



Peer Support and Mental Health

(A Study Among Adolescents)

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Abstract. Peer support is an important social factor that contributes to adolescents' psychological development. Insufficient peer support may increase the risk of mental health problems among adolescents. This study aimed to examine the correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health problems among students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. A total of 67 students were recruited using an accidental sampling technique. Data were collected using a peer support questionnaire and an adolescent mental health problems questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using Kendall's Tau correlation test. The results showed that the majority of respondents reported low peer support (56.7%) and very severe mental health problems (86.6%). Kendall's Tau analysis revealed a significant correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health problems ($\tau = -0.317$; $p = 0.004$). The negative correlation coefficient indicates that higher levels of peer support were associated with lower levels of mental health problems among adolescents. These findings suggest that peer support plays an important protective role in maintaining adolescent mental health. Strengthening positive peer relationships may contribute to the prevention and reduction of mental health problems among adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents; Junior High School Students; Mental Health; Peer Support; Protective Factor.

1. BACKGROUND

Adolescent mental health has become an increasingly important public health issue in recent years. Adolescence is a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood characterized by complex biological, emotional, psychological, and social changes. These changes may increase adolescents' vulnerability to stress, anxiety, emotional disturbances, and psychosocial problems if they are unable to adapt effectively. According to Sihombing & Nainggolan, (2025), adolescent mental health is influenced by various internal and external factors, including social environments and interpersonal relationships.

Data from the Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) revealed that one in three Indonesian adolescents experienced mental health problems within the past year. This finding indicates that adolescent mental health remains a significant challenge requiring attention from families, schools, and the broader social environment. Furthermore, increasing academic pressure, excessive social media use, and changes in social interaction patterns in the digital era have also contributed to adolescents' psychological vulnerability (Kesehatan, 2024)

During adolescence, peer relationships become increasingly important compared to earlier developmental stages. Adolescents tend to seek social acceptance, emotional security, identity formation, and emotional support from their peer groups. Peer support refers to forms

of attention, empathy, emotional assistance, appreciation, and social acceptance provided by individuals of similar age or shared experiences. Anggarjita et al. (2025) stated that positive peer support can help adolescents cope with psychological stress, improve self-confidence, and strengthen adaptive coping abilities in dealing with life challenges.

Recent studies have demonstrated that peer support is positively associated with psychological well-being and adolescent mental health. Adolescents who receive adequate social support tend to exhibit better adaptive abilities, lower levels of anxiety, and healthier interpersonal relationships. Conversely, lack of social support, peer conflict, social rejection, and bullying may increase the risk of emotional and mental health problems among adolescents (Yunere et al., 2021).

In addition, the rapid development of digital media has significantly transformed adolescents' social interaction patterns. Unhealthy virtual interactions, cyberbullying, and social pressure in digital environments may negatively affect adolescents' psychological conditions. In such circumstances, supportive peer relationships serve as an important protective factor in maintaining adolescent mental health. Ruaidah et al. (2023) explained that emotional support and positive social relationships can help adolescents manage social pressures and improve their psychological well-being.

Based on the explanation above, peer support plays an essential role in the development and maintenance of adolescent mental health. Therefore, research examining the relationship between peer support and adolescent mental health is necessary to better understand social factors contributing to adolescents' psychological well-being. The findings are expected to provide a foundation for developing promotive and preventive mental health programs within school settings.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Concept of Adolescent Mental Health

Mental health is defined as a state of psychological well-being in which individuals are able to recognize their potential, cope with life stressors, build healthy social relationships, and function optimally in daily life. During adolescence, mental health becomes a crucial aspect because adolescents experience complex biological, emotional, social, and psychological changes. Failure to adapt to these developmental changes may increase the risk of stress, anxiety, depression, and other emotional disturbances. According to World Health Organization (2022), adolescent mental health is influenced by various factors, including

family environment, social relationships, academic pressure, experiences of bullying, and social support from the surrounding environment.

Adolescence is also considered a critical period of identity formation, making individuals more sensitive to social acceptance and interpersonal relationships. Sihombing and Nainggolan (2025) explained that the quality of social relationships has a substantial influence on adolescents' psychological well-being because adolescents tend to view their social environment as a primary source of emotional support and self-evaluation.

Peer Support

Peer support refers to social assistance provided by individuals of similar age and shared experiences, including emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support. During adolescence, peers become one of the most significant sources of social support because adolescents spend more time interacting with peer groups than with their families. Ruaidah et al. (2023) stated that peer support may include attention, empathy, social acceptance, and assistance in dealing with daily life problems.

Anggarjita et al. (2025) reported that peer social support helps adolescents feel valued, accepted, understood, and emotionally connected through opportunities to share personal experiences. Such support may enhance self-confidence, coping abilities, and psychological resilience in dealing with social and academic pressures.

Peer support can be categorized into several forms:

- a) Emotional support, including empathy, care, and concern.
- b) Appraisal support, including acceptance and positive reinforcement.
- c) Informational support, including advice and guidance.
- d) Instrumental support, including tangible assistance in solving problems.

According to Yunere et al. (2021) supportive peer relationships can help adolescents develop better social adaptation skills. Conversely, poor peer relationships, social conflicts, peer rejection, and bullying may increase the risk of emotional and mental health problems among adolescents.

The correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health

Social support theory explains that individuals who receive emotional and social support from their environment tend to have better abilities to cope with stress and psychological pressure. In adolescence, peers serve as a primary source of support during psychosocial development. Santrock (2018) emphasized that positive peer relationships help adolescents develop self-identity, improve self-esteem, and strengthen social adaptation abilities.

Previous studies have demonstrated that peer social support is positively associated with psychological well-being and adolescent mental health. Adolescents who receive adequate social support tend to exhibit lower anxiety levels, more adaptive coping strategies, and healthier interpersonal relationships. Mufidha (2021) explained that peer social support contributes significantly to adolescents' psychological well-being, particularly in coping with academic and social pressures.

Furthermore, Yunere et al. (2021) found a significant relationship between peer support and emotional mental disorders among adolescents. Adolescents with low social support were more vulnerable to stress, loneliness, and emotional disturbances compared to those who received adequate peer support.

In the current digital era, adolescents' social interaction patterns have changed significantly due to the increasing use of social media and virtual communication. Ruaidah et al. (2023) explained that unhealthy online interactions, cyberbullying, and social pressure in digital environments may negatively affect adolescents' psychological conditions. In such circumstances, positive peer support serves as an important protective factor in maintaining adolescent mental health.

3. RESERCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research method with a cross-sectional study design, which aimed to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables at a single point in time. According to Notoatmodjo (2018), a cross-sectional design is used to investigate the relationship between risk factors and outcomes through observation or data collection conducted simultaneously at a particular time.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Pandak in 2026. The population consisted of all ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Pandak. The sampling technique used was *accidental sampling*, resulting in 67 respondents who met the inclusion criteria. Sugiyono (2022) explained that accidental sampling is a sampling technique based on chance encounters, where individuals who happen to meet the researcher and are considered appropriate as data sources may be selected as research participants.

The independent variable in this study was peer support, while the dependent variable was adolescent mental health. Data were collected using peer support and adolescent mental health questionnaires that had been adjusted to the research indicators. According to Ruaidah et al. (2023), peer support includes emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support provided by peer groups to adolescents.

Meanwhile, adolescent mental health was measured based on respondents' emotional, psychological, and social conditions. The World Health Organization (2022) stated that adolescent mental health includes individuals' ability to recognize their potential, manage life stress, establish healthy social relationships, and function productively in daily life.

Data analysis was conducted using univariate and bivariate analyses. Univariate analysis was used to describe the frequency distribution of respondents' characteristics and each research variable. Bivariate analysis was performed to determine the relationship between peer support and adolescent mental health using Kendall's tau-b test with a significance level of 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$). According to Notoatmodjo (2018), Kendall's tau-b test is used to determine the relationship between two variables measured on an ordinal scale.

This study complied with research ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality of respondents' identities, anonymity, and the use of data solely for research purposes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health. The data obtained from 67 respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe respondent characteristics and study variables, followed by Kendall's tau correlation test to examine the relationship between peer support and adolescent mental health. The findings are discussed in relation to relevant theories and previous empirical studies.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Peer Support Score Categories Among Students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, 2026.

		Peer Support		
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	High	12	17.9	17.9
	Moderate	33	49.3	49.3
	Low	22	32.8	32.8
	Total	67	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 1., it can be observed that the majority of respondents reported receiving a moderate level of peer support, accounting for 33 respondents (49.3%). Meanwhile, 22 respondents (32.8%) reported receiving low peer support, and 12 respondents (17.9%) reported receiving high peer support. In total, the study involved 67 respondents (100%).

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Adolescent Mental Health Score Categories Among Students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, 2026.

		Mental Health Disorder		
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Moderate	7	10.4	10.4
	Severe	2	3.0	3.0
	Very Severe	58	86.6	86.6
	Total	67	100.0	100.0

Based on Table 2., it can be observed that the majority of respondents reported very severe mental health problems, accounting for 58 respondents (86.6%). Meanwhile, 7 respondents (10.4%) reported moderate mental health problems, and 2 respondents (3.0%) reported severe mental health problems. In total, the study involved 67 respondents (100%).

Table 3. Cross-Tabulation of Peer Support and Adolescent Mental Health Among Students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak, 2026.

			Mental Health Disorder			Total
			Moderate	Severe	Very Severe	
Peer Support	Low	Count	0	0	38	38
		% within Mental Health Disorder	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	56.7%
	Moderate	Count	4	2	4	10
		% within Mental Health Disorder	57.1%	100.0%	6.9%	14.9%
	High	Count	3	0	16	19
		% within Mental Health Disorder	42.9%	0.0%	27.6%	28.4%
Total		Count	7	2	58	67
		% within Mental Health Disorder	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Based on Table 3., among the 58 respondents categorized as having very severe mental health problems, the majority reported low peer support, accounting for 38 respondents (65.5%). Meanwhile, 16 respondents (27.6%) reported high peer support, and 4 respondents (6.9%) reported moderate peer support.

Among respondents categorized as having severe mental health problems, all respondents (100.0%) reported moderate peer support, representing 2 respondents. No respondents with low or high peer support were found in this category.

Regarding respondents with moderate mental health problems, 4 respondents (57.1%) reported moderate peer support, while 3 respondents (42.9%) reported high peer support. No respondents with low peer support were identified in this category.

Overall, the cross-tabulation results indicate a tendency for adolescents with lower levels of peer support to experience more severe mental health problems compared with those receiving moderate or high levels of peer support.

Table 4. Results of Kendall's Tau Test on the Correlation Between Peer Support and Adolescent Mental Health Disorder Among Students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2026.

		<i>Symmetric Measures</i>			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal	Kendall's tau-b	-317	.087	2.860	.004
by					
Ordinal					
	N of Valid Cases	67			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

The results of Kendall's tau-b analysis showed a correlation coefficient of **-0.317** with a significance value ($p = 0.004$). Since the p -value was less than 0.05, the findings indicate a statistically significant correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health problems among students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak.

The negative correlation coefficient indicates an inverse relationship between the two variables. This finding suggests that adolescents who receive higher levels of peer support tend to experience lower levels of mental health problems. Conversely, lower levels of peer support are associated with more severe mental health problems. Based on the correlation coefficient value (-0.317), the strength of the correlation can be classified as weak to moderate.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated a significant negative correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health problems. This result indicates that adolescents who receive greater support from their peers tend to experience fewer mental health problems. Peer relationships play an important role during adolescence, as peers often serve as sources of emotional support, companionship, and social acceptance. Therefore, adequate peer support

may function as a protective factor that helps adolescents cope with psychological distress and various developmental challenges.

The results of this study showed a significant negative correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health problems ($\tau = -0.317$; $p = 0.004$). These findings indicate that adolescents who receive higher levels of peer support tend to experience lower levels of mental health problems. Conversely, adolescents with lower levels of peer support are more likely to experience more severe mental health problems.

Peer support plays an important role during adolescence because peers become one of the primary sources of emotional, informational, and social support. Positive interactions with peers can help adolescents cope with academic pressure, interpersonal conflicts, and various developmental challenges. Supportive peer relationships may also enhance adolescents' sense of belonging, self-esteem, and emotional resilience, thereby reducing the risk of psychological distress.

The findings of this study are consistent with the longitudinal study conducted by Affuso et al. (2024), which found that peer support was positively associated with psychological well-being among adolescents. Adolescents who reported stronger peer support tended to demonstrate better psychological adjustment and more positive psychosocial outcomes over time.

Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis by Brinsley et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of peer-led and peer-supported interventions in promoting adolescent mental health and well-being. The study emphasized that peer relationships can serve as valuable resources for emotional support and mental health promotion within school settings.

Furthermore, Hoagwood et al. (2025) reported that youth peer support contributes positively to mental health outcomes by facilitating social connectedness, emotional validation, and help-seeking behaviors among adolescents and young adults. Their systematic review identified peer support as an effective component of mental health services and psychosocial interventions for young people.

The present findings are also supported by Liu et al. (2024), who reported that peer support functions as a protective social resource that helps adolescents cope with psychosocial stressors and reduces the likelihood of maladaptive behaviors. Adolescents who perceive greater support from their peers are more likely to develop adaptive coping strategies and maintain better psychological functioning.

Based on these findings, peer support may be considered a protective factor against mental health problems among adolescents. Therefore, schools and families should encourage

positive peer interactions and strengthen social support networks to promote adolescent psychological well-being and prevent mental health problems.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study found a significant negative correlation between peer support and adolescent mental health problems among students of SMP Negeri 1 Pandak, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. The Kendall's Tau analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of -0.317 with a significance value of 0.004 ($p < 0.05$). The negative coefficient indicates that higher levels of peer support are associated with lower levels of mental health problems among adolescents. Conversely, adolescents with lower peer support tend to experience more severe mental health problems. Although the strength of the correlation was relatively weak, the findings highlight the important role of peer support as a protective factor for adolescent mental health.

Recommendations

Schools are encouraged to implement peer-support-based programs, such as peer counseling and peer education initiatives, to strengthen positive social interactions among students. Parents should maintain open communication and monitor adolescents' social relationships to ensure they receive positive social support. Health professionals and school counselors should conduct regular mental health promotion and screening activities. Future studies are recommended to include larger samples and additional variables influencing adolescent mental health, such as family support, academic stress, social media use, and emotional regulation skills.

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