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Peer Pressure and Academic Cheating among Higher Secondary School Students: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

Academic cheating remains a concern in educational settings, and peer pressure may be associated with students' academic behaviour. This study examined gender differences in academic cheating and peer pressure and investigated the relationship between these variables among higher secondary school students in Baripada Town, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, India. A descriptive survey design was employed, involving 100 students, comprising 50 male and 50 female students, selected from two higher secondary schools. Data were collected using a self-developed Peer Pressure Scale and the Academic Cheating Scale (ACS-KK). Mean, standard deviation, independent-samples t-tests, and Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient were used for analysis. The findings indicated no statistically significant gender differences in academic cheating or peer pressure. However, a statistically significant positive correlation was reported between peer pressure and academic cheating ($r = .666$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher peer pressure scores were associated with higher academic cheating scores. These findings highlight the relevance of peer-group dynamics in understanding academic dishonesty and suggest that school-based academic integrity initiatives should promote ethical decision-making, positive peer relationships, and responsible academic practices. Given the study's limited sample and correlational design, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and cannot establish a causal relationship.

Keywords: *academic cheating, academic dishonesty, peer pressure, gender differences, higher secondary school students, academic integrity*

1. Introduction

Higher secondary education is an important stage in students' academic and personal development, as it prepares them for higher education and future career opportunities. Academic performance during this period may influence students' educational and professional choices (Ghatol, 2017). However, educational success involves more than achieving good examination results. Students are also expected to develop honesty, responsibility, and respect for academic rules. These values are important for ensuring that academic achievement reflects students' actual knowledge, abilities, and efforts.

Academic integrity is a fundamental principle of education, encompassing six core values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI, 2021) identifies these values as essential for maintaining ethical conduct within academic communities. Students demonstrate academic integrity by completing assignments honestly, acknowledging others' contributions, and following examination rules. However, academic competition, fear of failure, and social expectations may sometimes encourage students to engage in dishonest practices. Academic cheating is therefore a concern because it compromises fairness in assessment and may interfere with students' genuine learning.

Academic cheating refers to practices that violate academic rules to obtain an unfair advantage. These practices may include copying classmates' homework, using unauthorised materials during examinations, sharing answers during tests, and

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presenting another person's work without appropriate acknowledgement (Waltzer et al., 2023). Although students may cheat for different reasons, their behaviour cannot always be understood solely in terms of individual motivation. The influence of friends and classmates may also be relevant, particularly during adolescence, when peer relationships become an important part of students' social and educational experiences.

Peers can influence students' attitudes, decisions, and behaviour in both positive and negative ways. Supportive friendships may encourage cooperation, academic motivation, and responsible learning. However, students may also experience pressure to conform to their friends' expectations, even when those expectations conflict with school rules. For example, students may share examination answers or copy assignments because they fear rejection, wish to maintain friendships, or do not want to appear less capable than their classmates. Kilday and Ryan (2022) highlighted the relevance of peer relationships to students' motivation and engagement in learning. These considerations make peer pressure an important factor to investigate in relation to academic cheating among higher secondary school students.

The relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating can be understood partly through social learning theory, which explains how individuals learn behaviours by observing others and the consequences of their actions. When students observe classmates cheating without apparent consequences, they may begin to regard such behaviour as acceptable. Conversely, peers who disapprove of cheating may discourage dishonest practices. Carrell et al. (2008), in their investigation of peer effects in academic cheating among students at United States military service academies, examined the relationship between peer behaviour and individual cheating. Although their research concerned higher education, it provides a useful perspective on the possible role of peer behaviour in shaping academic decisions.

Further evidence comes from Zhao et al. (2022), who conducted a meta-analysis of 38 studies involving 24,181 participants. They reported a positive association between academic dishonesty and students' perceptions of cheating among their peers. This finding suggests that students' perceptions of the academic behaviour of their classmates may be associated with their own involvement in dishonest practices. Nevertheless, perceived peer cheating and direct peer pressure are not identical. A student may observe classmates cheating without feeling pressured to participate, whereas another student may experience direct encouragement from friends to engage in such behaviour. Distinguishing between these concepts is important when examining the relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating.

Research involving secondary school students provides a more direct basis for the present investigation. Nora and Zhang (2010) examined cheating among secondary school students in relation to self-efficacy and peer influence. Their study drew attention to the relevance of students' academic beliefs and peer-related experiences in understanding dishonest behaviour. Similarly, Bassey and Iruoje (2017), in a study involving 1,200 senior secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria, reported that peer pressure, test anxiety, attitudes towards schooling, and parental influence were significant predictors of students' cheating tendencies. These findings suggest that academic cheating may be associated with both individual circumstances and social relationships. However, findings from other educational and cultural settings may not fully explain the experiences of students in a particular local context.

The broader educational landscape continues to evolve through technological advancement, changing educational policies, and increasing attention to psychological wellbeing. Tikader (2023a)(Tikader, 2023) discussed the role of emerging technologies in enhancing teaching effectiveness in higher education, while (Tikader, 2025) examined adult education as a contributor to national development under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Furthermore, (Tikader & Acharya, 2025), in a systematic review of mental health challenges among secondary school teachers, highlighted the importance of psychological wellbeing within educational settings. Although these studies address different aspects of education, they collectively provide a broader context for understanding educational development, wellbeing, and responsible learning. Within this context, investigating the relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating is important for understanding the social factors associated with students' academic behaviour and for promoting academic integrity.

Although previous studies have examined peer influence and academic dishonesty, further investigation is useful to understand the specific relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating among higher secondary school students in the Indian educational context. The distinction between general peer influence and direct peer pressure also warrants attention. In addition, examining gender differences may help establish whether male and female students differ in their

reported levels of peer pressure and academic cheating. Such differences should be determined through empirical evidence rather than assumed in advance.

Against this background, the present study, entitled "Peer Pressure and Academic Cheating among Higher Secondary School Students: A Correlational Study," focuses on higher secondary school students in Baripada Town, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha. It aims to examine the relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating and to investigate gender differences in both variables. By exploring these aspects, the study seeks to contribute to an understanding of the social factors associated with academic cheating and provide insights that may help educators promote academic integrity and responsible behaviour among students.

2. Objectives of the study

1. To study the academic cheating among higher secondary school students with reference to their gender.
2. To study the peer pressure among higher secondary school students with reference to their gender.
3. To find out the relationship between academic cheating and peer pressure among higher secondary school students.

Hypothesis of the Study

H01 There is no significant difference in the academic cheating of higher secondary school students with reference to their gender.

H02 There is no significant difference in the peer pressure of higher secondary school students with reference to their gender.

H03 There exists no significant relationship between academic cheating and peer pressure of higher secondary school students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey method to examine the relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating among higher secondary school students in Baripada Town, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha.

3.2. Variables of the Study

Peer pressure was considered the predictor variable, academic cheating the outcome variable, and gender (male and female) the grouping variable.

3.3. Population and Sample

The population comprised higher secondary school students in Baripada Municipality. A sample of 100 students from Classes XI and XII was selected from two higher secondary schools using a random sampling technique. The sample included 50 male and 50 female students.

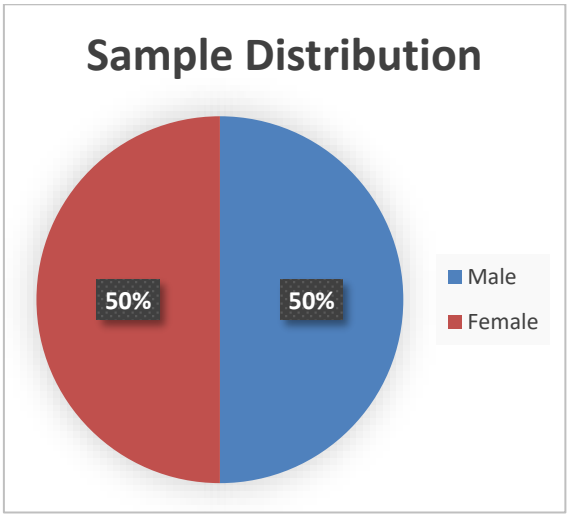


Figure 3.3 shows the sample distribution

3.4. Tools Used

Two instruments were used: a self-developed Peer Pressure Scale and the Academic Cheating Scale (ACS-KK), developed by A. K. Kalia and Kiran Deep (2011). The Peer Pressure Scale employed a five-point Likert response format, with reverse scoring for negatively worded items. The ACS-KK consists of 40 items covering five dimensions: cheating in examinations, plagiarism, lying about academic assignments, interference during instruction, and damaging intellectual property. Responses range from Always (5) to Never (1), with higher scores indicating more frequent academic cheating.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Permission was obtained from the selected schools before administering the questionnaires. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were collected, checked, and scored for analysis.

3.6. Statistical Analysis

Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to describe students' scores. Independent-samples *t*-tests were used to compare male and female students, while Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating. Significance was assessed at the .05 and .01 levels.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected for the present study were analysed quantitatively to address the research objectives and test the formulated null hypotheses. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to examine academic cheating and peer pressure among higher secondary school students with reference to gender.

4.1: Comparison of Academic Cheating Scores of Male and Female Higher Secondary School Students

Table 4.1 shows the comparison of Academic Cheating Scores of Male and Female Higher Secondary School Students

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Significance
Academic cheating	Male	50	98.72	32.67093	98	1.46	Not Significant
	Female	50	90.9	19.20061			

Note. An independent-samples *t*-test was used to examine the difference between the two groups.

Table 4.1 presents a comparison of academic cheating scores between male and female higher secondary school students. Male students obtained a higher mean score (M = 98.72, SD = 32.67) than female students (M = 90.90, SD = 19.20). The independent-samples t-test indicated that the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant, t(98) ≈ 1.46, p > .05.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which assumed no significant difference in academic cheating scores between male and female higher secondary school students, was not rejected. Although male students demonstrated comparatively higher academic cheating scores, the observed difference was insufficient to establish a statistically significant gender-based difference in the present sample.

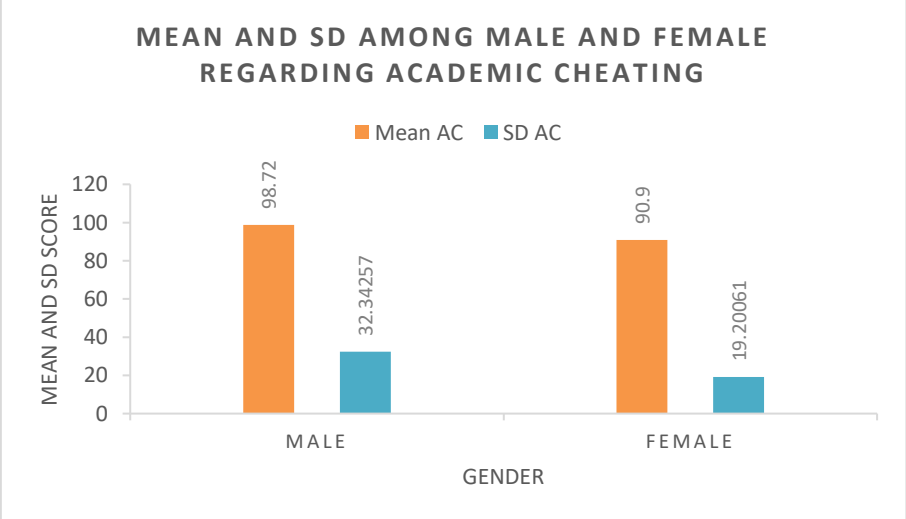


Figure 4.1: Mean Academic Cheating Scores of Male and Female Higher Secondary School Students

Figure 4.1 illustrates the difference in mean academic cheating scores between male and female students, with male students exhibiting a higher average score than female students. Overall, the findings suggest that no statistically significant difference in academic cheating scores was established between male and female higher secondary school students in the present study.

4.2. Comparison of Peer Pressure Scores of Male and Female Higher Secondary School Students

Table 4.2 shows the comparison of Peer Pressure Scores of Male and Female Higher Secondary School Students

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	*t*	Significance
Peer Pressure	Male	50	60.92	15.38	98	0.44	Not Significant
	Female	50	59.80	9.38			

Note. The reported *t*-value is 0.661 with 98 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.2 presents a comparison of peer pressure scores between male and female higher secondary school students. Male students obtained a mean score of 60.92 (SD = 15.38), whereas female students obtained a mean score of 59.80 (SD = 9.38). The reported independent-samples t-test value was 0.44 with 98 degrees of freedom, which was not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}), which assumed no significant difference in peer pressure scores between male and female higher secondary school students, was not rejected. Although male students recorded a slightly higher mean score than female students, the observed difference was not statistically significant. Furthermore, the higher standard deviation among male students indicates greater variability in their peer pressure scores compared with female students.

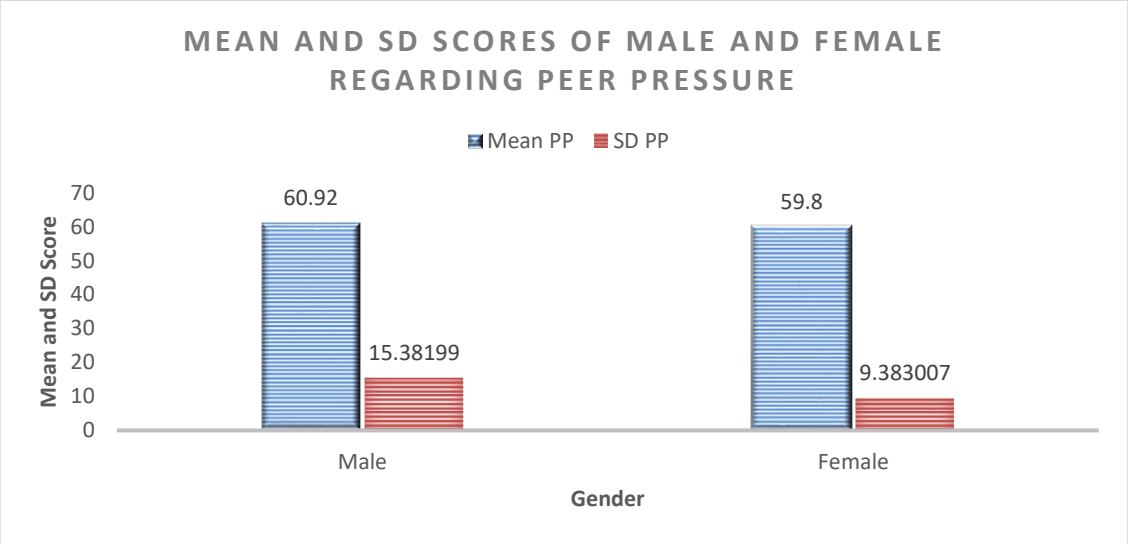


Figure 4.2 Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Male and Female Students on Peer Pressure

Figure 4.2 illustrates the mean and standard deviation scores of male and female students on peer pressure. The results show a marginal difference in mean scores, with male students scoring slightly higher than female students.

Overall, the findings indicate that no statistically significant gender difference in peer pressure scores was established among the higher secondary school students included in the study.

4.3. Relationship Between Academic Cheating and Peer Pressure Among Higher Secondary School Students

Table 4.3 Relationship Between Academic Cheating and Peer Pressure Among Higher Secondary School Students

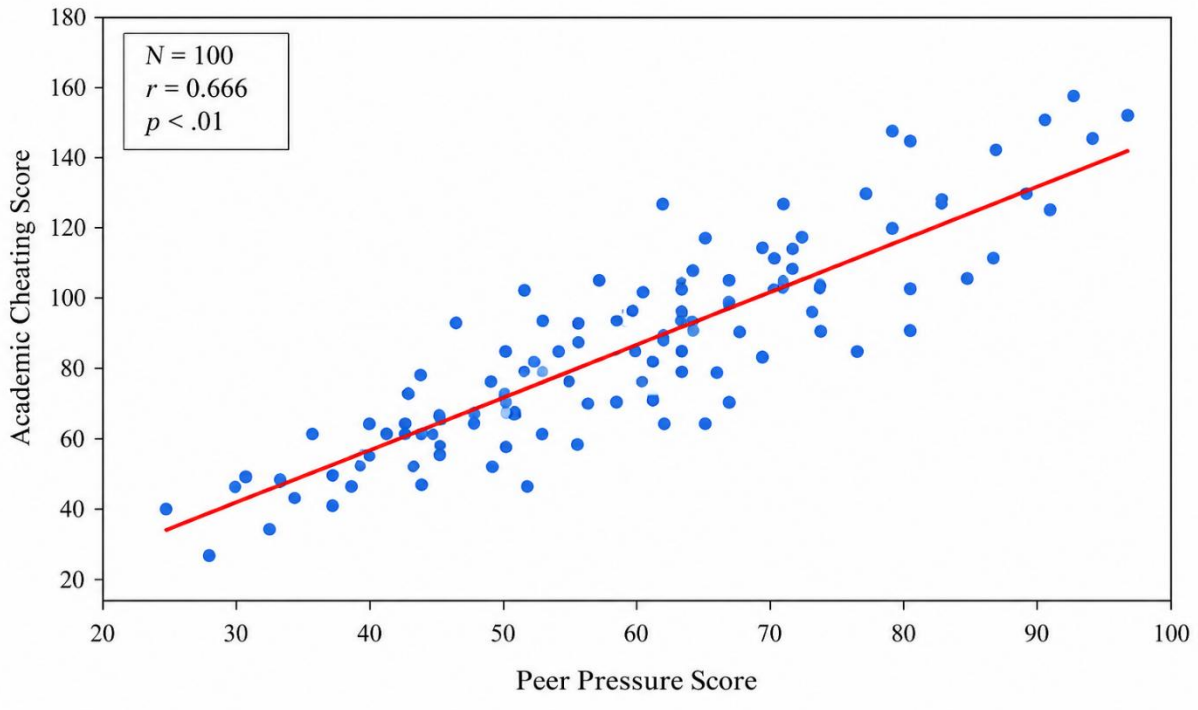
Variables	N	Pearson's correlation coefficient (*r*)	Significance
Academic Cheating and Peer Pressure	100	0.666	Significant at the .01 level

Note. The reported correlation coefficient is $r = 0.666341$, with $N = 100$.

Table 4.3 presents the relationship between academic cheating and peer pressure among 100 higher secondary school students. Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables. The obtained correlation coefficient was r = 0.666, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between academic cheating and peer pressure. The correlation was statistically significant at the .01 level.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{03}), which stated that there was no significant relationship between academic cheating and peer pressure among higher secondary school students, was rejected. The findings indicate that students with higher peer pressure scores tended to report higher academic cheating scores. Conversely, students with lower peer pressure scores tended to report lower academic cheating scores.

Figure 4.3. Relationship Between Academic Cheating and Peer Pressure Among Higher Secondary School Students



The results suggest that peer pressure is significantly associated with academic cheating among the students included in the study. However, the correlational nature of the study does not establish a causal relationship between the two variables.

Overall, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between peer pressure and academic cheating among higher secondary school students ($r = 0.666$, $p < .01$). This finding highlights the importance of considering peer-related influences when examining academic cheating behaviour among students.

5. Discussion

The present study examined academic cheating and peer pressure among 100 higher secondary school students from two schools in Baripada Town, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha. The discussion focuses on the gender differences observed in academic cheating and peer pressure and the relationship between these two variables. The findings are interpreted in relation to previous empirical studies to identify similarities, differences, and educational significance.

5.1. Gender Differences in Academic Cheating

The findings revealed that male students obtained a higher mean academic cheating score ($M = 98.72$, $SD = 32.67$) than female students ($M = 90.90$, $SD = 19.20$). However, the reported difference was not statistically significant. Thus, the study did not establish a significant gender difference in academic cheating among the participants.

This finding can be considered alongside the meta-analysis by Lee et al. (2020), which examined personality, attitudinal, and demographic correlates of academic dishonesty across 75 samples involving more than 27,000 participants. Their findings indicated that academic dishonesty was associated with several individual characteristics, although the strength of these associations varied. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2022), in their meta-analysis of 38 studies involving 24,181 participants, found that perceived peer cheating was more strongly associated with academic dishonesty than several demographic characteristics, including gender. These findings highlight the importance of examining social and contextual factors alongside demographic variables when studying academic cheating.

The slightly higher mean score among male students in the present study may indicate a difference in the reported levels of academic cheating; however, the non-significant result does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that gender groups differ in the wider population. The finding also does not establish that male and female students engage in exactly the same

level or forms of academic dishonesty. Further research with larger samples could examine whether particular forms of cheating vary by gender and whether such differences are influenced by school environment, academic expectations, or peer-group norms.

Overall, the present finding supports an inclusive approach to academic integrity education. Rather than assuming that academic cheating is primarily associated with one gender, schools should promote ethical academic practices among all students.

5.2. Gender Differences in Peer Pressure

The results showed that male students obtained a slightly higher mean peer pressure score (M = 60.92, SD = 15.38) than female students (M = 59.80, SD = 9.38). The reported difference was not statistically significant. Therefore, the study did not establish a significant gender difference in peer pressure among the sampled students.

Although the previous studies considered here do not provide a direct test of gender differences in general peer pressure among higher secondary school students, research on academic dishonesty offers a useful perspective on the social context of students' behaviour. McCabe and Treviño (1993), in a study involving 6,096 students across 31 institutions, reported that academic dishonesty was associated with contextual factors, including cheating among peers and institutional approaches to academic integrity. Their findings suggest that students' academic conduct should be understood in relation to the environment in which they study, rather than solely through individual characteristics.

The present study extends this discussion by examining peer pressure across gender groups in a higher secondary school setting. The absence of a statistically significant difference suggests that the study did not identify evidence that male and female students differed in their overall peer pressure scores. Nevertheless, this result should not be interpreted as proof that both groups experience identical social pressures. The types, sources, and perceived consequences of peer pressure may differ even when overall scores are similar.

The findings indicate that school-based programmes addressing peer influence should involve students of all genders. Teachers and counsellors can help students develop independent decision-making, assertiveness, and ethical judgement. Further studies could examine whether friendship networks, perceived classroom norms, academic competition, and the desire for social acceptance are associated with peer pressure among higher secondary school students.

5.3. Relationship Between Peer Pressure and Academic Cheating

The most important finding of the present study was the statistically significant positive relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating (r = 0.666, N = 100, $p < .01$). This result indicates that students with higher peer pressure scores tended to report higher academic cheating scores. The association was substantial in magnitude and represents the central finding of the study.

This finding is consistent with Zhao et al. (2022), who conducted a meta-analysis of 38 studies comprising 24,181 participants. Their analysis found a positive association between students' academic dishonesty and their perceptions of cheating among peers (r = .37, 95% CI [.35, .39]). The authors identified perceived peer cheating as one of the stronger correlates of academic dishonesty and highlighted the relevance of peer influence and cultural context in understanding cheating behaviour. Although the correlation reported in the present study (r = .666) was stronger than the average association reported by Zhao et al., the two estimates should be compared cautiously because the studies may differ in their samples, instruments, and operational definitions of peer influence.

The present result is also consistent with McCabe and Treviño (1993), who found that cheating among peers was associated with academic dishonesty across the institutions they studied. In a subsequent multicampus investigation, McCabe and Treviño (1997) reported that academic dishonesty was associated with both individual and contextual factors, including the level of cheating among peers and peer disapproval of cheating. Their findings emphasise that the behaviour and expectations of a student's social group may be relevant to academic integrity.

Evidence from a secondary school context is provided by Bassey and Iruoje (2017), who investigated examination-cheating tendencies among 1,200 senior secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria. Their study examined test anxiety, attitude towards schooling, parental influence, and peer pressure. The results indicated that these factors jointly predicted students'

cheating tendencies. Although their study used a different design and examined several predictors together, it supports the relevance of peer pressure when investigating academic dishonesty among secondary school students.

Taken together, these previous studies provide support for the positive association observed in the present research. One possible explanation is that students may be more likely to regard cheating as acceptable when they believe that their peers engage in or approve of such behaviour. The desire to maintain friendship, gain acceptance, or avoid falling behind academically may also be relevant. However, these explanations were not directly tested in the present study and should be treated as possible interpretations rather than established mechanisms.

It is also important to distinguish general peer pressure from perceived peer cheating. The present study examined peer pressure as a broader construct, whereas Zhao et al. (2022) specifically examined perceptions of cheating among peers. The similarity in their results is informative, but the two variables are not identical. Future research could examine perceived peer cheating separately to determine whether it has a distinct relationship with students' academic cheating.

Since the present study used a correlational design, the findings do not establish that peer pressure causes academic cheating. It is possible that peer pressure contributes to dishonest behaviour, that students who cheat tend to associate with peers who behave similarly, or that other factors influence both variables. Nevertheless, the strength of the observed association makes peer-group dynamics an important consideration in academic integrity initiatives.

5.4. Educational Implications of the Findings

The findings, considered alongside previous research, suggest that academic integrity should be addressed through both individual guidance and a supportive school environment. The absence of statistically significant gender differences indicates that interventions should be available to all students, while the positive association between peer pressure and academic cheating highlights the potential value of addressing peer-group norms.

Schools can establish clear expectations regarding examination conduct, plagiarism, assignment completion, and the responsible use of academic resources. Teachers can encourage students to value honest effort and provide appropriate academic support to those experiencing learning difficulties. Peer mentoring and collaborative learning activities may also help students develop positive relationships in which academic assistance is provided without encouraging dishonest practices .

The findings of McCabe and Treviño (1993, 1997) and Zhao et al. (2022) further suggest that peer behaviour and institutional expectations are relevant considerations in understanding academic dishonesty. Accordingly, schools should make academic integrity policies clear, apply them consistently, and encourage students to support rather than undermine one another's learning. Counselling and social-emotional learning activities may help students respond confidently when friends encourage them to cheat.

Parents can also contribute by promoting realistic academic expectations and emphasising learning, responsibility, and honesty rather than marks alone. However, the present study did not directly examine parental influence or intervention effectiveness. These recommendations should therefore be understood as educational implications informed by the findings and previous literature, rather than as interventions whose effectiveness has been demonstrated by this study. The broader educational context also provides useful perspectives for promoting responsible academic behaviour. Tikader (2023) discussed the contribution of emerging technologies to teaching effectiveness

The present study found no statistically significant gender differences in academic cheating or peer pressure among the participating higher secondary school students. In contrast, it identified a substantial positive relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating. The findings broadly align with previous research highlighting the relevance of peer behaviour and contextual influences in understanding academic dishonesty (Bassey & Iruoje, 2017; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; Zhao et al., 2022).

The study contributes context-specific evidence from higher secondary school students in Baripada Town, Odisha. Its findings reinforce the need to consider students' social environments alongside individual characteristics when examining academic integrity. However, the sample was limited to 100 students from two schools, and the correlational design does not establish causality. The results should therefore not be generalised to all higher secondary school students without further evidence. Research involving larger and more diverse samples, qualitative interviews, and additional variables-such as

academic stress, parental expectations, school climate, and perceived peer cheating-could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between peer pressure and academic dishonesty.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined academic cheating and peer pressure among higher secondary school students in Baripada Town, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, with particular reference to gender differences and the relationship between the two variables. The findings revealed that male students obtained slightly higher mean scores than female students in both academic cheating and peer pressure. However, the observed gender differences were not statistically significant, indicating that the study did not establish significant differences between male and female students on either variable.

The major finding was the statistically significant positive relationship between peer pressure and academic cheating (r = 0.666, p < .01). This suggests that students reporting higher levels of peer pressure also tended to report higher levels of academic cheating. The result is broadly consistent with previous research highlighting the relevance of peer-group behaviour and social context in understanding academic dishonesty. Nevertheless, the correlational nature of the study does not establish that peer pressure directly causes academic cheating.

The findings underline the importance of promoting academic integrity through a supportive school environment. Teachers and school authorities should encourage ethical decision-making, responsible peer relationships, independent thinking, and honest academic practices among all students, irrespective of gender. Peer mentoring, guidance and counselling, and clear expectations regarding examination and assignment conduct may help strengthen a culture of academic honesty.

Since the study was limited to 100 students from two higher secondary schools in Baripada Town, its findings should be interpreted within this context. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples across different districts and school types would help determine whether similar patterns are observed in other educational settings. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering peer pressure when examining academic cheating and designing school-based initiatives to promote academic integrity.

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