensation applications in 2025, 34 of which involved unintended pregnancies, underscoring the urgent need for preventive interventions [5].

Promiscuous behavior in adolescents can be attributed to several social environmental causes, with peer influence being among the most significant. During adolescence, individuals tend to interact more frequently and intensely with peers, and the behaviors, norms, and habits within peer groups can strongly shape adolescents' thinking and actions. Peer groups often serve as reference points for social acceptance, identity formation, and behavioral validation. When peer norms encourage risky behavior, adolescents may feel pressured to conform in order to maintain social belonging.

In addition to peer influence, insufficient social support from family, school, or community can also increase the risk of promiscuity. Social support plays a crucial role in providing adolescents with attention, guidance, emotional security, and behavioral regulation. Adequate support helps adolescents develop resilience, make informed decisions, and avoid deviant behavior. Conversely, weak supervision, limited communication, or inconsistent guidance can leave adolescents more susceptible to external pressures and risky behaviors [6].

Most prior studies have examined peer influence or social support separately, limiting the understanding of how these factors may interact or operate simultaneously. This study uniquely addresses this gap by analyzing both peer pressure and social support together within the same model. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the influence of peer pressure and social support on adolescent promiscuity behavior at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan.

METHODS

Time, setting and design

This study was conducted from January to May 2026 at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan, a vocational secondary school located in Magetan Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The school was selected because it represents a large adolescent population with diverse social dynamics relevant to the study variables. An analytical quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach was employed. This design was chosen for its efficiency in examining the relationship between independent and dependent variables at a single point in time [7].

Subjects and Recruitment

The target population consisted of all 377 students enrolled in Grades X, XI, and XII at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan. The minimum sample size was determined using the Krejcie–Morgan method, resulting in 191 required participants. A proportional random sampling technique was applied, yielding a final sample of 193 students distributed proportionally across grade levels. Inclusion criteria were adolescents aged 15–18 years, enrolled in Grades X, XI, or XII, and willing to participate and signed informed consent. Exclusion criteria were outside the specified age range, absent during data collection, did not complete the questionnaire and declined informed consent.

Variables, measurements and data analysis

The study included three main variables, namely peer pressure (independent variable), social support (independent variable) and promiscuity behavior (dependent variable). Three standardized and validated instruments were used Peer Pressure Scale Questionnaire–Revised (PPSQ-R) Developed by Saini & Singh (2016), consisting of 25 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Scores were categorized as not supportive or supportive [8]; Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) Developed by Zimet et al. (1988), consisting of 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale. Scores were categorized as not supportive or supportive [9]; and Emotional Promiscuity Scale Developed by Jones (2011), consisting of 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Scores were categorized as not at risk or at risk [10]. Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms distributed through WhatsApp groups. Data analysis consisted of descriptive analysis to describe frequency and percentage [11–14], bivariate analysis using Chi-square or Fisher's exact test [15,16] and multivariate analysis using binary logistic regression to identify the dominant influencing factor [17].

RESULTS

Adolescent characteristics

Based on Table 1, a total of 193 students participated in this study. Most respondents were male, in mid-adolescence, and enrolled in Grade XI, forming a demographic profile that closely reflects the social dynamics typically found in vocational schools. Mid-adolescence is a developmental stage marked by heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, increasing autonomy, and expanding social networks, making adolescents more responsive to group norms and social expectations. In this context, the predominance of male students contributes to a peer culture characterized by strong group cohesion, shared identity, and frequent social interaction both inside and outside the classroom. The proportional distribution of respondents across grade levels ensured that each academic stage was adequately represented, allowing the findings to capture variations in social behavior and peer influence throughout the school's student population. These characteristics collectively illustrate an environment where peer relationships play a central role in shaping attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes among adolescents.

Table 1. Distribution of adolescent characteristics at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan in 2026

Demographic characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	164	84.97
Female	29	15.03
Age (years)		
15	10	5.18
16	68	35.23
17	64	33.16
18	51	26.42
Grade		
X	65	33.68
XI	74	38.34
XII	54	27.98

Peer pressure, social support, and promiscuity behavior

Based on Table 2, the majority of adolescents experienced supportive peer pressure, illustrating how strongly peer groups shape their attitudes, choices, and daily behaviors. In the vocational school environment where these adolescents study, peer interactions are frequent, intense, and often central to their social identity. Such conditions make peer norms highly influential, and adolescents tend to align themselves with the expectations, habits, and values upheld within their peer circles. Supportive peer pressure in this context does not necessarily imply positive guidance; rather, it reflects the strength of peer influence; an influence that can easily encourage conformity to behaviors perceived as acceptable or admired within the group.

In addition to peer pressure, nearly all respondents perceived their social support as supportive, suggesting that they felt surrounded by individuals who provided emotional closeness, companionship, or a sense of belonging. However, this perceived support did not translate into protection against risky promiscuity behavior. This paradox highlights an important nuance: not all forms of social support function as safeguards. Adolescents may receive encouragement, empathy, or validation from peers and romantic partners, yet such support may reinforce permissive attitudes rather than discourage risky behavior. When social support is rooted primarily in peer solidarity rather than parental guidance or structured adult supervision, it may strengthen emotional bonds without offering the behavioral regulation or moral direction needed to prevent engagement in risky activities.

Despite the presence of strong peer connections and perceived social support, most adolescents were still categorized as at risk for promiscuity behavior. This indicates that supportive environments; when dominated by peer-based interactions do not necessarily prevent emotionally risky behaviors. Instead, they may create a social climate where adolescents feel comfortable experimenting with behaviors that align with group norms, even when those behaviors carry potential consequences. The findings suggest that the quality, source, and nature of support matter more than its mere

Table 2. Distribution of peer pressure, social support, and promiscuity behavior at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan in 2026

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Peer pressure		
Not supportive (score 25–75)	33	17.10
Supportive (score 76–125)	160	82.90
Social support		
Not supportive (score 12–36)	3	1.55
Supportive (score 37–84)	190	98.45
Promiscuity behavior		
Not at risk (score 10–30)	28	14.51
At risk (score 31–50)	165	85.49

Table 3. Influence of peer pressure and social support on adolescent promiscuity behavior at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan 2026

Variable	Adolescent promiscuity behavior		p-value
	Not at risk: f (%)	At risk: f (%)	
Peer pressure			
Not supportive	27 (81.82%)	6 (18.18%)	0.000
Supportive	1 (0.63%)	159 (99.38%)	
Social support			
Not supportive	3 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0.000
Supportive	25 (13.16%)	165 (86.84%)	

presence. Support that lacks monitoring, guidance, or boundaries may inadvertently enable adolescents to adopt behaviors that place them at risk, especially in settings where peer influence is pervasive and parental oversight is limited.

Influence of peer pressure and social support

Based on Table 3, the bivariate analysis demonstrated that both peer pressure and social support were significantly associated with promiscuity behavior, revealing how deeply adolescents' social environments shape their emotional and behavioral choices. Adolescents who experienced strong peer influence tended to display higher-risk behaviors, underscoring the powerful role of peer norms in guiding decision-making during this developmental stage. In vocational school settings where peer groups are tightly knit and social identity is strongly tied to group belonging, adolescents often rely on peers as their primary reference point. As a result, behaviors that are normalized, encouraged, or admired within the peer group; whether positive or negative can quickly become internalized and reproduced. This pattern reflects the broader developmental reality that adolescents are highly sensitive to social approval and often prioritize group acceptance over personal judgment or long-term consequences.

Interestingly, adolescents with lower social support were more likely to fall into the not-at-risk category, suggesting that social support does not always function as a protective factor. This counterintuitive finding highlights the complexity of social support as a construct. High levels of perceived support may not necessarily indicate guidance, supervision, or emotional regulation from parents or authority figures. Instead, the support may come primarily from peers or romantic partners, whose influence may reinforce permissive norms rather than discourage risky behavior. In such cases, "support" may take the form of validation, encouragement, or emotional closeness that inadvertently facilitates risk-taking. Conversely, adolescents with lower social support may rely more on personal judgment, maintain greater emotional independence, or experience stricter parental oversight, all of which can reduce the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that the source, quality, and orientation of social support matter more than its perceived presence. Support that lacks boundaries, monitoring, or guidance may fail to protect adolescents from risky behavior, especially when peer norms strongly encourage conformity. This dynamic reinforces the importance of understanding adolescents' social ecosystems holistically, recognizing that peer influence and social support interact in complex ways that can either mitigate or amplify risk.

Dominant factor affecting promiscuity behavior

Based on Table 4, multivariate analysis identified peer pressure as the dominant factor influencing promiscuity behavior. Social support did not show a significant effect in the multivariate model, likely due to its highly homogeneous distribution, which limited its ability to differentiate risk levels among respondents. The findings indicate that peer influence plays a more decisive role than social support in shaping adolescents' emotionally risky behaviors. Adolescents tend to conform to peer expectations, especially in environments where peer groups are cohesive and influential. Although social support was high, it did not necessarily mitigate risky behavior, possibly because the support provided was not specifically oriented toward preventing negative outcomes. These results highlight the importance of peer-focused interventions, such as peer education programs, strengthening positive peer norms, and promoting healthy social interactions within school environments. Future research should incorporate broader psychosocial and cultural variables to better understand the complex interplay of influences on adolescent behavior.

Table 4. Binary logistic regression analysis of peer pressure and social support on adolescent promiscuity behavior at SMK PGRI 1 Magetan in 2026

Variable	B	SE	Wald	p-value	OR (95% CI)
Peer pressure	-6.455	1.102	34.307	0.000	0.002 (0.000–0.014)
Social support	-19.817	23205.41	0.000	0.999	0.000 (0.000)
Constant	21.203	23205.41	0.000	0.999	
Omnibus test χ^2 (model)	117.665				
Nagelkerke R ²	0.811 (81.1%)				

DISCUSSION

The majority of respondents in this study were male adolescents aged sixteen years and enrolled in Grade XI, a demographic profile that aligns closely with what developmental theory identifies as middle adolescence. This stage is marked by an intensified search for identity, heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation, and a growing need for social belonging, making adolescents particularly vulnerable to group dynamics and peer norms [18]. In the context of a vocational school dominated by male students, the culture of peer solidarity tends to be exceptionally strong. Daily interactions, collaborative practical activities, and informal social gatherings create an environment where peer norms are not only visible but also readily internalized. The dominance of male peer groups further amplifies expectations related to masculinity, social bravado, and conformity, shaping behavioral tendencies in ways that may predispose adolescents to risky actions.

Within this social landscape, peer pressure emerged as a prominent factor, with 82.90% of respondents categorized as experiencing supportive (high) peer pressure. This finding resonates with the work of Namuwonge et al. [19], who emphasized that peer pressure often becomes the primary driver of adolescent engagement in risky behaviors. The desire to belong to a group, avoid exclusion, and maintain social acceptance frequently overrides adolescents' awareness of social norms or long-term consequences. Differential Association Theory provides a compelling explanation for this phenomenon, suggesting that deviant behavior is learned through sustained interaction with groups that normalize or encourage norm violations [20]. In environments where peers openly discuss or display permissive attitudes toward romantic or sexual behavior, adolescents may adopt these behaviors as part of their group identity, reinforcing a cycle of imitation and conformity.

Interestingly, almost all respondents reported supportive social support. At first glance, this might suggest a protective environment; however, the high level of perceived social support did not translate into reduced promiscuity risk. This paradox can be understood by examining the nature of the MSPSS instrument, which captures social support from multiple sources, including peers and romantic partners, rather than exclusively from parents or authority figures. Alfadiati and Rochmawati [21] found that when parental emotional control is weak or inconsistent, adolescents tend to seek validation from peer environments, often without considering the risks involved. Thus, the "supportive" social support reported in this study likely reflects emotional closeness among friends or partners, which may encourage rather than prevent risky behavior. Peer relationships can exert stronger influence than parental guidance when adolescents spend more time with peers than with family [22].

The behavioral outcomes observed in this study further support these theoretical perspectives. A substantial majority of respondents, 85.49%, were categorized as at risk for promiscuity behavior. Social Learning Theory (Bandura) offers a clear explanation: adolescents learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their social environment [23]. In the vocational school context, where peer groups are tightly knit and male-dominated, adolescents may perceive permissive romantic or sexual behaviors as socially rewarding or identity-enhancing. Limited parental monitoring, combined with the developmental characteristics of late adolescence, creates conditions conducive to the internalization of permissive norms.

Statistical analysis reinforced these theoretical insights. The Chi-Square test confirmed a significant influence of peer pressure on promiscuity behavior ($p = 0.000$). When peer pressure was categorized as supportive, nearly all adolescents exhibited risky promiscuity behavior. This aligns with findings by Pasaribu [24] and Hutaaruk [25], who demonstrated that peer environments are strong predictors of adolescent risk-taking. The Dual Systems Model (Steinberg) provides a neurobiological explanation: during adolescence, the socioemotional reward system is highly active, making adolescents more sensitive to social approval, while the cognitive control system responsible for long-term planning is still maturing [26]. As a result, adolescents tend to prioritize immediate social acceptance over potential long-term risks, especially when surrounded by peers.

Social support also showed a significant association with promiscuity behavior in the bivariate analysis ($p = 0.000$). Adolescents with unsupportive social support were entirely in the not-at-risk category, consistent with Stress Buffering Theory (Cohen and Wills), which posits that social support can protect individuals from maladaptive coping behaviors [27]. However, in the multivariate model, social support lost its significance ($p = 0.999$), largely due to the extremely limited variance in social support scores, 98.45% of respondents reported supportive social support. This homogeneity reduced the discriminating power of social support in predicting risk, suggesting that while social support may theoretically buffer risk, its protective effect depends on the type and source of support rather than its mere presence.

The simultaneous analysis confirmed peer pressure as the dominant factor influencing promiscuity behavior, with an odds ratio indicating a strong predictive relationship and a model explaining 81.1% of the variation in behavior (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.811$). This finding is consistent with Group Socialization Theory (Harris) and research by Laursen and Veenstra [28], which argue that peer groups exert stronger influence than families in shaping adolescent behavior. These results highlight the importance of interventions that target peer dynamics, such as peer counseling programs, assertiveness training, and structured peer-led activities, alongside enhanced parental monitoring and school-based supervision.

This study possesses several strengths. Its simultaneous examination of peer pressure and social support provides a more holistic understanding of adolescent promiscuity than studies that analyze these factors separately. The use of validated instruments, PPSQ-R, MSPSS, and The Emotional Promiscuity Scale ensures reliable measurement of psychosocial constructs. Proportional random sampling across grade levels enhances representativeness, while the integration of multiple theoretical frameworks strengthens the interpretive depth of the findings.

However, the study also has limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, meaning the observed associations cannot be interpreted as cause-and-effect relationships. Self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability bias, especially for sensitive behaviors such as sexual activity. The homogeneity of social support scores limits the ability to detect its true effect in multivariate analysis. Additionally, the study did not include other potentially influential variables such as parental monitoring, digital media exposure, personality traits, or cultural norms, all of which may interact with peer pressure and social support. Finally, the single-site setting limits generalizability to other school types or regions with different socio-cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

Among the two factors, peer pressure emerged as the strongest and most influential determinant, while social support did not demonstrate a meaningful protective role in the overall model due to its highly uniform distribution across respondents. The implications of this study highlight the need for schools, especially guidance counselors, to develop structured peer-counseling programs that can reshape peer norms and strengthen positive group dynamics. Parents are encouraged to enhance communication and monitoring of adolescents' peer relationships, while local government should consider integrated prevention strategies that involve families, schools, and community institutions. Future research is recommended to use mixed-methods approaches and explore additional variables such as self-control, digital media exposure, and parental monitoring to provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent promiscuity behavior.

Ethical consideration, competing interest and source of funding

- This study received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Poltekkes Kemenkes Surabaya, Number: EA/4362/KEPK-Poltekkes_Sby/V/2026.
- There is no conflict of interest related to this research.
- Source of funding is authors.

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