Journal of Pastoral and Practical Theology
[ISSN 2957-6482]
Volume: 05 Issue: 01 | October-2026
JPPT

Analysis of Christian Union Students' Perceptions of Peer Pressure as a Factor Influencing Cultism in Public Universities in Kenya

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Cite this article in APA
Siwa, J.O. (2026). Analysis of Christian Union students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. *Journal of pastoral and practical theology, volume 5*(1), 180-195. https://doi.org/10.51317/yvqe5a02

A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history
Received: 2026-08-20
Accepted: 2026-09-26
Published: 2026-10-26

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Abstract
This study analysed Christian Union (CU) students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. Although researches have been carried out regarding the factors influencing cultism in institutions of higher learning, on the Kenyan scene, there was need for a study of the Christian Union students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design guided by Bounded Choice Theory. The study was conducted in six selected public universities where cases of cultism have been reported. The target population comprised 55,600 CU students in Kenyan public universities, while the accessible population consisted of 10,900 CU students from the six selected universities. A sample of 220 CU students was selected using simple random and stratified sampling techniques. Of these, 193 responded, yielding an 88 per cent response rate. Additionally, 60 small-group Bible study leaders and six CU patrons were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interview schedules. The findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between peer pressure and the prevalence of cultism ($r = 0.612$, $p < .05$), suggesting that peers can influence students' recruitment into cult groups. The study recommends equipping new students with practical skills to recognise, resist, and manage peer pressure during university orientation to reduce their vulnerability to cult recruitment.

Key terms: Christian union students, cultism, perceptions, peer pressure, public university.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study analysed Christian Union (CU) students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. Although researches have been carried out regarding the factors influencing cultism in institutions of higher learning, on the Kenyan scene, there was need for a study of the Christian Union students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. Christian Union Students in this study refer to undergraduate students pursuing various degree programs who are members of the Christian Union, which is a registered interdenominational association of Christian students, and are affiliated to the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS Kenya), and members of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES).

The term cult has been used in this study to refer to any group or movement that excludes itself from mainline faith as taught in the Bible to foster new doctrines and group practices after the teaching of the founder. Kigame (2018) and Lalich (2017) posit that a cult describes a bounded movement committed to a charismatic leader who upholds a transcendent ideology and demands total commitment from members; such commitment is enforced through systems of control and systems of influence. In this study, therefore, the term cult is used to refer to campus-based new religious, pseudo-religious, or non-religious charismatic minority movements whose spiritual devotion, beliefs, spirituality and practices are considered binding on members but repugnant to biblical teaching and social order**.**

Cultism refers to the practice of secret rituals by associations whose membership, admission, policy, initiation, and mode of operation are secret and negatively affect both members and nonmembers. **(**Ajayi, et al.2010). Aniekpeno (2017) posits that cultism refers to the practice of activities linked to organisations whose membership and ways of operation are secret and reserved exclusively for members, who pledge their loyalty under oath to support and carry out the activities of the group. In this study, cultism refers to the recruitment, involvement, participation, commitment to or spiritual devotion in campus-based new religious, pseudo-religious, or non-religious charismatic minority movements whose beliefs, rituals, and practices are binding on members, but are considered repugnant to Biblical teaching**.**

Occultism, on the other hand, refers to hidden interest or practice beyond the natural human senses, such as witchcraft, and esoteric or mystical practices aimed at attaining personal power, including fortune-telling, divination, spiritism, magic and demonic forces. In this study, occultism is referred to only in the sense of shared components of secrecy and overt rituals related to cultism, and the terms cult and occult are not used interchangeably.

Peer pressure refers to the social influence students can have on each other due to the desire for acceptance, inclusion, and recognition among their age group and acquaintances. Peer pressure, according to Mutiu et al. (2015), is the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging individuals to change their attitudes and values to conform to group norms. Peer pressure thus can be rendered as what one's own age urges them to do to fit in with agemates. Peer pressure is therefore discussed herein as that social influence by friends, comrades and acquaintances on Campus due to the desire for acceptance, inclusion, and recognition. It thus explains social systems of influence and systems of

control (Lalich, 2004) used in cultism to gain control of recruits and to retain members in cults through the use of peers to modify their thinking concerning the cult details.

Cultism has been reported among undergraduate students worldwide, as Pager (2019) reports concerning the death and other atrocities of university students due to fraternity recruitment rituals and cult hazing at the University of Buffalo, where it is reported that one in every ten undergraduate students participated in cultic groups. Stack **(**2019) further reported that at Louisiana State University, a student was found guilty of homicide and jailed for five years and expelled from the University for involvement in the hazing death of a recruit during an initiation ritual.

A study by Smah (2001), in Universities in the Middle Belt Zone in Nigeria, revealed that 67.9 per cent of the students were aware of the existence of certain cult-related organisations on Campus, whereas a typical campus of Universities in Nigeria could have as many as 40 cult groups. 69.63 per cent of the students indicated that cult groups operated violently.

Hassan (2020) posits that cult leaders and recruiters capture the hearts, minds, and souls of the best and brightest students who are active, productive, intelligent, energetic individuals who would be useful for the cult in fundraising, recruitment of other followers, running cult-owned businesses, and even facilitating cult-related seminars. Studies have revealed that cults approach fresh students upon their admission when they are most vulnerable, Ross (2014) concurs with the above author that cults target new students struggling to adjust to the Campus at the start of their college careers, away from family support and friends. The cultic groups take advantage of their transitional dilemma, and as Wangeri et al. (2012) found, the new environment of the university can overwhelm new students because most of them have unexplained fears and reservations about the university.

In the United Kingdom, Wallis (2003) found that Manchester University Students' Union warned of cult recruitment and activities of the International Christian Church (ICC), which had been banned on campuses in London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Manchester, due to its teaching that non-members were doomed and for requiring members to recruit their friends as proof of their own commitment to the group. Similarly, cultism has been considered a crisis in Nigerian Universities (Omebe & Omobe, 2015). Tete (2020) similarly opined that cults are a menace in universities and further argued that cults practice in secrecy because they are proscribed as illegal and criminal. Ajitoni and Olaniyan (2018) agree with Tete that cultism hinders effective teaching and learning due to violence, chaos and lawlessness.

The menace of cultism in public universities in Kenya reflects a serious contemporary challenge in Kenyan society, as evidenced by the report of the ad hoc committee of the Senate, which was set up to investigate the proliferation of religious organisations and the circumstances leading to the deaths of over four hundred and twenty-nine (429) people, including 190 children in Shakahola, Kilifi County (Kenya Senate, October 2023). Furthermore, according to the Kenya National Assembly official record, Hansard (2000), the challenge of cultism attracted the attention of the Kenyan Parliament in the year 2000 when a Member of Parliament for Budalangi sought the attention of Parliament on the matter of cultism concerning bizarre killings in the constituency in which three people had been murdered on suspicion of religious cultism, and the MP asked the minister to investigate and expose the people

who were practising cultism in the area. Furthermore, Ombati (2019) reported that a Nigerian pastor operating in Kenya was among the people who were questioned over the spread of cultism in Nairobi for luring vulnerable Kenyans into cultism alongside ten other foreigners whose churches had apparently been leading some members into dangerous cult practices. The government had deported at least 20 other foreigners, who had obtained work permits to work as clerics but were also linked to cult practices.

The above being the case, and peer pressure having been identified by scholars as a factor contributing to cultism, it became necessary to establish the Christian Union students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya.

Although research has been carried out regarding the factors influencing cultism in institutions of higher learning, on the Kenyan scene, there was a need for a study of the Christian Union students' perceptions of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. This is because cults have been reported targeting Christian students for recruitment and initiation. There is evidence of a high and increasing number of university students being lured and recruited into cultism. A survey done by the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS Kenya 2020) reported that cultism was a major challenge facing university students. An earlier report by the Christian Union leaders during a National Students Executive Committee (NASEC) further decried the mushrooming of cultic groups in Kenyan Universities (FOCUS Kenya 2019). The reports further indicated that engagement in cultism had resulted in students losing their productivity, abandoning their studies, failing their examinations, engaging in crimes, committing suicide, withdrawing from friends and family, engaging in drugs and substance abuse, and other immoral behaviours, thus becoming a nuisance in the universities. This has been attributed to several factors, among them peer pressure, as Wallis (2007) asserts, and to a growing number of cult groups recruiting on university campuses, hoping to catch young people at the most vulnerable time of their lives when away from home for the first time, lonely or looking for friendship, especially among their peers.

Furthermore, the Kenya Police Service (2018) reported an emerging cult, namely Young Blud Saints, operating within Nairobi that had targeted students in Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Technical University of Kenya, among others. This study attempted to establish the Christian Union students' perception of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Cult recruitment is pyramidal and happens in phases. More than two-thirds of people who get into a cult are either recruited by a friend, a family member, or a co-worker, and it is difficult to reject such advances (Lalich, 2019). Lalich further opines that internal peer pressure is critical in understanding cultism, arguing that people, after a certain age, tend to heed what friends or mates do and do not want to let them down. Lalich adds that in cults, people are always reporting on each other, causing conformity with rules and norms through many other cunning ways. Cherono (2019) revealed that several students had been introduced to cults by their peers. Peer group has been reported as a significant factor in university students' involvement in cultism. Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015) concur with Cherono that most students joined various cult groups due to peer group influence and

pressure. Peer group influences and pressures are the main factors that make students join campus cults (Ejike, 2015). Mediayanose (2016) concurs with Ejike that most students joined various cult groups due to peer group influence or pressure, adding that students who became cultists due to this factor did so to avoid being considered weak and to protect their image among their friends who were cultists.

Ufuoma (2007), in a study, found that one of the causes of campus cultism included the desire to belong to a peer group, further stating that peer groups' influence is a strong force that compels students to join secret cults, and adding that the period of adolescence is marked by intense social relationships in any environment they find themselves in. This agrees with Ibeh (2005), who asserts that at this age, emphasis is laid on social relationships shifting from parents to peers as the youth break away from dependence and contact with parents, thus shifting their reliance to the newly acquired group on Campus, which they embrace. In related studies, Akinfolarin (2003) and Omoegun and Akanle (2007) concur that peer group influence is one of the factors leading students into cultism. Ajayi et al. (2010) and Nimenibo et al. (2020), in their studies, established that peer group influence compels young undergraduates to join secret cults.

Peer group is critical in socialising the individual, though not always beneficial, especially in cases such as cultism where values propagated contradict those previously taught (Eguavoen, 2008). In the Bible, the apostle Paul cautioned that bad company corrupts good morals, as written in 1 Corinthians 15:33, indicating that not all company is beneficial. Ongong'a and Akaranga (2013) found that students are attracted to cults due to their desire not to be undermined by their acquaintances; thus, some students also become cultists because their friends are members. Lalich (2017) concurs with the above authors and asserts that peer pressure has an immense influence on people. Lalich further gives an example of a cultic group called Nexium (NXIVM), which was a self-improvement cult that recruited a lot of young women, thousands of whom took their courses, thus making people think it was okay since their friends had done it and added that peer pressure and being convinced by someone trusted were factors in drawing people into cultism.

Foster et.al. (2003) assert that cults confine people in one place long enough to apply sufficient persuasion to cause them to convert; they use social and peer pressure to keep the recruits longer, while individual relationships may also be used to build one-to-one relationships, which may even be romantic or may just be based on apparent friendship. Cults exclude contrary influence using persuasive arguments. Cults also use social confirmation because everyone else confirms the core message, and contrary thinking is punished as a means of persuasion. In concurrence with this view, Lifton (2012) posits that cults isolate recruits from familiar environments and associations, encapsulate or cocoon them or cut them off, then indoctrinate them using peer influence techniques that limit critical thinking.

On the contrary, Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015) posit that students are socialised into cultism by adults they look up to and imitate as mentors and models in society. The authors further argue that highly respected personalities in society who are cult members give cover to student cultists, while cultists who occupy prominent positions in society encourage the young ones to participate in cultism. Mediayanose (2016) adds that influential people, such as university faculty, staff, and other prominent

members of society, are known to belong to secret cults and often serve as mentors to these young cult members and socialise them into cultism. The author further posits that some students join a cult because certain lecturers and administrators are members of secret cults. Ogidefa (2014) agrees that 'godfatherism' is a strong influence, together with status imitation and authorities' patronage by lecturers who are members or patrons and available to assist the student "members to pass their examinations, even to the extent of influencing other lecturers to pass those members who fail their subjects.

The above authors have discussed the socialisation into cultism through what Lalich (2004) has referred to as systems of influence through peer pressure used effectively by cultists both to recruit and to retain members. The Bounded choice theory is applicable in the sense that it explains the systems of influence and the system of control used to catch and keep their members. It is the peers who paint a promising image of the cult to endear it to their friends and colleagues. To be able to capture the feelings and opinions of university students, this study built on this finding and sought to establish the Christian Union students' perception of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. This study therefore provides an insider perspective by investigating the Christian Union students' perception of peer pressure, which researchers have reported as a major factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. The reports would be incomplete without the input of the Christian Union students since they have been reported as a primary target for cult recruitment.

Theoretical Framework

This study falls within the purview of practical theology, which bridges the gap between theological study and real-world practice, addressing itself to situations and contexts both within the church and in society (Osmer, 2008). Smith (2010) posits that Practical theology is an effort to understand and evaluate how faith is lived out in various contexts, by providing insights to inform both practice and theological reflection. This therefore requires an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for a succinct study of the subject herein. Whereas several theories attempt to explain elements such as voluntary engagement and religious freedom of choice, they have not sufficiently explained the systems of influence and systems of control applied in pressure groups such as cults in the way in which Lalich (2004) bounded choice theory does.

Bounded Choice Theory

This study established that the Bounded Choice Theory, which was developed by Lalich (2004), was more inclusive because it blends several interdisciplinary dimensions for assessment of the perceptions of Christian Union students on peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public universities in Kenya. Bounded Choice Theory is a Socio-psychological theory developed by Lalich (2004) to interpret the behaviour of true believers in a closed, charismatic context was developed by Lalich (2004) as a model that can be used to examine and analyse cults or high-demand groups. The theory explains the seemingly irrational behaviour of the most dedicated adherents, and attempts to consider individual choice within the context of an authoritarian, transcendent, and closed group. As the social dynamic closes in on itself, adherents find themselves living within a bounded reality whose parameters are enclosed and defined by the 'self-sealing system'. The theory posits that once people join cultic

groups, they may cease to socialise with anyone outside the cultic group and become locked in or bounded. They become irrational in their thoughts, and it becomes difficult for them to exit the group.

The bounded choice theory was applicable in this study because it is pegged on four main propositions: firstly, that the charismatic leader is the originator of the group who is charming and manipulative; secondly, cults have a transcendent belief system which is a means to get to some better place and a recipe for change through a transformational process dictated to the adherents through an indoctrination program; thirdly, that cults use systems of control through rituals or study sessions to lock one in so that they adopt a new worldview and new behaviours requiring one to cut off from the past. The members are then controlled through stringent rules and regulations, and fourthly, cults use systems of influence through peer pressure where older members model for the new members how they are supposed to behave such that before they know it, they are enveloped in a new exclusive reality. From that moment on, Lalich (2004) asserts that the adherent is not open to any other explanations, and the mind has completely closed in and is glued to this new worldview as their only hope. The bounded choice theory was thus used to study the Christian Union students' perception of peer pressure as a factor influencing cultism in public Universities in Kenya.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-method research design to examine Christian Union students' perceptions of the influence of peer pressure on cultism in public universities in Kenya. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Validity was established through expert judgment by two scholars and academic supervisors, peer validation, and piloting to improve the clarity and relevance of the research instruments. Reliability was tested through a pilot study at the University of Nairobi, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.833, which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70.

The study was conducted in six public universities: Kenyatta University, JKUAT, Moi University, Egerton University, Maseno University, and Chuka University. The target population comprised 55,600 Christian Union students, while the accessible population was 10,900. The study focused on CU students because they represent an evangelical student fellowship and have been identified as a major target for cult recruiters, making them well positioned to assess how peer pressure influences students' vulnerability to cultism. A sample of 220 students was selected using simple and stratified random sampling. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select six Christian Union patrons and 60 small-group Bible study leaders.

Data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires with a four-point Likert scale, interview guides, and FGDs. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and Pearson correlation with SPSS version 26.0. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated with quantitative findings.

Ethical considerations included obtaining approval from Kabarak University Research Ethics Committee (KUREC) and a research permit from NACOSTI. Relevant authorities granted permission for data

collection. Informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were maintained, and the information collected was used strictly for academic purposes.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Factor Loading for Peer Pressure

Factor loadings in principal components and factor analysis refer to the correlation between the original and the underlying latent variables or factors. Essentially, factor loadings show how much each variable 'loads onto' a specific factor. This means that factor loadings allow us to understand which variables are most closely associated with a particular factor. Subsequent tables illustrate the factor loadings for peer pressure.

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix for Peer Pressure

Rotated Component Matrix	Factor loading
Students are attracted to cultism because some lecturers belong to secret cults and act as their godfathers or guardians	.806
Students are socialised into cultism by the adults they look up to and emulate in society as their heroes and models	.757
Students receive cult introduction from their peers and friends	.576
Students join cult groups to avoid being considered weaklings by their peers who belong to cults	.743
Students join cult groups to safeguard their identity among their cult friends and to fit in	.495
Students are vulnerable to entering cultism because of the transition and changing social interaction from parents to peers on Campus	.613
Youth consider membership in underground cults to be a symbol of pride	.742
Comrade peer pressure persuades young people and students that entering cultism is good	.631
Some students have become cultists because their mates are part of the cult community, and they look happier	.706
Peer group members and friends who are in cults are very persuasive in recruiting	.671
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.	
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.	

The findings indicate that the item “Students are attracted to cultism because some lecturers belong to secret cults and act as their godfathers or guardians” loaded with the highest coefficient of 0.806. Furthermore, four items were within the same measurement domain (0.7 *coefficients*). These include "Students are socialised into cultism by the adults they look up to and emulate in society as their heroes and models (0.757); "Students join cult groups to avoid being considered weaklings by their peers who belong to cults (0.743); "Youth consider membership in underground cult to be a symbol of

pride (0.742); "Some students have become cultists because their mates are part of the cult community, and they look happier (0.706)."

Furthermore, *three* items were within the same measurement domain (*0.6 coefficients*). The items include: "Students are vulnerable to entering cultism because of the transition and changing social interaction from parents to peers on campus " (0.613); "Comrade peer pressure persuades young people and students that entering cultism is good (0.631); "Peer group members and friends who are in cults are very persuasive in recruiting (0.671). Finally, the item with the least factor loading was "Students joined cult groups to safeguard their identity among their cult friends and to fit in" with a loading coefficient of 0.495. Principally, all the items surpassed the loading threshold of 0.3 and were retained for further analysis.

Peer Pressure and Cultism

The objective of this study was to examine the Christian Union students' perception of the influence of peer pressure on cultism in public universities in Kenya. Table 2 displays the results of the descriptive analysis. Percentages, means, and standard deviations were used. Additionally, a four-point Likert scale was used to measure the variables.

Table 2: Peer Pressure and Cultism

Statement	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD
Students are attracted to cultism because some lecturers belong to secret cults and act as their godfathers or guardians	8%	38%	42%	11%	2.57	0.79
Students are socialised into cultism by the adults they look up to and emulate in society as their heroes and models	3%	10%	60%	27%	3.10	0.69
Students receive cult introduction from their peers and friends	7%	12%	52%	28%	3.01	0.83
Students join cult groups to avoid being considered weaklings by their peers who belong to cults	3%	21%	57%	20%	2.93	0.71
Students join cult groups to safeguard their identity among their cult friends and to fit in	3%	17%	58%	23%	3.01	0.70
Students are vulnerable to entering cultism because of the transition and changing social interaction from parents to peers on Campus	4%	13%	53%	29%	3.07	0.76
Youth consider membership in underground cults to be a symbol of pride	2%	19%	42%	37%	3.15	0.77
Comrade peer pressure persuades young people and students that entering cultism is good	2%	18%	58%	23%	3.01	0.69
Some students have become cultists because their mates are part of the cult community, and they look happier	2%	13%	58%	26%	3.08	0.69
Peer group members and friends who are in cults are very persuasive in recruiting	5%	15%	50%	30%	3.04	0.80
Peer Pressure Mean Index					3.00	0.40

The findings in Table 2 above indicated that the older generations serve as mentors and models to the younger ones, and any doctrine they spread is easily transmitted to the younger generations. It was established from the finding that 53 per cent supported the statement that students were attracted to cultism because some lecturers belong to secret cults and acted as their godfathers (*Mean* =2.57; *SD*=0.79). It was, however, noted that 47 per cent of the participants disagreed with the statement, expressing a contrary view regarding the influence of lecturers in recruitment to cults. This negates the position expressed by scholars such as Mediayanose (2016), Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015), and Ogidefa (2014), who held the view that the lecturers played a central role in cult recruitment in Nigerian universities. This implies that the Kenyan student scene was slightly different in its perception of the role of university faculty in the prevalence of cultism.

Furthermore, 87 per cent of the participants reiterated that students are socialised into cultism by the adults they look up to and emulate in society as their heroes and models (*Mean* =3.10; *SD*=0.69). This suggests that those in positions of authority who are constantly sought for advice are quick to promulgate any new ideology connected to cultism, which can have adverse effects on the masses. This result is consistent with that of Lalich (2017), who notes that cult recruiting is hierarchical and occurs in stages, adding that more than two-thirds of people who join cults are either recruited by friends, family, or coworkers, and it can be challenging to turn down such attempts. Lalich further stated that internal peer pressure is essential in advancing cultism, contending that individuals beyond a certain age tend to take their friends' or partners' actions into consideration and do not want to disappoint them.

The patrons agreed that students are carried away by some errant lecturers who are viewed as role models and pace setters. They indicated that it was very possible for senior staff who are involved in cultism to recruit students. He indicated that by virtue of seniority, the students are attracted and value their opinions as true. Some lecturers who are members of cultic groups influence their students to join cultism by even assisting them to register.

The recruitment of university students into cults was observed to be significantly influenced by peer groups. In this research, 80 per cent of the participants cited that students receive cult introductions from their peers and friends (*Mean* =3.01; *SD*=0.83). Introduction to cultism is largely influenced by mates, as 84 per cent of those who affirmed that some students have become cultists because their mates are part of the cult community, and they look happier (*Mean* =3.08; *SD*=0.69). This finding is in line with Cherono (2019), who found that numerous students had been exposed to cults through their friends. The peer group has been cited as a key contributor to university students' cult membership. Because of the influence and pressure from their peers, most students joined numerous cults.

The interviews established that recruitment by peers is quite efficient due to common interests. This is thus responsible for the vast spread and growth of cults in the university. They affirmed that:

Cults have a structured introduction, and their referrals to higher levels are made by peers for the inquisitive ones. Friends, peers, and classmates can be used to lure them in with testimonies of how successful and fulfilled the groups are, making them feel good. They make you feel at home and can

buy you food. The "Food, Fun & Fellowship" movement. Also, students grow and learn from each other.

The influence of peer groups is a powerful element that pushes students to join secret cults. Considering this development, 77 per cent of the participants agreed that students join cults in order to avoid being viewed negatively by their cult-affiliated peers. In a similar vein, 81 per cent of respondents claimed that students joined cults to fit in and maintain their identity amongst their cult peers. The findings support the assertion by Mediayanose (2016) that the majority of learners join cults as a result of peer pressure or influence. The author further notes that students who join cults for this reason do so to prevent themselves from being perceived as weak and to uphold their reputation among their fellow cult members.

The patrons interviewed reiterated that:

Comradeship is a strong word and philosophy. Comrades cannot go wrong is a mantra that strengthens cults on Campus. A combination of comrade mantra and peer pressure influence is a strong force. They further posited that they join cultic groups to safeguard their identity with cultic friends; they even know each other by how they dress, and they try to safeguard their identity.

The patrons also pointed out that there exists a relationship between cultism, sex, drugs and substance abuse. Finally, they posited that:

Peers who look attractive yet are members of cults become marketers for the cults. The peers ask each other, for example, what is your new tongue identity, and they then exchange notes, short messages and WhatsApp messages in tongues.

The respondents expressed that the main reason why students join cults is that they are exposed to completely novel social dynamics. The study's findings revealed that 82 per cent of respondents believed that many students were at risk of joining cults because of the shift in social interactions away from parents and toward peers while attending higher education institutions (*Mean* =3.07; *SD*=0.76). To support this assertion, up to 81 per cent of the participants stated that peer pressure persuades young people and students that entering cultism is good (*Mean* =3.01; *SD*=0.69). This suggests that because of the effect of present societal dynamics and traits, students are in danger of being convinced to become part of cultic organisations. The findings support the theory by Ongong'a and Akaranga (2013) that students are drawn to cults because they want to avoid being discredited by their friends. As a result, some students join cults because their peers are followers. The discussions with the FGD consider peer influence to be an identity issue. They indicated that:

The cultists seem to find corporate strength when together. Some of them have identity markers such as dress, appearance, and uniformity, which they try to safeguard. Whereas parents appear to have authority, control, and monitor their actions through supervision at home, the students joining Campus from high school come to the university with a rebellious mindset, and soon they adopt a liberal lifestyle from their new social groups on Campus.

The desire for social identification and peer pressure appears to be the driving factors behind people joining cultic organisations. According to the study, up to 79 per cent of the participants affirmed that youth consider membership in a secret cult to be a symbol of pride (*Mean* =3.15; *SD*=0.77). Furthermore, 80 per cent of participants cited that peer group members and friends who are in cults are very persuasive in recruiting (*Mean* =3.04; *SD*=0.80). This implies that individuals may end up joining cults that appear to offer immediate acceptance, love-bombing, and attention in an effort to establish relationships with others with whom they believe they have something in common. The current findings support the arguments put forward by Foster et al. (2003) that cults keep members in one place for a long enough period of time to persuade them to convert, that they use peer and social pressure to keep members longer, and that they can also use individual relationships to develop one-to-one relationships, some of which may even be romantic or simply based on apparent friendship. Peer pressure has typically been identified as a factor that determines cultism (*Mean* =3.04; *SD*=0.80).

Interviewees with patrons also affirmed that:

Some students even fear to profess the old-time religion because of peer pressure. They further opined that changing social interactions from parents to peers affected the students' attitude due to the influence of their peers.

They observed that students were always inviting each other to their churches, some of which are cultic, and because students are curious, they end up trying out, and then they get recruited.

The findings from the FGD with small group Bible study leaders made a case for the need to impart critical thinking and discernment among Christians to identify cults and avoid being lured into cultic movements. Lecturers or student leaders may attribute their success, whether financial or social, to being part of a cult. This tempts students to emulate them by joining the cultic groups in order to achieve said success. The peers of the students have a better understanding of the trends and attractions of their targets; thus, it is easy for them to ensnare the students into joining their secret cults.

In their search for their place in the university environment, students find it difficult to refuse the invitation to join cults to avoid being left out or isolated from their peers. The distance and separation from family and parents cause peers to take precedence as the primary form of counsel to students. The respondents posited that overprotective parents may also cause students to become vulnerable to their peers due to the sudden change in the social structure of the students who previously had no experience in making their own decisions. The sudden separation from their families, therefore, leaves them open to the influence of their peers.

The SGBS leader in the FGD agreed that lecturers can influence students by causing them to question their beliefs. They observed that some students joined cults because they were attracted by other students who were attracted to cults, to be one of the worthy and with bravado. Some join cults to sustain friendships. Peer pressure can be an influence because some people are looking for meaning and purpose in life, and cultic groups tend to present solutions.

Correlation Analysis for Peer Pressure and Cultism

The Pearson correlation measures the degree to which two randomly distributed variables with normal distributions are connected or dependent. The sign of r indicates the association's direction. If r is positive, both variables have a propensity to increase as one does. The analysis's findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations for Peer Pressure and Cultism

		Prevalence of Cultism
Peer Pressure	Pearson Correlation	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	193
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		

It was revealed that there exists a statistically significant relationship between peer pressure and the prevalence of cultism ($r=0.612^{**}$; $p<0.05$). This implies that individuals can be successfully recruited by their peers so that they can be accepted in society. Peer groups are important socialisation tools, but they are not always helpful, particularly in situations like cults where the ideals being spread run contrary to what has previously been taught. According to Oyemwinmina and Aibieyi (2015), a number of pupils were exposed to cults through their friends. According to reports, cultism among university students is significantly influenced by peer groups.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concluded that Christian Union students perceive peer groups as having a substantial impact on the recruitment of university students into cults. Cults use peers to source and retain recruits. Cults have a structured introduction and recruitment process; peers were seen as referring recruits to higher levels within the cults for entrenchment. Individuals were perceived to embrace cults to protect their identities among cult friends. Students who are exposed to wholly new social dynamics are more likely to join cults. Cultists appear to gain corporate power through upholding identification indicators, like attire and looks. As a result, it would seem that peer pressure is part of what motivates students to join cults.

Recommendations: The study recommends strengthening psychological, pastoral, spiritual care, and counselling services in universities to support cult victims, escapees, and students at risk of cultic abuse. Christian Unions should enhance discipleship, mentorship, peer counselling, and spiritual formation programmes incorporating apologetics, biblical teaching, discernment, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence to help students resist negative peer influence. Pre-university training through seminars, conferences, and webinars should also be organised to educate families, churches, and prospective university students about cultism and its risks. Additionally, university orientation programmes should equip freshmen with critical thinking skills to recognise and resist cult recruitment,

while Christian Unions should establish internal policies to attract and retain members and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by cultic groups.

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