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The language of social media and adolescent mental well-being: A case study of the role of social workers in dealing with cyberbullying

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Abstract

Background: The development of social media has significantly changed the communication patterns of adolescents. The language used in digital interactions not only serves as a means of communication but can also affect the emotional state and mental well-being of adolescents.

Purpose: To analyze the impact of language use on social media on adolescent mental health and to examine the role of social workers in handling cyberbullying cases.

Method: Literature study by collecting data from various sources such as books, scientific journals, and academic articles.

Results: The use of negative language such as ridicule, insults, and hate speech can cause stress, depression, and even lower self-confidence in adolescents. Conversely, the use of positive and empathetic language contributes to the creation of a healthy digital environment. Social workers have a strategic role in providing digital literacy education, conducting psychosocial assistance, and building collaborative networks between schools, families, and communities to prevent and handle cyberbullying.

Conclusion: A holistic approach that emphasizes language ethics in the virtual world is needed as part of efforts to improve the mental well-being of adolescents in the digital age.

Keywords: Adolescent Mental Well-Being; Cyberbullying; Social Worker Intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important part of social practices that shape individuals in society (Putri, 2023). Language is a social behavior that is part of culture and a means of self-expression (Dhea, 2023). Thus, individuals form their identities through language. The variations in language used by a person also reflect information about themselves (Willard, 2017). Language is not only a tool for shaping identity, but also a medium for expressing and introducing oneself (Suarni, Yassar, Ramawati, & Kamal, 2024). Cyberbullying is an act of bullying in the virtual world that is carried out deliberately and repeatedly to attack or humiliate someone through social media. This

study examines the causes, effects, and prevention of this behavior using a literature review method. The effects can cause anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts in victims. Prevention efforts are carried out through internet ethics, the role of parents, counseling, and support from social institutions (Rusyidi, 2020).

Adolescent mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which play an important role in how adolescents think, feel, and interact. Good mental health helps them cope with life's pressures, build positive relationships, and make wise decisions. Conversely, mental disorders

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can reduce academic achievement, damage social relationships, and increase the risk of depression and dangerous behavior (Rachel & Novianty, 2023). Social media is an internet-based platform that makes it easy for users to interact and share content.

Social media is built with Web 2.0 technology to enable information exchange (Huliselan, Supulatu, Lemosol, Latuheru, & Pitna, 2021). Examples include Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter, which differ from traditional media because they operate via the internet. Social workers play an important role in helping adolescents face various challenges in the digital age. Based on the Person in Environment theory, social workers are required to understand the relationship between individuals and the digital environment, which has now become an important part of adolescents' lives. Changes in interaction patterns due to technological developments require social workers to adapt and understand the new social dynamics that have emerged in the virtual world (Ramadhani & Jatnika, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

Literature review, which is a research method conducted by collecting and studying various written sources such as books, journals, articles, research reports, and other scientific works directly related to the topic of the impact of language on social media on

the mental well-being of adolescents and the role of social workers in dealing with cyberbullying. Researchers search for relevant sources through scientific databases, digital libraries, and academic repositories. After that, the materials are selected based on the suitability of the topic, the credibility of the author, and their contribution to the development of the theoretical framework. Researchers then compare the content, findings, and opinions of various experts on how aggressive language, hate speech, and negative comments on social media can affect the psychological condition of adolescents, such as anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and depression.

In addition, literature on social worker interventions was studied to understand strategies for dealing with cyberbullying, such as counseling, digital literacy education, psychosocial assistance, and collaboration with schools and families. Scientific journals were used to examine previous research results, case trends, and the effectiveness of social worker interventions in reducing the negative impact of cyberbullying. Through this literature review method, researchers can develop a clearer, more comprehensive, and in-depth understanding of the relationship between language on social media, adolescent mental well-being, and the important role of social workers in prevention efforts.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Research Overview Table

Variable	Key Findings
Negative language on social media	Harsh comments, insults, body shaming, and hate speech can trigger stress and anxiety in adolescents.
Impact on mental well-being	Decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, emotional stress, and mild to severe depression.
Forms of cyberbullying	Flaming, denigration, repeated harassment, rumor spreading, and online exclusion.
Adolescents' responses	Withdrawal, sleep disturbances, mood changes, and declining academic performance.

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Role of social workers	Providing counseling, digital literacy education, psychosocial support, and mediation with families/schools.
Prevention efforts	Anti-cyberbullying education, healthy social media use campaigns, and strengthening social support systems.

The table presents a summary of key research findings showing how negative language on social media contributes to psychological issues among adolescents, including anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional stress. It also outlines common forms of cyberbullying, adolescents' typical responses, and the essential role of social workers in providing counseling, digital literacy education, and psychosocial support. Additionally, the table highlights preventive efforts aimed at promoting healthy social media use and strengthening social support systems.

DISCUSSION

Language serves as the primary means for humans to convey ideas, thoughts, and feelings. In social life, language is an important tool in communication, both verbal and nonverbal. The development of social media such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X (Twitter) has changed the way humans interact, making it faster and more widespread. Teenagers, as active users, utilize language on social media to express themselves and build relationships. However, the use of language without ethics can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and even mental health issues. Conversely, polite and positive language creates healthy communication, fosters self-confidence, and makes teenagers feel valued. Because teenagers are still in the process of finding their identity, the use of positive and empathetic language on social media is very important to maintain their emotional balance and mental health (Inderasari, Lestari, & Achsani, 2019).

The language used by teenagers on social media plays an important role in shaping their way of thinking, attitudes, and psychological conditions. Negative expressions or comments such as ridicule, insults, or sarcasm can have serious emotional impacts. Teenagers who often receive or read such

language tend to feel insecure, anxious, and experience mental pressure. A digital communication environment characterized by harsh or aggressive language can create unhealthy interaction habits. If this is allowed to continue, adolescents will consider the use of negative language to be normal, even though it can be detrimental to their own mental well-being and that of others. Conversely, the use of positive, polite, and empathetic language on social media can strengthen social relationships and help maintain the emotional stability of teenagers. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the importance of improving digital literacy so that teenagers can communicate wisely, respect others, and create a digital space that supports mental health (Arifin, 2025).

Cyberbullying often occurs through the use of language on social media, which serves as a means for aggressive and rude behavior to emerge. Various studies show that perpetrators often use insults, ridicule, and even foul language to damage the victim's image in the digital space. This phenomenon manifests itself in the form of online arguments, slander, disclosure of secrets, and even social exclusion. In addition, the use of dark jokes and slang can also be a form of covert insults that have a negative impact on the recipient. Therefore, awareness and digital literacy are needed so that people are able to interact ethically, wisely, and respectfully with others on social media (Dewi, Hamid, Annisa, Oktafianti, & Genika, Effrisanti, 2023). This study highlights the psychological impact experienced by adolescents as a result of their involvement in social media and online interactions, the consequences of which are not always realized. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which cyberbullying affects the psychological condition of adolescents, especially amid

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technological advances that have made digital communication increasingly accessible. The focus of the study is on adolescents who have been victims of cyberbullying, in order to identify the various impacts that arise during their transition to adulthood (Putri & Savira, 2023).

In summary, social workers play a multifaceted role in dealing with adolescent victims of cyberbullying. This role includes direct interventions such as assessing the psychosocial condition of victims, individual and group therapy, and strengthening adaptive coping strategies. In addition, social workers also play a role in assisting adolescents, families, and school environments to build safe, supportive relationships and increase the confidence and self-esteem of victims. Equally important, social workers play a role in education and advocacy, namely providing digital literacy, anti-cyberbullying counseling, and striving for school and community policies that protect children and adolescents from online violence (Larasati, Kanzunudin, & Pratiwi, 2023). A holistic and collaborative approach between social workers, schools, families, and communities is key to successfully reducing the negative impact of cyberbullying on the mental and social health of adolescents. Strong social support has been proven to reduce the risk of depression and improve the psychological well-being of adolescent victims (Hutasoit, 2024). In addition, social workers also play an important role in creating a safer digital environment through preventive activities and public policy advocacy (Pehe, Manu, Adisaputra, Dua, Veto, & Jewadut, 2025).

Amidst the rapid development of the digital age, social media and technology have become an integral part of teenagers' lives. The digital world provides them with vast opportunities to express themselves, be creative, and build social relationships. However, unwise use can have negative effects such as stress, anxiety, cyberbullying, and decreased self-confidence. Therefore, social work plays an important role in building a safe digital environment that supports the mental well-being of teenagers. One form of effort that can be made is through digital literacy education. By providing training and guidance,

social workers help teenagers understand how to use social media wisely and ethically, as well as how to distinguish between true and false information (Irawan, 2025). In addition, social workers can also create safe online spaces for adolescents to share their experiences, tell stories, and obtain emotional support without fear of being judged.

Social workers can provide online counseling services, such as chat and video calls, which allow adolescents to obtain psychological support in an easily accessible manner (Pujianti & Mardiansyah, 2022). Furthermore, digital campaigns on the importance of maintaining mental health, limiting social media use, and fostering a positive self-image are also important to continue consistently (Syah & Hermawati, 2018). Collaboration between social workers, schools, communities, and positive influencers is also a strategic step to expand the reach of mental health education in the virtual world (Agustin, Deliana, & Bara, 2024). With this cross-sector collaboration, the digital environment can become an empathetic, inclusive, and supportive space for the healthy social and emotional growth of adolescents (Nahari, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Social workers play an important role in helping adolescents deal with digital challenges through understanding, guidance, and empowerment. Through a holistic approach involving families, schools, and communities, social workers can create a safe and supportive digital environment. A cross-system approach that combines intervention, guidance, and education is a comprehensive strategy to improve psychosocial well-being, strengthen social support, and prevent future cases of cyberbullying. Social work plays an important role in building a positive and civilized digital culture. A healthy digital world is not only about technological security but also about creating a social space that values diversity and supports overall mental well-being.

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