

Group Pressure in Youngsters' Dangerous Behaviour

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Abstract

Unintentional injury is the leading cause of death and disability in children. Many injuries to school-aged children occur during unsupervised peer activities, but peer influences on risky behavior in preadolescence remain under-investigated. We examined peer context effects on reported risk-taking, identified predictors of peer influence, and compared peer influence in high-and low-social-functioning groups. Forty-one boys aged 8-10 years listened to scenarios in which they encountered opportunities for risk-taking with their best friends, with "cool guys", with disliked peers, and alone. They rated the likelihood that they would engage in risky behavior in each condition for each scenario. Children also completed measures of friendship satisfaction, peer orientation, and socially desirable responding. Children reported more risk-taking with positive peers than alone, and less with negative peers than alone. Children in the high social competence group showed larger peer influence, and indicated a preference for risk-taking with best friends over cool guys. Results are discussed in terms of improving injury prevention efforts by reconceptualizing "peer pressure" as a developmentally adaptive aspect of child functioning.

Keywords: *preadolescence, cool guys, peer pressure, risk behavior, injury.*

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