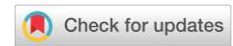


# Relationship Between Peer Relationships and Mental Health Among High School Adolescents

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Adolescence is a developmental period filled with challenges, including physical, emotional, and social changes. Peer interactions significantly influence adolescent mental health. Positive peer relationships provide emotional support, boost self-confidence, and help adolescents develop healthy social skills. Conversely, negative relationships or lack of social interaction can increase the risk of mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression. This study aimed to analyze relationship between peer relationships and mental health among high school adolescents.

**Method:** This study employs a quantitative method with a cross-sectional design. The sample consists of 246 adolescents from five high schools in Bandung, selected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Mental health assessment was conducted using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), while peer relationships were evaluated based on social indicators. Data analysis was performed using the chi-square test to examine the relationship between variables.

**Result:** Bivariate analysis revealed a significant relationship between peer relationships and adolescent mental health ( $p = 0.000$ ). About 50.8% of respondents had good peer relationships, while 49.2% did not. In terms of mental health, 51.6% of respondents were categorized as normal, 21.5% as borderline, and 26.8% experienced mental health disorders.

**Conclusion:** Peer relationships have a significant impact on adolescent mental health. Support from schools, parents, and healthcare professionals is essential in creating a healthy social environment and preventing mental health issues among adolescents.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental period characterised by a multitude of challenges, encompassing physical, emotional, and social transitions. This phase of life is not merely a bridge between childhood and adulthood; it is a complex journey marked by significant changes that can profoundly affect an adolescent's psychological well-being. Among the myriad of factors influencing mental health during this time, academic pressure, identity exploration, and the dynamics of social relationships stand out as particularly impactful. Each of these elements interacts in intricate ways, shaping the adolescent experience and influencing their overall mental health outcomes.

One of the most critical aspects of adolescent mental health is the role of peer interaction. Positive peer relationships are invaluable, as they provide essential emotional support and foster self-confidence. For instance, a teenager who feels accepted and valued by their peers is more likely to develop a robust sense of self-worth, which is crucial during the often tumultuous teenage years. Such relationships can help adolescents navigate the complexities of identity formation, offering a safe space for exploration and experimentation. Conversely, negative peer relationships or a lack of social interaction can have

detrimental effects, increasing the risk of mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression. Research conducted by Alifya et al. (2023) underscores this point, highlighting the stark contrast between adolescents who enjoy supportive friendships and those who do not.

The pressing issue of mental health among adolescents has garnered significant attention in recent years, revealing a complex web of contributing factors. Peer influence, levels of gratitude, and gender differences all play pivotal roles in shaping mental health outcomes. According to clinical psychologist Nirmala Ika, parenting styles are instrumental in this dynamic, affecting adolescents within both family and school environments (Defianti, 2022). A nurturing parenting style, characterised by warmth and support, can bolster an adolescent's resilience against mental health issues, while a more authoritarian approach may exacerbate feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2018) indicates a concerning rise in cases of emotional mental disorders among adolescents. Symptoms of anxiety and depression are increasingly prevalent, with the Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (INAMHS) revealing that approximately one-third of Indonesian adolescents reported feelings of sadness, anxiety, or difficulty controlling their emotions in the past year (Wilopo, 2023). This alarming statistic points to a pressing need for interventions that address the underlying causes of these emotional struggles. External factors, such as a lack of parental support and negative peer environments, further compound the issue, creating a breeding ground for mental health challenges.

Previous studies have illuminated the significant role that peer relationships play in shaping adolescent psychological well-being. For instance, a study conducted by Novelani et al. (2024) at SMA Negeri 3 Atambua found that adolescents who received social support from peers exhibited markedly better mental health than those who lacked such support. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of an increasingly digital world, where online interactions can supplement or replace face-to-face connections. Similarly, research by Mutiara Fasha et al. (2024) highlighted that adolescents with low levels of peer social interaction are more susceptible to depressive symptoms. The absence of supportive social relationships can thus be identified as a significant risk factor for adolescent mental health, illustrating the urgent need for fostering healthy peer interactions.

Moreover, the school environment plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent mental health. As highlighted by Kholifah (2020), a positive school environment, characterised by harmonious peer interactions and supportive teachers, can significantly enhance adolescent mental well-being. In contrast, an unsupportive school environment may exacerbate emotional and psychological disorders, creating a hostile atmosphere that hinders healthy development. The importance of fostering a positive school climate cannot be overstated, as it serves as a critical foundation for adolescents to thrive academically and emotionally.

Furthermore, peer support within the school environment has been shown to mitigate academic stress levels. Research conducted by Syehifi et al. (2024) demonstrated that adolescents with strong peer relationships are better equipped to cope with academic pressures and personal challenges than their counterparts with weaker social ties. This resilience is crucial in an educational landscape where academic expectations can be overwhelming. Healthy social interactions provide a sense of comfort and security, ultimately strengthening adolescents' psychological resilience in facing life's challenges. Therefore, it is imperative for adolescents to have access to a positive social environment, as this is essential for their effective growth and development (Kholifah & Sodikin, 2020).

The data from the Bandung District Health Office (2023) further emphasises the importance of addressing adolescent mental health concerns. Among 96,850 adolescents aged 15-18 years who underwent mental health screenings in 62 community health centres, a staggering 22.2% were found to experience emotional mental health problems. This statistic serves as a clarion call for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals to prioritise the mental health needs of adolescents.

Adolescence is a critical period marked by various challenges that can significantly impact psychological well-being. The interplay of peer relationships, family dynamics, and school environments creates a complex landscape that can either support or hinder mental health development. Positive peer interactions are essential for fostering self-esteem and resilience, while negative relationships can lead to increased vulnerability to mental health disorders. Additionally, the influence of parenting styles and the school environment cannot be overlooked, as they play a vital role in shaping adolescents' experiences and outcomes. As the data indicates, a significant portion of adolescents are struggling with mental health issues, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive support systems that address these

challenges. By fostering positive social environments and enhancing support mechanisms, we can help adolescents navigate this tumultuous phase of life and emerge as healthy, well-adjusted individuals.

## METHODS

This study employs a quantitative method with a cross-sectional design, which is considered more accurate and objective in generating data. It allows data collection at a specific point in time, making the research process more efficient. The study population consists of five high schools in Bandung, with a total sample of 246 adolescents. The sampling technique used is proportionate stratified random sampling, applying Slovin's formula. The research instrument utilized is the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to measure adolescent mental health and peer relationships.

In ensuring ethical integrity, the study adhered to key research principles, including respect for participants, confidentiality, and informed consent. Participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that no personal identifiers were recorded on research documents, with all data coded to protect participants' privacy. Before participating, all individuals provided written informed consent, acknowledging their voluntary participation. These ethical considerations safeguarded the rights, well-being, and privacy of participants while ensuring the validity and reliability of the research findings.

## RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Peer Relationships and Adolescent Mental Health

Peer Relationship Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Good	125	50,8
Bad	121	49,2
Mental Health Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Normal	127	51,6
Boderline	53	21,5
Abnormal	66	26,8

Based on Table 1 the data obtained are half of the respondents 125 individuals (50.8%) fall into the category of having good peer relationships, while the other half 121 individuals (49.2%) have bad peer relationships. Regarding mental health, half of the respondents in this study are categorized as having normal mental health (127 individuals (51.6%). Nearly half of the respondents have abnormal mental health conditions 66 individuals (26.8%), while a smaller portion 53 individuals (21.5%) fall into the borderline category.

Table 2. Relationship Between Peer Relationships and Adolescent Mental Health

Peer Relationships	Adolescent Mental Health						Total	
	Normal		Boderline		Abnormal			
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Good	87	69,6%	21	16,8%	17	13,6%	125	100%
Bad	41	33,9%	31	25,6%	49	40,5%	121	100%
Total	128	52,0%	52	21,1%	66	26,8%	246	100%
<i>p-value</i>	0,000							

Based on table 2, the data obtained are the chi-square bivariate test the p-value obtained is **0.000**, which is less than **0.05**. This indicates a significant relationship between peer relationships and adolescent mental health

## DISCUSSION

Peer interaction is a crucial aspect of adolescent development, significantly impacting their mental health in multifaceted ways. During adolescence, individuals undergo considerable emotional and psychological changes, making the role of their peers particularly influential. Emotional support, social acceptance, and positive peer interactions can enhance adolescents' psychological well-being, whereas a lack of support or negative experiences can increase the risk of mental health issues (Son et al., 2020). These interactions serve as a mirror through which adolescents view themselves and their place in the world, shaping their self-concept and overall mental health.

Emotional support from peers plays a vital role in shaping a positive self-concept, reducing depression levels, improving overall mental health, and fostering positive affect in adolescents (Anderson, 2017). For instance, when adolescents receive encouragement from friends during challenging times, such as academic pressures or personal crises, they often feel valued and understood. This support can manifest in various forms, such as listening without judgment, offering advice, or simply being present. Such interactions can create a buffer against the stresses of adolescence, enabling individuals to navigate their challenges more effectively. In contrast, negative peer interactions, such as bullying or social exclusion, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and despair, exacerbating issues like anxiety and depression. Research has consistently shown that positive peer interactions are associated with lower levels of depression among adolescents. Conversely, those who experience unhealthy peer environments may suffer from stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, self-destructive behaviour, and social isolation.

A study by Alifya et al. (2023) found that peer social support involves processes such as providing encouragement, friendship, empathy, sharing, and mutual assistance, which can help reduce the intensity of mental health disorders like loneliness, rejection, discrimination, and frustration. For example, a group of friends who regularly check in on each other and celebrate each other's successes can create an environment where individuals feel safe and supported. This sense of belonging is crucial during adolescence, as it can mitigate feelings of loneliness and foster resilience. Similarly, Dewi et al. (2024) discovered a link between emotional peer support and adolescent self-concept. If adolescents fail to cope with these pressures, they are at risk of developing mental health disorders (Fitri et al., 2018). The absence of supportive peer relationships can lead to a downward spiral, where individuals feel increasingly isolated and disconnected, further impacting their mental health.

Moreover, studies on peer friendships and mental health highlight the significant role of friendships in students' mental well-being (Yunanto, 2019). The bonds formed during this developmental stage can be incredibly powerful, providing a sense of identity and belonging. These friendships often serve as a primary source of emotional support and validation. However, Yunere et al. (2021) explained that peer relationships can have both positive and negative influences on adolescents. The need for peer acceptance and the desire to belong to a group often lead adolescents to conform to the norms and values of their peer groups, including engaging in risky behaviours that may impact their mental health. For instance, an adolescent may feel pressured to participate in substance use or risky sexual behaviour to fit in, potentially leading to long-term negative consequences for their mental health.

Peer support is crucial during adolescence, as lower peer support is associated with a higher risk of emotional and mental disorders (Rahmadani et al., 2024). The emotional landscape of adolescence is often tumultuous, and the presence of supportive peers can provide a stabilising force. When adolescents feel that they can rely on their friends for support, they are more likely to engage in healthy coping strategies. Conversely, those who lack such support may resort to maladaptive behaviours, such as substance abuse or withdrawal, to cope with their feelings.

Additionally, the influence of peer relationships on adolescent mental health is shaped by various factors. The quality of peer relationships—whether supportive and positive or negative and destructive—affects their impact on mental health. For example, a supportive friendship can act as a protective factor against mental health issues, while a toxic relationship can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression. The norms and values within peer groups also influence adolescent behaviour and mental well-being. If a peer group promotes positive values such as mutual respect, support, and avoidance of risky behaviours, adolescents are more likely to maintain good mental health. Conversely, if a group normalises harmful behaviours, such as bullying or substance abuse, adolescents may feel pressured to conform, leading to detrimental outcomes.

The school environment also plays a role in shaping peer influence on adolescent mental health. A safe, inclusive, and supportive school setting fosters positive peer interactions and improves adolescent

mental well-being. Schools that encourage collaboration, empathy, and open communication among students create an atmosphere where positive peer relationships can flourish. For instance, programmes that promote social-emotional learning can equip adolescents with the skills they need to build and maintain healthy relationships, thereby enhancing their overall mental health.

Peers have a significant influence on adolescents' social and emotional development. Through peer interactions, adolescents learn essential social skills such as cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. These skills are not only vital for personal relationships but also for future professional interactions. Additionally, peers provide much-needed emotional support for adolescents (Desiani, 2020). The ability to share thoughts and feelings with friends can alleviate stress and foster a sense of belonging, which is crucial for mental health.

Understanding the influence of peers on adolescent mental health has important implications for mental health promotion and the prevention of mental health problems in adolescents. Holistic support from the surrounding environment can help adolescents build healthy relationships and improve their well-being. By understanding and addressing the factors influencing peer impact, we can assist adolescents in forming supportive peer relationships and enhancing their mental health. This understanding can inform interventions aimed at fostering positive peer interactions, such as peer mentorship programmes, workshops on emotional intelligence, and initiatives that promote inclusivity and respect within peer groups.

Peer interaction is a fundamental component of adolescent development, profoundly affecting mental health. The emotional support, social acceptance, and positive interactions that arise within peer relationships can bolster psychological well-being, while negative experiences can lead to significant mental health challenges. By fostering supportive peer environments, promoting healthy relationships, and addressing the various factors that influence peer interactions, we can enhance the mental health of adolescents and equip them with the tools they need to navigate this critical stage of life successfully. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating effective strategies to support adolescents in their journey toward emotional and psychological well-being

## CONCLUSION

Peers have a significant influence on adolescent mental health. Adolescents with positive peer relationships tend to have better mental health compared to those with poor peer relationships. Therefore, it is essential for adolescents to build positive peer relationships and receive support from family and school to enhance their psychological well-being. Preventive efforts for adolescent mental health disorders can be implemented through school- and community-based social support programs, such as youth discussion groups, mentoring programs, and mental health education involving peers.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that this study is free from any conflicts of interest

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