

Adolescent Mental Health: Importance and Contributing Factors

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Abstract

Adolescent mental health plays a crucial role in their overall development, affecting emotional stability, academic performance, and social adaptation. This paper examines the concept of mental health in adolescents, its essential components, and the characteristics of those with strong or poor mental well-being. Key contributing factors include biological influences, family environment, social relationships, and academic pressures. Additionally, digital media and economic conditions also impact adolescent mental health. Understanding these factors is vital for creating supportive environments and effective interventions that promote long-term mental well-being.

Introduction

Adolescence represents a critical developmental phase characterized by numerous physical, emotional, and social changes. This period is marked by an increased vulnerability to mental health issues, making the investigation of adolescent mental health both timely and essential. According to the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2022), mental disorders significantly affect adolescents, with approximately 10-20% experiencing some form of mental illness during this crucial stage of development. The implications of these issues are profound, influencing not only the immediate well-being of adolescents but also their long-term functioning and quality of life. This literature review will explore the importance of adolescent mental health and identify various contributing factors that impact mental health outcomes in this demographic.

Importance of Adolescent Mental Health

Adolescent mental health is paramount due to

the lasting implications of mental health issues that can extend into adulthood. The prevalence of mental disorders, including anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems, has been a growing concern globally. For instance, studies indicate that about 29% of adolescents in Ireland reported poor mental health, with significant rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation observed among gender-diverse youth compared to their cisgender peers. The developmental trajectory of adolescents is influenced by their mental health status, which subsequently affects their academic performance, social relationships, and overall life satisfaction. Adolescents with mental health disorders are at a heightened risk for engaging in risky behaviors, including substance abuse and self-harm, which can lead to serious consequences. Early recognition and intervention are crucial in mitigating these risks. Effective mental health strategies and supportive environments can foster resilience and promote healthy development during this formative period (Rogers, 2020). There

are several significant gaps in the understanding of adolescent mental health, particularly regarding the long-term impact of early mental health issues and the role of interventions. While substantial knowledge exists regarding the prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues among adolescents, there is a notable lack of longitudinal studies that track the persistence of these conditions into adulthood, especially within diverse cultural contexts. Furthermore, the long-term efficacy of interventions—ranging from psychological therapies to community-based programs—remains inadequately explored. To address these gaps, it is critical to conduct research that assesses the sustained impact of adolescent mental health issues and evaluates the longitudinal effectiveness of various intervention strategies (Das et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2023). Several scholars have undertaken research similar to this study on adolescent mental health. For example, Carroll et al. (2021) examined the prevalence and determinants of mental health issues in adolescents, emphasizing the role of factors such as bullying, substance use, and exposure to violence in shaping mental health outcomes. Additionally, Das et al. (2016) explored the efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy in treating adolescent depression and anxiety, finding short-term improvements in symptom severity. However, while these studies provide valuable insights into the immediate effects of mental health disorders and interventions, there remains a dearth of research addressing the long-term consequences of early mental health issues and the extended effectiveness of interventions. Previous studies, both in Thailand and globally, have significantly contributed to the understanding of adolescent mental health. Research such as that conducted by Attygalle et al. (2017) and Goodwin et al. (2023) has underscored the importance of mental health literacy in facilitating early intervention, highlighting how increased awareness can mitigate the development of mental health issues. However, a critical gap persists in understanding the long-term effects of these interventions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like Thailand, where cultural and socio-economic factors may uniquely influence adolescent mental health outcomes. Additionally, the role of digital interventions, especially in resource

-limited settings, remains underexplored, and there is a need for further investigation into the effectiveness of these interventions in fostering long-term mental well-being (Yu et al., 2023). Addressing the gaps in adolescent mental health research is of paramount importance in order to improve early interventions and achieve better long-term outcomes. There is an urgent need for longitudinal studies that examine how early mental health issues evolve over time and the lasting effects they may have on adolescents as they transition into adulthood. This study aims to contribute to filling these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the long-term effects of early mental health problems, as well as the effectiveness of various interventions. By doing so, the study seeks to offer valuable insights into how early interventions can be optimized to ensure more favorable long-term mental health outcomes for adolescents (Das et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2023). There is compelling evidence supporting the need for more longitudinal studies on adolescent mental health. A growing body of research indicates that many mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, persist in adulthood, adversely affecting an individual's overall well-being and quality of life. Longitudinal studies are crucial for understanding the long-term consequences of early mental health problems and for evaluating the sustained effectiveness of various interventions. These studies will provide critical insights into the factors that contribute to mental health stability over time and help refine intervention strategies to better meet the needs of adolescents in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts (Yu et al., 2023).

Gap of knowledge: Reliance on Cross-Sectional Studies: Many existing studies on adolescent mental health are cross-sectional, providing only a snapshot of mental health at a particular point in time. This approach limits understanding of the developmental trajectory of mental health issues and the long-term impact of early interventions. Longitudinal studies are needed to track changes over time and assess causality (Holz et al., 2021).

Prevalence Rates

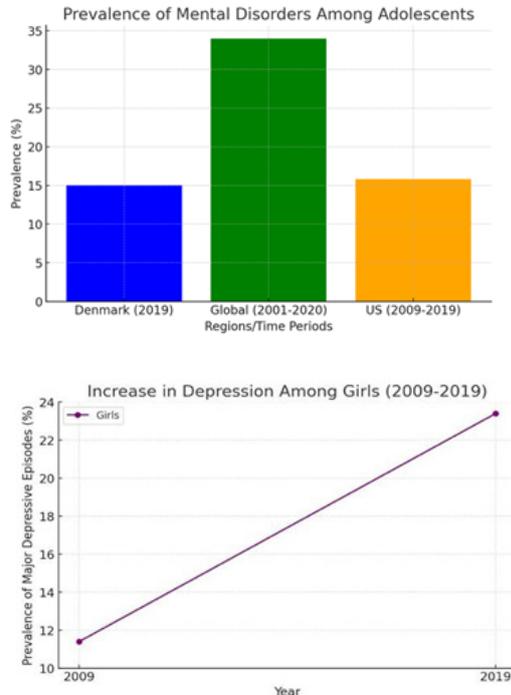
The prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents is significant.

A study conducted in Denmark found that 15.01% of children and adolescents were diagnosed with a mental disorder by the age of 18, with anxiety disorders being

the most common among girls and ADHD among boys (Dalsgaard et al., 2019). This gender difference in mental health disorders is consistent with broader trends observed in other studies. Women consistently show higher rates of internalizing disorders, including mood and anxiety disorders, which are more prevalent among females during adolescence (Boyd et al., 2015). These disorders are often influenced by psychosocial factors and hormonal changes, such as the interaction of estradiol with stress hormones during puberty (Martel, 2013). Conversely, externalizing disorders like ADHD are more frequently diagnosed in males. These disorders are typically linked to both biological factors, such as prenatal testosterone exposure, and social factors, including gender roles and expectations (Boyd et al., 2015; Eaton et al., 2012; Martel, 2013). This aligns with the findings of the Denmark study, where ADHD was found to be more common in boys, further supporting the idea of a gender disparity in the types of mental

health disorders. Globally, the point prevalence rate of elevated depressive symptoms among adolescents was found to be 34% from 2001 to 2020, with major depressive disorder (MDD) and dysthymia having prevalence rates of 8% and 4%, respectively (Shorey et al., 2021). The higher rates of internalizing disorders like depression among females are consistent with global trends, as studies consistently show that mood disorders are more common among adolescent girls (Tibubos et al., 2021). In the U.S., the prevalence of past-year major depressive episodes increased from 8.1% to 15.8% between 2009 and 2019 (Daly, 2021). This increasing trend in depressive episodes among American adolescents is consistent with the rise in internalizing disorders observed in other parts of the world and highlights the need for effective mental health support for adolescents, particularly among females who are more vulnerable to such disorders. As summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Prevalence of Mental Disorders Among Adolescents



Gender-Specific Statistics

Gender differences in mental health are pronounced, with girls generally more affected by mental health issues than boys. For instance, the prevalence of major depressive episodes among girls increased by 12 percentage points from 11.4% in 2009 to 23.4% in 2019, widening the gender gap in depression (Daly, 2021). Additionally, girls have a higher risk of disorders such as schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and mood disorders compared to boys (Dalsgaard et al., 2019). The global prevalence of elevated depressive symptoms is also higher in female adolescents than in their male counterparts (Shorey et al., 2021).

Trend Comparisons

Trends in adolescent mental health reveal varying patterns over time. In Canada, the prevalence of diagnosed mood and anxiety disorders and past-year mental health consultations increased from 2011 to 2018, particularly among young adult females (Wiens et al., 2020). In the U.S., the prevalence of adolescent depression and internalizing mental health problems has increased, while externalizing behaviors have

decreased (Mojtabai & Olfson, 2020). Furthermore, the prevalence of common mental disorders (CMD) among adolescents was found to be 31% using a specific cut-off point, with a higher prevalence among girls (Silva et al., 2020).

Factors Influencing Adolescent Mental Health

Several factors significantly influence adolescent mental health. These include (Table2):

Table 2: Several factors significantly influence adolescent mental health

Factors	Key finding	Reference
Prevalence of Mental Health Issues	69.2% of adolescents have moderate mental health issues; higher prevalence in boys	Suvitha et al. (2024)
Socioeconomic Status	Lower family wealth linked to lower life satisfaction and higher depressive symptoms	Nagy-Pénzes et al. (2020)
Social support	High social support reduces psychosomatic symptoms and depression scores	(Nagy-Pénzes et al., 2020; Bustomi et al., 2024).
Academic pressure	Positive association with depression and anxiety; prevalent in Asia and Europe	Steara et al. (2023)
Protective factors	Emotional competence, self-esteem, and supportive environments promote well-being	(De La Barrera et al., 2019; Ostaszewski, 2020).

Contributing Factors to Adolescent Mental Health

Numerous factors contribute to adolescent mental health, encompassing biological, psychological, social, and environmental dimensions. Understanding these factors is critical for developing effective interventions and support systems.

Biological Factors

Adolescents undergo significant hormonal and neurodevelopmental changes that can impact their emotional and psychological well-being. Research indicates that biological changes during puberty may coincide with increased vulnerability to mental health issues (Rogers, 2020). Neurotransmitter imbalances and genetic predispositions also play a role in the risk of developing mental disorders during this period.

Psychosocial Factors

Psychosocial factors, including self-esteem, social support, and peer relationships, significantly influence adolescent mental health. Low self-esteem and poor social relationships have been linked to higher incidences of depression and anxiety among adolescents (Zhang, 2023). In contrast, positive peer relationships and family support can serve as protective factors, enhancing resilience and psychological well-being.

Family Dynamics

The family environment is a crucial determinant of

adolescent mental health. Parenting styles, parental mental health, and family relationships can profoundly affect an adolescent's emotional and psychological state. Studies show that authoritative parenting is positively associated with better mental health outcomes, while authoritarian and permissive styles correlate with higher levels of anxiety and depression (Hunduma et al., 2024). Parental mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, can also adversely impact adolescents, leading to poorer mental health outcomes (Sofrona & Giannakopoulos, 2024).

Social Media and Digital Influence

The rise of social media has introduced both risks and opportunities for adolescents. While social media can foster connectivity and support, excessive use has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among adolescents (Khalaf, 2023). Moreover, the nature of social media interactions—whether active or passive—can significantly influence mental health, with passive consumption often leading to negative mental health outcomes (Zhang, 2023).

Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a pivotal role in shaping adolescent mental health. Adolescents from lower SES backgrounds often face additional stressors, including financial instability, limited access to mental health resources, and exposure to adverse

living conditions, which can exacerbate mental health issues (Marciano, 2022). Studies indicate that adolescents in economically disadvantaged areas are at a heightened risk for mental health problems, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions in these populations (Li et al., 2024).

Cultural Context

Cultural factors also significantly influence adolescent mental health. Variations in cultural beliefs, practices, and values can affect how mental health issues are perceived and treated. In some cultures, mental health issues may carry a stigma, leading to underreporting and a lack of support for affected individuals. Understanding these cultural contexts is essential for developing effective mental health interventions tailored to specific communities (Atilola, 2015).

School Environment

The school environment is integral to adolescent development and mental health. Factors such as school connectedness, peer relationships, and academic pressure can influence mental health outcomes. A positive school climate, characterized by supportive relationships and a sense of belonging, can enhance mental well-being, while negative experiences, such as bullying, can lead to significant distress and mental health challenges (Šambaras et al., 2024).

Key Factors Affecting Adolescent Mental Health (Post-Covid19)

Individual Factors: Genetics, personality traits, and traumatic experiences are significant individual determinants of mental health. Adolescents with a predisposition to stress or those who have experienced trauma may be more vulnerable to mental health issues (Bustomi et al., 2024; Lin & Guo, 2024). In the post-COVID era, additional stressors, such as adapting to new social norms and educational changes, have further impacted adolescents' mental health.

Family Environment: Family dynamics, parental support, and economic conditions play crucial roles. Supportive family relationships and stable economic conditions are protective, while poor family relationships and economic hardship can increase risk (Bustomi et al., 2024; Wang, 2022; Lin & Guo, 2024). The pandemic highlighted the importance of family support, but post-pandemic, the challenge lies

in adjusting to new family routines and expectations.

School Environment: Academic pressure, peer relationships, and teacher support are critical. High academic pressure and negative peer interactions, such as bullying, can exacerbate mental health problems, whereas supportive teacher-student relationships can mitigate them (Bustomi et al., 2024; Wang, 2022; Wang & Xue, 2024). With the shift to online learning and the return to in-person schooling post-pandemic, many adolescents continue to face challenges in adjusting to the new learning environment, which can impact mental health.

Social and Digital Environments: social media, community environment, and access to mental health services are influential. Social media can both positively and negatively impact mental health, depending on usage patterns. Community support and access to mental health services are protective factors (Bustomi et al., 2024; Basu & Banerjee, 2020; Hermann et al., 2022). After the pandemic, the role of social media has become even more significant as adolescents navigate a digital-first world, which can impact mental well-being.

Socioeconomic Status and Lifestyle: Lower socioeconomic status is linked to higher mental health issues, while healthy lifestyle choices, such as regular physical activity and healthy eating, are associated with better mental health outcomes (Nagy-Pénzes et al., 2020; Association et al., 2023). Post-pandemic, socioeconomic disparities may have widened, further influencing adolescents' access to mental health resources and overall well-being.

Stigma and Social Norms: Stigmatization and stereotypical gender norms can exacerbate mental health problems. Adolescents often face stigma related to mental health issues, which can hinder seeking help and exacerbate conditions (Hermann et al., 2022). The stigma surrounding mental health may have increased post-pandemic as more adolescents face increased stressors, yet there is also a growing awareness of mental health, which can serve as a protective factor.

Conclusion

Adolescent mental health is a multifaceted issue shaped by biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. This study highlights the complex interplay between these elements, reinforcing the Bio-Psycho-Social Model (Engel, 1977), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of biological changes, family dynamics, peer relationships, and broader societal influences. The findings align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which suggests that adolescents' mental well-being is influenced not only by immediate family and school environments but also by cultural and socioeconomic factors. These results contribute to existing literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how various contextual elements impact adolescent mental health. While previous studies have primarily focused on single variables—such as social media usage (Twenge et al., 2018) or family relationships (Steinberg, 2020)—this research underscores the need for an integrated approach. The findings support prior research indicating that adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., 1998) and academic stress (Putwain, 2007) significantly contribute to mental health issues. However, this study also identifies gaps in intervention strategies, particularly in culturally specific contexts where stigma surrounding mental health remains a barrier to seeking help (Yang et al., 2007). The implications of these findings extend to multiple sectors. For educators and policymakers, designing school-based mental health programs that address both academic pressure and emotional resilience is crucial (Durlak et al., 2011). For healthcare professionals, early detection and culturally sensitive interventions should be prioritized (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Additionally, for parents and caregivers, fostering supportive home environments and open communication can help mitigate risk factors (Resnick et al., 1997).

Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of mental health interventions across different demographic groups. Comparative studies between adolescents from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds could provide deeper insights into effective strategies (Patel et al., 2007). Additionally, investigating the role of digital mental health support

systems, such as AI-driven therapy and peer support networks, could offer new avenues for intervention (Hollis et al., 2017).

Suggestion

1. Focusing on Prevention and Early Intervention: More research is needed on early intervention and prevention strategies, particularly in educational settings, to address mental health issues before they become severe.

Application:

The results of this study can be used by school administrators, counselors, and policymakers to design mental health programs that focus on early identification of mental health issues. These programs can include regular mental health screenings, workshops for teachers to identify at-risk students, and the integration of mental health education into the school curriculum. By incorporating these strategies, schools can create supportive environments where students are empowered to seek help before their mental health issues escalate.

2. Promoting Youth Participation in Research and Policy: Adolescents should be actively involved in the design and implementation of mental health interventions to ensure that their unique needs are met.

Application: Researchers, policymakers, and mental health organizations can utilize our research results to engage adolescents directly in the design and evaluation of mental health programs. This could be done through focus groups, surveys, and advisory boards consisting of adolescent representatives. By incorporating adolescent voices into the policymaking process, these stakeholders can create interventions that are more relevant, engaging, and ultimately more effective in addressing adolescent mental health challenges.

Recommendations

In addition to the practical applications mentioned above, further research should continue to explore the effectiveness of these strategies in diverse populations. For example, studying the impact of early intervention programs across different regions and cultural contexts can provide valuable insights into how mental health interventions can be tailored to

meet the needs of specific adolescent groups. Future research should also explore the long-term effects of youth participation in mental health policy design and its impact on the success of interventions.

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