

**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047****Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025****Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

Breaking the Cycle of Marginalization: From Exclusion to Empowerment in Adolescent Behavioural Challenges and Educational Equity in India's Path to 2047

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Abstract

As India envisions an inclusive and globally competitive future by 2047, addressing the challenges of adolescent education among marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and Tribals, is a national priority. This study examines the role of peer networks in shaping adolescent problem behaviours such as truancy, disengagement, and classroom disruptions in secondary schools across Jharkhand. Grounded in Belongingness Theory, Normative Social Influence Theory, and Comparative Reference Group Theory, the research highlights how caste-based segregation, economic disparities, and social exclusion reinforce negative peer dynamics, contributing to educational marginalization. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and observational data to explore the interplay of socio-economic status, caste hierarchies, and peer influence. Findings reveal that students from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) experience heightened academic disengagement due to exclusionary peer norms and limited parental involvement, exacerbating educational inequalities. The study advocates for peer mentorship programs, psychosocial interventions, and inclusive educational policies to transform peer influence into a catalyst for academic engagement and social mobility. Aligning with India's 2047 development vision, these interventions will be instrumental in fostering equitable access to education, breaking cycles of marginalization, and positioning India as a global leader in social equity and human capital development.

Keywords: *Marginalization, Adolescent Behavior, Educational Equity, Peer Influence, Inclusive Growth.*

Introduction

As India moves toward inclusive growth and global leadership by 2047, ensuring educational equity for marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and Tribals, is crucial. Systemic barriers such as socio-economic disparities, caste hierarchies, and rural-urban divides continue to limit opportunities for academic success and social mobility, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. A key challenge is adolescent problem behavior, including truancy, classroom disengagement, and disruptive conduct, which weakens both individual progress and the broader educational ecosystem. While extensive research on adolescent behavior exists in Western contexts, India's unique socio-cultural landscape

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necessitates a localized approach. In Jharkhand, where Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) students face economic deprivation and caste discrimination, peer networks significantly shape behavioral outcomes. This study, using Geven's (2016) framework on peer influence, examines how peer affiliations impact adolescent behavior in secondary schools. The findings highlight the need for peer mentorship programs, inclusive policies, and psychosocial interventions to transform peer influence into a tool for empowerment. Addressing these challenges is essential for bridging educational gaps and ensuring no section of society is left behind in India's journey toward an equitable and empowered future by 2047.

Background Information

Jharkhand's socio-economic and demographic landscape presents unique educational challenges, where tribal and Dalit students face systemic marginalization due to rural poverty, caste hierarchies, and limited access to quality education. Economic insecurity, caste-based exclusion, and low parental involvement make these students more vulnerable to negative peer influence, often leading to truancy, disengagement, and disruptive behavior, further reinforcing educational marginalization. Research in educational psychology, including Dishion and Patterson's (2006) deviant peer clustering and Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, highlights how peer networks can either support academic engagement or perpetuate exclusion. Applying these frameworks to Jharkhand's context, this study examines how peer influence shapes adolescent behavior and explores policy-driven solutions that align with India's vision for inclusive education and social equity by 2047.

Research Question and Purpose

This study examines how peer networks influence adolescent problem behavior in Jharkhand's secondary schools, particularly among Dalit and Tribal students, who face educational exclusion due to socio-economic deprivation and caste-based segregation. Understanding the role of peer dynamics in shaping truancy, disengagement, and disruptive behavior is essential for ensuring inclusive educational growth, a key pillar of India's Developed India@2047 vision. By analyzing peer interactions within Jharkhand's socio-cultural context, the study aims to inform policy-driven interventions, including peer mentoring programs, equitable education policies, and psychosocial support, ensuring that marginalized students are empowered to fully participate in India's developmental journey.

Significance and Scope

This study highlights the critical role of peer networks in shaping adolescent behavior among Dalit and Tribal students in Jharkhand, emphasizing peer influence over individual or family-based factors in educational outcomes. As India progresses toward Developed India@2047, ensuring inclusive education and mental well-being for marginalized students is essential. By examining socio-economic status, caste identity, and peer interactions, the research provides insights into structural

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inequalities that hinder educational progress. These findings will inform policy interventions, peer mentorship programs, and mental health strategies, contributing to educational equity and social inclusion. Aligning with India's global leadership goals in education, this study offers a localized framework for fostering resilient, engaged youth in a more equitable India.

Literature Review: Understanding Peer Influence and Marginalization in the Context of Developed India@2047

Adolescent problem behavior in schools has been a widely researched topic, particularly regarding the role of peer networks in shaping behaviors such as truancy, disengagement, and classroom disruptions. However, as India advances toward its vision of becoming a globally influential and inclusively developed nation by 2047, it is crucial to examine the impact of peer influence on marginalized communities such as Dalits and Tribals, whose educational experiences are deeply shaped by caste hierarchies and socio-economic disadvantages. This study draws upon foundational theories, including Belongingness Theory, Normative Social Influence Theory, and Comparative Reference Group Theory, to analyze the role of peer networks in either reinforcing or dismantling cycles of educational exclusion among historically marginalized students in Jharkhand.

Theoretical Foundations and Peer Influence in Marginalized Contexts

Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory asserts that individuals have a fundamental need to form social connections. This perspective is particularly relevant in tribal and Dalit communities in Jharkhand, where adolescents often struggle to establish a sense of belonging in educational environments that may not be inclusive or supportive of their identities. When formal school structures fail to integrate marginalized students socially, they turn to peer networks for validation, sometimes reinforcing anti-school behaviors such as truancy and disengagement. This challenge underscores the urgency of India's commitment to inclusive educational policies by 2047, ensuring that students from every background can find belonging within mainstream academic institutions rather than through exclusionary peer networks.

The Normative Social Influence Theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) highlights how individuals conform to behaviors that are socially approved within their peer groups. In Jharkhand's rural schools, where economic distress and caste-based divisions shape student interactions, peer conformity can reinforce disengagement from academics. Many students from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) face social stigmatization, leading them to conform to the behaviors of similarly marginalized peers rather than align with school expectations. This is a critical barrier to India's vision of an equitable knowledge economy by 2047, as sustained exclusion from formal education could limit the upward mobility of entire communities.



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Festinger's (1954) Comparative Reference Group Theory further explains how adolescents evaluate their academic self-worth based on peer comparisons. In Jharkhand, where significant economic and caste disparities exist between students, those from marginalized backgrounds often perceive themselves as academically inferior. This perception can lead to self-imposed withdrawal from academic activities or the adoption of disruptive behaviors as a means of coping with their disadvantaged status. To build a globally competitive India, the education system must break these cycles by ensuring that students from marginalized backgrounds receive the mentorship, encouragement, and institutional support necessary to compete on an equal footing.

Structural Dimensions of Peer Influence and Marginalization

Beyond individual behavioural theories, structural perspectives such as Bourdieu's (1986) Social Capital Theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory provide a macro-level understanding of how societal structures shape adolescent peer behaviors. Bourdieu's concept of social capital emphasizes that peer networks function as either an asset or a barrier to educational success, depending on the socio-economic environment. In under-resourced schools, students may form peer groups that prioritize immediate survival (through child labour or social withdrawal) over long-term educational aspirations, thereby reinforcing intergenerational poverty and exclusion.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory situates adolescent behavior within interconnected layers of social influence, including family, community, and institutional structures. In Jharkhand, the lack of robust educational policies, the persistence of caste-based segregation, and the limited economic security of tribal communities collectively shape peer interactions. If Developed India@2047 is to be realized, education must be restructured to function as a true equalizer, offering marginalized students access to quality resources, mentorship, and interventions that counteract structural disadvantages.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory further explains how adolescents model behaviours observed within their peer groups. In Jharkhand's tribal and Dalit communities, where exclusion from mainstream educational spaces often results in reliance on peer-based norms, adolescents are at risk of internalizing disengagement and resistance toward academic achievement. To ensure that marginalized students are active contributors to India's global intellectual capital by 2047, interventions must be implemented to create positive peer mentorship structures within schools, offering aspirational role models rather than reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

Reframing Peer Influence for an Inclusive Future

The complex interplay of caste, economic status, and peer influence significantly impacts educational outcomes among marginalized students in Jharkhand, reinforcing the urgent need for context-specific interventions. Drawing on Belongingness Theory, Normative Social Influence Theory, and Social Learning Theory, this literature review highlights the structural and psychological barriers that must

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be dismantled to create an equitable education system by 2047. By integrating mentorship programs, inclusive policies, and culturally responsive interventions, India can transform peer networks into assets for learning rather than agents of exclusion, ensuring that no student is left behind in its journey toward global leadership.

Methodology: Research Design and Approach for Inclusive Educational Development in India@2047

To achieve India's vision of inclusive growth and global leadership by 2047, it is essential to understand how peer networks shape the educational experiences of marginalized communities. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine the influence of peer interactions on adolescent behavior in Jharkhand's socio-cultural context. Unlike conventional research that primarily focuses on individual behavioural traits, this study takes a structural and intersectional approach, considering caste-based hierarchies, tribal affiliations, and economic disparities as key determinants of student experiences.

The study builds on Geven's (2016) theoretical framework on adolescent peer influence but introduces context-specific modifications to reflect the unique socio-economic and cultural realities of Jharkhand. By combining structured surveys, semi-structured interviews, and observational data, the research offers a holistic understanding of how peer networks function as both barriers and facilitators to academic engagement among Dalit and Tribal students. The use of mixed methods ensures that the study captures not only quantifiable trends in student behavior but also the lived experiences of marginalized adolescents, providing nuanced insights into the social dynamics that drive educational exclusion and disengagement.

By adopting this multidisciplinary approach, the research aligns with the broader policy goals of Developed India@2047, offering evidence-based recommendations for inclusive educational reforms. The findings will contribute to policy frameworks, teacher training programs, and community-based interventions, ensuring that peer networks are leveraged as a force for academic empowerment rather than exclusion in India's rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Participants and Sampling Method: A Framework for Inclusive Educational Equity in India@2047

To align with India's vision of an inclusive and equitable education system by 2047, this study ensures diverse representation of marginalized communities in its sampling strategy. The sample consists of 400 adolescents aged 12 to 16, drawn from secondary schools in urban, rural, and tribal regions across Jharkhand. Recognizing the intersectionality of caste, economic status, and geography, a stratified random sampling method was employed to capture the differential impact of peer networks on Dalit and Tribal students.



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This methodological inclusivity is crucial in a state like Jharkhand, where caste-based hierarchies, economic deprivation, and rural-urban divides significantly shape educational access and student behavior. Special emphasis was placed on ensuring robust representation from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling the study to highlight the structural factors influencing peer dynamics and adolescent problem behavior. Additionally, both male and female students were included to analyze gender-specific peer influences, acknowledging that socialization patterns, cultural expectations, and access to education differ significantly across genders.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods: A Holistic Approach to Understanding Peer Influence

Data collection was conducted in two phases to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative insights, ensuring a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to educational reform.

1. Phase One: Structured Questionnaires

The quantitative component employed structured questionnaires to measure peer interactions, behavioural tendencies, and socio-economic factors influencing adolescent engagement in school. This data provides a statistical foundation for understanding patterns of educational disengagement, truancy, and classroom disruptions across different socio-economic and caste groups.

2. Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews and Observations

To humanize the statistical findings, the second phase involved semi-structured interviews designed to capture students' lived experiences, emotional responses, and social dynamics within peer networks. This approach ensures that the perspectives of Dalit and Tribal students—who often face exclusion in mainstream educational discourse—are directly incorporated into policy recommendations.

Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to analyze real-time peer interactions, behavioural trends, and teacher-student engagement levels. Observations provided contextual depth, revealing how socio-economic factors, caste affiliations, and school environments shape adolescent behavior.

By integrating quantitative analysis with in-depth qualitative insights, this study ensures that its findings contribute meaningfully to the design of inclusive education policies. The results will serve as a foundation for evidence-based interventions that align with India's 2047 goal of eliminating educational disparities and fostering global leadership through social equity.

Data Analysis: A Multidisciplinary Approach for Inclusive Educational Growth in India@2047

To contribute to India's vision of Developed India@2047, this study employs rigorous quantitative and qualitative analytical methods to generate insights that can shape inclusive educational policies.

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The integration of advanced statistical techniques and thematic qualitative analysis ensures that both numerical patterns and lived experiences of marginalized students are captured, offering a holistic understanding of peer influence on adolescent behavior in Jharkhand.

Quantitative Analysis: Identifying Structural Patterns in Peer Influence

To examine the complex relationships between peer networks, socio-economic background, caste identity, and adolescent behavior, this study employed multivariate regression and structural equation modelling (SEM). These techniques allow for:

- a) Assessing the impact of peer pressure on school engagement and truancy rates.
- b) Determining how economic background and caste identity influence susceptibility to negative peer behaviours.
- c) Exploring gender-specific differences in peer group dynamics and academic disengagement.

This quantitative framework ensures that policy interventions are data-driven, offering evidence-based recommendations to address peer-related barriers to education for Dalit and Tribal students in India's long-term development strategy.

Qualitative Analysis: Understanding Social and Cultural Dynamics in Schools

Beyond statistical correlations, thematic coding was employed to analyze interview transcripts and classroom observations, identifying recurrent themes related to caste-based exclusion, peer influence, and family engagement in education. This approach provided deeper insights into the socio-cultural realities that shape student behavior, ensuring that India's policy responses to educational inequality are informed by the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative insights, this study presents a nuanced, evidence-based framework for addressing adolescent behavioural challenges in Jharkhand. The findings will contribute to the development of inclusive school environments, targeted peer mentorship programs, and policy-driven interventions that align with India's goal of achieving social equity and educational excellence by 2047.

Results: Understanding Peer Influence and Marginalization in India's Educational Transformation by 2047

This study investigates how peer networks shape adolescent problem behaviors in secondary schools across Jharkhand, with a particular focus on Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) students, whose educational experiences are shaped by socio-economic inequalities, caste-based discrimination, and limited institutional support. As India moves toward Developed India@2047, addressing these structural barriers is essential for ensuring inclusive educational growth and equitable learning opportunities.



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The findings, derived from quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, highlight the significant influence of socio-economic background, caste dynamics, and peer group quality on student behavior. The results are visualized through bar diagrams, pie charts, and trend analyses, offering a comprehensive perspective on the structural and peer-related factors influencing adolescent engagement in education.

A: Peer Influence on Problem Behaviours

Quantitative data reveal that economically disadvantaged students show higher rates of truancy (45%) and classroom disengagement than wealthier peers (25%). This aligns with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory, suggesting students seek validation through peer groups, sometimes reinforcing negative behaviours.

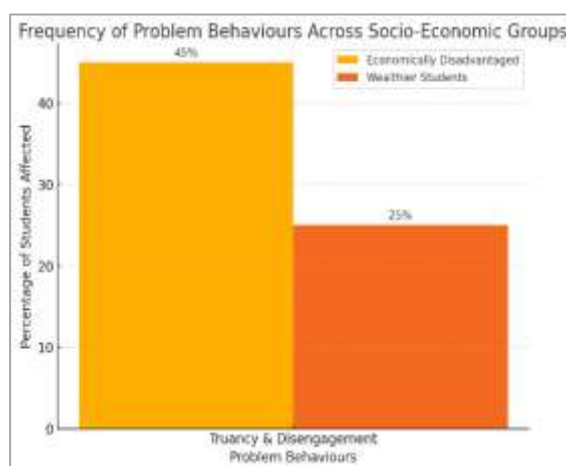


Figure 1: Frequency of Problem Behaviours Across Socio-Economic Groups

Note: The above bar chart illustrates the frequency of problem behaviors (truancy and disengagement) across socio-economic groups. It highlights the significant disparity between economically disadvantaged students (45%) and their wealthier counterparts (25%).

B: Caste-Based Peer Group Dynamics

A pie chart indicates that 60% of friendships are caste-based, with marginalized students reporting higher exposure to negative peer influence. Festinger's Comparative Reference Group Theory (1954) supports this, highlighting how academic self-worth influences resistance behaviors in caste-segregated environments.



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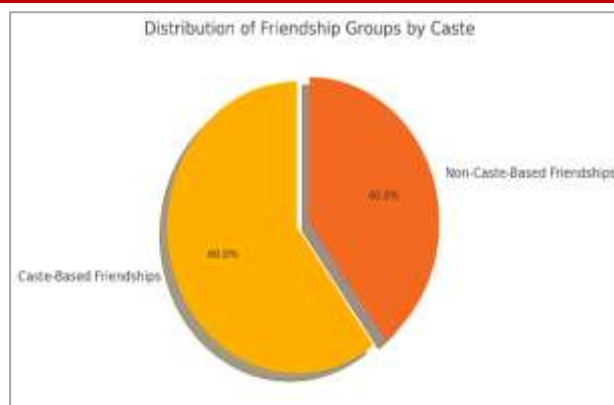


Figure 2: Distribution of Friendship Groups by Caste

Note: The above pie chart illustrates the distribution of friendship groups by caste. The chart emphasizes that 60% of students form their primary friendships along caste lines, highlighting the deep-rooted social divisions in Jharkhand's secondary schools.

C: Gender Differences in Peer Influence

Trend analysis shows rural boys face stronger negative peer pressure, leading to higher rates of absenteeism (50%) compared to girls (20%). Normative Social Influence Theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) explains how peer conformity shapes behavior, reinforcing gendered educational disparities.

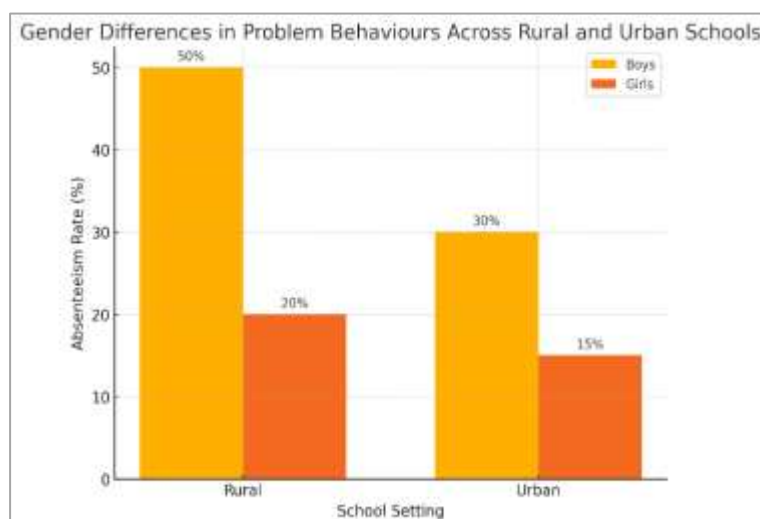


Figure 3: Gender Differences in Problem Behaviours Across Rural and Urban Schools

Note: The above bar chart illustrates gender differences in problem behaviors across rural and urban schools. It highlights that boys, particularly in rural areas, exhibit higher absenteeism rates (50%) compared to girls (20%), emphasizing the gendered disparities in school engagement.



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D: Impact of Peer Group Quality

Students with supportive peer networks exhibit fewer behavioural issues (10%) than those in conflict-driven peer groups (40%). This suggests peer mentorship programs and inclusive learning environments can reduce academic disengagement.

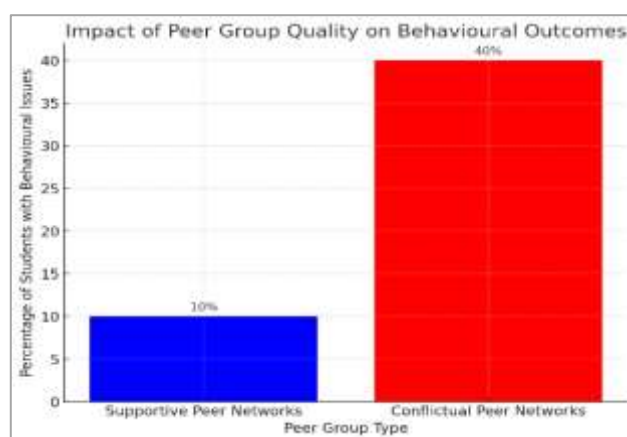


Figure 4: Impact of Peer Group Quality on Behavioural Outcomes

Note: The above bar chart illustrates the impact of peer group quality on behavioral outcomes. The chart shows that students with supportive peer networks exhibit significantly lower behavioral issues (10%), while those in conflictual peer networks experience a much higher incidence of problem behaviors (40%).

E: Socio-Economic Background and Parental Involvement

Students from low-income families with active parental involvement show fewer behavioural problems, while those with minimal parental engagement are at higher risk. Strengthening parental support programs and financial aid initiatives is crucial for mitigating peer-related challenges and ensuring educational equity by 2047.

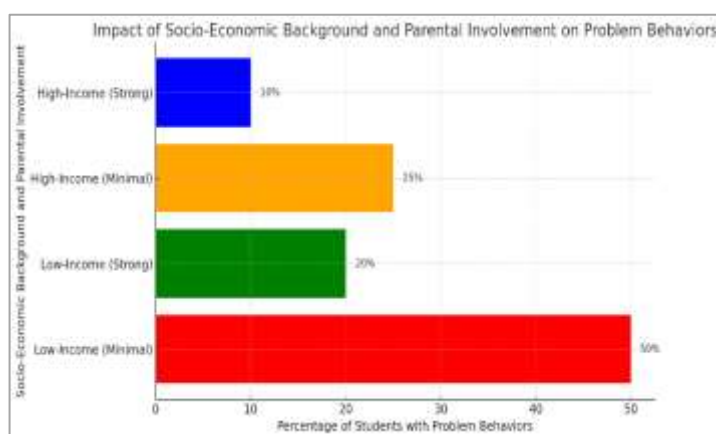


Figure 5: Impact of Socio-Economic Background and Parental Involvement on Problem Behaviours



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Note: The above horizontal bar chart illustrates the impact of socio-economic background and parental involvement on problem behaviors. This design enhances readability by clearly displaying the differences between groups while making comparisons more intuitive.

Implications for India's Educational Growth and Policy Design

This finding underscores the urgent need to integrate family engagement initiatives into India's long-term educational policies, particularly in rural and marginalized communities where socio-economic hardships often limit parental participation. In Dalit, Tribal, and other underprivileged households, economic constraints frequently compel parents to prioritize livelihood concerns over direct involvement in their children's education, inadvertently increasing the likelihood of adolescent disengagement and negative peer conformity.

To bridge this gap and ensure that education remains a pathway for social mobility, policymakers must focus on strengthening school-family partnerships through structured parental engagement programs that are sensitive to economic realities.

Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Parental Involvement

For India to achieve an inclusive and knowledge-driven society by 2047, the following policy interventions should be prioritized:

- a. Community-Based Parental Engagement Programs – Implementing school-led parental workshops in rural and marginalized areas, focusing on low-cost strategies to support adolescent education despite financial constraints.
- b. Flexible Learning Support for Working Parents – Encouraging evening or weekend school interactions, ensuring that parents in labour-intensive jobs have opportunities to engage with teachers and students' academic progress.
- c. Technology-Enabled Parental Monitoring Systems – Leveraging low-cost mobile applications and SMS-based updates to keep parents informed about their children's attendance, academic performance, and behavioural progress.
- d. Parental Incentives for School Involvement – Introducing government-backed financial or food security incentives for families who actively participate in school meetings, mentoring programs, or community-based academic support networks.

Aligning Family Engagement with India's 2047 Vision

By ensuring that socio-economic disadvantages do not hinder parental involvement, India can leverage family support as a powerful tool to break cycles of educational exclusion. Strengthening parent-school collaborations, particularly for Dalit and Tribal communities, will be fundamental in reducing adolescent behavioural issues, increasing school retention rates, and fostering an academically driven youth population.

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These reforms will not only enhance individual student outcomes but also contribute to India's broader goal of human capital development, positioning the country as a global leader in equitable and inclusive education by 2047.

Recommendations Based on Findings: Building an Inclusive and Equitable Education System for India@2047

As India strives to achieve its vision of Developed India@2047, ensuring that peer networks contribute positively to adolescent development is critical for creating an equitable and inclusive education system. The findings from this study provide several key recommendations that can help mitigate the negative impact of peer influence, particularly for students from Dalit, Tribal, and other marginalized backgrounds in Jharkhand.

1. Implementation of Peer Mentoring Programs: Encouraging Positive Social Influence

To counter negative peer dynamics, schools, particularly in rural and tribal areas, should introduce structured peer mentoring programs where older or high-achieving students mentor younger or at-risk students. These programs can:

- a) Foster inclusive peer networks, breaking caste-based social divisions and promoting academic engagement.
- b) Encourage pro-social behaviours, reducing disruptive classroom actions.
- c) Empower marginalized students by providing positive role models who reinforce aspirations for higher education and career growth.

Peer mentorship programs should be institutionalized at the policy level, ensuring that they are implemented at scale to benefit students across the country.

2. Establishment of Psychosocial Support Systems in Schools

To address the emotional and psychological distress associated with caste-based exclusion, economic hardship, and peer pressure, schools should:

- a) Create structured counselling services that provide individual and group therapy sessions for students experiencing peer-induced stress and disengagement.
- b) Develop peer support groups that encourage emotional expression, helping students find social validation in positive ways rather than through negative peer conformity.
- c) Train teachers in social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies, ensuring that they can identify students struggling with peer-related challenges and provide necessary interventions.

Such initiatives will help build resilience in marginalized students, equipping them with the skills to navigate adverse peer environments while staying engaged in school.



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3. Enhancing Parental Involvement Programs in Marginalized Communities

Parental involvement has been found to mitigate the effects of negative peer influence, particularly for students from low-income and marginalized backgrounds. To ensure greater family engagement in education, schools should:

- a) Organize parental workshops to educate families on the importance of active participation in their children's academic life.
- b) Introduce flexible parent-teacher interaction models, such as evening or community-based meetings, to accommodate working parents who struggle to attend traditional school functions.
- c) Leverage digital tools (e.g., SMS-based school updates, mobile parent portals) to help parents track their child's progress even when direct school visits are not feasible.

By bridging the communication gap between schools and families, these interventions will reinforce a culture of academic accountability at home, reducing the likelihood of students succumbing to negative peer pressures.

Aligning Interventions with India's 2047 Educational Goals

By implementing these peer, psychological, and family-centered interventions, India can foster a healthier and more inclusive academic environment. These efforts will be instrumental in reducing dropout rates, increasing school retention, and ensuring that marginalized students—particularly from Dalit and Tribal backgrounds—can contribute to India's growth as a global knowledge hub by 2047.

A strong peer support system, robust mental health services, and active parental engagement will not only address adolescent behavioural challenges but also create a future where every child in India, regardless of caste or economic background, has the opportunity to thrive.

Discussion and Interpretation of Results: Addressing Peer Influence for an Inclusive India@2047

The findings from this study highlight the critical role of peer networks in shaping adolescent behavior in secondary schools across Jharkhand, particularly among Dalit, Tribal, and other marginalized students. As India moves toward its 2047 vision of inclusive and equitable development, understanding the interplay between socio-economic status, caste identity, and peer dynamics is essential for breaking cycles of educational exclusion and fostering academic engagement among historically disadvantaged communities.

Understanding Social Belonging and Behavioural Disengagement

This study's results align with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory, demonstrating that adolescents from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds and lower castes exhibit higher rates of truancy, classroom disruptions, and disengagement. A lack of social belonging and

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institutional support often compels students to seek validation through peer groups that reinforce negative behaviours. This mirrors existing global research, where social exclusion increases the risk of behavioural maladjustment and academic withdrawal.

To ensure that India's educational policies promote social integration and reduce peer-driven disengagement, targeted interventions are needed to create inclusive school environments where all students—regardless of caste or economic background—can form positive peer relationships that support academic achievement.

Peer Conformity and Gendered Behavior Patterns

The findings also align with Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) Normative Social Influence Theory, which explains how peer conformity shapes adolescent behaviours. The results indicate that male students in rural areas are particularly susceptible to negative peer norms, often due to weak parental supervision, socio-cultural expectations, and economic pressures that deprioritize formal education for boys. As a result, higher instances of truancy, classroom disengagement, and behavioural disruptions were recorded among boys in this study.

Addressing peer-driven behavioural patterns among male students requires stronger community engagement strategies that reinforce positive role models, peer mentorship programs, and parental involvement in education. By promoting positive peer influence and strengthening socio-emotional learning, India can ensure that adolescent boys in marginalized regions do not succumb to disruptive behaviours that hinder their educational and social mobility.

The Role of Perceived Inferiority in Academic Disengagement

This study also supports Festinger's (1954) Comparative Reference Group Theory, which suggests that students evaluate their academic self-worth by comparing themselves to their peers. The findings reveal that students from marginalized castes and economically disadvantaged backgrounds perceive themselves as academically inferior compared to their privileged peers, increasing self-doubt, disengagement, and resistance to school participation.

In the context of Developed India@2047, this underscores the urgent need for targeted educational interventions that:

- a) Provide academic support for Dalit and Tribal students through mentorship, remedial education, and leadership programs.
- b) Challenge social hierarchies in schools by fostering inclusive learning environments that dismantle caste-based peer divisions.
- c) Strengthen economic support mechanisms to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not perceive financial hardship as a determinant of academic failure.



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Building an Equitable Educational Future for India

The results of this study demonstrate the deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers that continue to shape adolescent behavior in India's marginalized communities. If India is to fulfil its 2047 vision, peer networks must be transformed from risk factors into protective mechanisms. By institutionalizing inclusive education policies, enhancing parental engagement, and fostering peer mentorship programs, India can ensure that every student—regardless of caste, gender, or socio-economic status—has an equal opportunity to succeed.

These findings reinforce the need for long-term, policy-driven approaches that prioritize educational equity, social inclusion, and sustainable peer interventions, ensuring that India's progress is not limited to economic growth but extends to the empowerment of its most vulnerable youth populations.

Implications: Transforming Education for an Inclusive India@2047

The findings of this study carry profound implications for educational policy and practice in Jharkhand and across India, reinforcing the urgent need for inclusive, peer-driven interventions to support adolescent development. As India strives to position itself as a global leader in education by 2047, the creation of equitable, inclusive school environments that empower marginalized students—particularly those from Dalit, Tribal, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds—is essential for breaking cycles of social exclusion and academic disengagement.

To counteract the negative impact of peer influence, schools must institutionalize structured peer mentoring programs and psychosocial support systems to foster healthy social relationships and positive role modelling. These interventions should specifically target marginalized communities, offering alternative, constructive peer networks that reinforce academic engagement rather than disengagement.

Additionally, parental involvement in education must be strengthened, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, as family engagement has been shown to mitigate negative peer influence. The promotion of a supportive school ecosystem, where teachers, families, and communities work together to reinforce educational aspirations, will be crucial to improving adolescent mental well-being and long-term academic outcomes, particularly in rural and tribal regions.

Limitations: Areas for Further Investigation

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of peer influence on adolescent behavior, there are certain limitations that must be acknowledged:

- a) **Sample Diversity Constraints** – Although the sample includes various socio-economic and caste groups, it may not fully capture the diverse regional variations within Jharkhand, particularly between tribal, rural, and urban populations. Future research should expand sample size and geographic coverage to ensure a more comprehensive representation of marginalized communities.



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- b) Reliance on Self-Reported Data – Given the use of self-reported surveys and interviews, there is a possibility of response bias, where students may underreport or overreport their experiences due to social desirability concerns. Future studies should integrate longitudinal observational methods and teacher reports to validate findings.
- c) Exclusion of Broader Structural Factors – This study primarily focused on peer networks, without fully accounting for structural variables such as school infrastructure, teacher quality, and community-level socio-economic influences, all of which significantly shape adolescent behavior. Future research should adopt a multilevel approach that considers institutional and systemic barriers alongside peer dynamics.

Conclusion: Building a Resilient and Inclusive Education System

This study explored the impact of peer networks on adolescent problem behaviours in secondary schools across Jharkhand, revealing how socio-economic background, caste, and gender shape student relationships, engagement, and behavioural outcomes. The findings indicate that students from marginalized communities, particularly those lacking strong peer support and parental involvement, are more prone to academic disengagement and behavioral challenges, as supported by Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belongingness Theory and Festinger's (1954) Comparative Reference Group Theory. Additionally, boys in rural areas were found to be more susceptible to negative peer conformity, exacerbating behavioural issues, in line with Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) Normative Social Influence Theory.

To ensure that India's educational framework aligns with its 2047 vision of inclusive growth and global leadership, immediate interventions are required to foster inclusive peer networks, strengthen parental engagement, and provide psychosocial support for students in marginalized communities. By leveraging peer mentorship, enhancing community involvement, and addressing socio-economic barriers, policymakers and educators can create an education system that empowers all students, regardless of caste or economic background.

Future Directions: Research and Policy Innovations for 2047

To further build on these findings and enhance India's commitment to inclusive education, future research should:

- a) Expand Sample Diversity – Conduct studies that cover a wider range of schools across Jharkhand and other states to ensure findings are applicable to diverse socio-cultural contexts.
- b) Examine Broader Socio-Economic Factors – Investigate how school infrastructure, teacher quality, and economic policies interact with peer dynamics to shape adolescent behavior.
- c) Evaluate Intervention Effectiveness – Implement and assess the impact of peer mentoring programs, inclusive school policies, and family engagement initiatives to generate data-driven policy recommendations for India's education system.



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By addressing these future research priorities, India can develop a world-class, socially inclusive education model, ensuring that all students—especially those from marginalized backgrounds—are equipped with the skills, support, and opportunities necessary to contribute to India's global leadership by 2047.

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