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Peer support and depressive symptoms among twelfth-grade students

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Abstract

Background: Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health problems among adolescents and may negatively affect academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life. Peer support is considered an important protective factor that can help adolescents cope with stress and emotional challenges during their developmental period.

Purpose: To determine the relationship between peer support and depressive symptoms among twelfth-grade adolescents.

Method: A quantitative correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. A total of 82 students were selected using a total sampling technique. Data were collected using peer support and depressive symptom questionnaires. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Chi-Square tests with a significance level of 0.05.

Results: Of the 82 respondents, 53.7% perceived supportive peer support, whereas 46.3% reported less supportive peer support. Most respondents experienced mild depressive symptoms (61.0%), followed by no depressive symptoms (25.6%) and moderate depressive symptoms (13.4%). Chi-Square analysis revealed no significant relationship between overall peer support and depressive symptoms ($p = 0.295$). Among the dimensions of peer support, only appraisal support was significantly associated with depressive symptoms ($p = 0.011$). Emotional support ($p = 0.193$), instrumental support ($p = 0.239$), informational support ($p = 0.566$), and companionship support ($p = 0.143$) were not significantly associated with depressive symptoms.

Conclusion: Overall peer support was not significantly associated with depressive symptoms among twelfth-grade adolescents. However, appraisal support showed a significant association with depressive symptoms, highlighting its potential role in promoting adolescent mental health.

Keywords: Adolescents; Depressive Symptoms; Mental Health; Peer Support.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by substantial biological, psychological, and social changes. During this period, adolescents undergo identity formation, emotional maturation, and increased social interaction, making them vulnerable to various mental health problems (Li & Yang, 2026). The inability to adapt effectively to these developmental challenges may increase the risk of emotional disturbances, including depressive symptoms (World Health Organization, 2024). Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders among adolescents worldwide. It is

characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest in daily activities, feelings of hopelessness, and impaired social functioning (Al-Qudah & Baioumy, 2018). If left untreated, depression can negatively affect academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life among adolescents (Faridah & Lestari, 2025). Recent reports indicate that mental health problems among adolescents continue to increase globally. The World Health Organization reported that approximately one in seven adolescents experiences a mental health disorder, with depression being one of the leading

contributors to illness and disability among this age group. In Indonesia, adolescent mental health problems have become an emerging public health concern requiring attention from families, schools, and healthcare professionals (Gunnarsdóttir, 2024). Various factors influence the occurrence of depressive symptoms among adolescents, including family relationships, academic stress, socioeconomic conditions, and peer interactions. Among these factors, peer support plays an important role because adolescents spend a significant portion of their time interacting with peers. Positive peer relationships may provide emotional comfort, social acceptance, and practical assistance that help adolescents cope with stress and psychological challenges (Sarhangi, Rostami, Abbasirad, Fasihi, & Ahmadboukani, 2023). Peer support consists of several dimensions, including emotional support, informational support, instrumental support, appraisal support, and companionship support. These forms of support may help adolescents develop self-confidence, improve coping mechanisms, and reduce psychological distress. Conversely, inadequate peer support may increase feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and vulnerability to depressive symptoms (Darling-Hammond & Le, 2025). Senior high school students face various academic and social pressures, particularly during their final year of study. Concerns

related to academic achievement, graduation requirements, and future educational plans may contribute to emotional stress and increase the risk of depressive symptoms. Therefore, understanding the role of peer support in adolescent mental health is essential for developing effective mental health promotion strategies within school settings (Ye, Zhang, Tao, Liping, Wang, Chen, & Zhou, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative correlational design using a cross-sectional approach. The study was conducted at Senior High School 1 Petir, Banten, Indonesia. The population consisted of all twelfth-grade students enrolled during the study period. A total of 82 students participated in the study using a total sampling technique. Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring peer support and depressive symptoms. Peer support was assessed through emotional, informational, instrumental, appraisal, and companionship support dimensions. Depressive symptoms were measured using a standardized depression assessment instrument. Descriptive statistics were used to describe respondent characteristics and study variables. The relationship between peer support and depressive symptoms was analysed using the Chi-Square test with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency of Respondents (N=82)

Variable	Results
Age (Mean$\pm$SD)(Range)(Year)	(16.9 $\pm$ 0.8)(15–18)
Gender (n/%)	
Male	35/42.7
Female	47/57.3
Major (n/%)	
Science	45/54.9
Social Science	37/45.1
Peer Support (n/%)	
Supportive	44/53.7
Low Peer Supportive	38/46.3
Depressive Symptoms (n/%)	

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No Depressive Symptoms	21/25.6
Mild	50/61.0
Moderate	11/13.4

Table 1. The respondents had a mean age of 16.9 ± 0.8 years, with an age range of 15–18 years. Of the total respondents, 47 (57.3%) were female and 35 (42.7%) were male. Based on academic major, 45 (54.9%) were enrolled in the Science major, while 37 (45.1%) were in the Social Science major. Regarding peer support, 44 respondents (53.7%) perceived supportive peer support, whereas 38 (46.3%) reported low peer support. In terms of depressive symptoms, 21 respondents (25.6%) reported no depressive symptoms, 50 (61.0%) experienced mild depressive symptoms, and 11 (13.4%) experienced moderate depressive symptoms.

Table 2. Association Between Peer Support Dimensions and Depressive Symptoms

Variable	p-value
Emotional Support	0.193
Appraisal Support	0.011
Instrumental Support	0.239
Informational Support	0.566
Companionship Support	0.143
Overall Peer Support	0.295

The Chi-Square analysis showed that overall peer support was not significantly associated with depressive symptoms ($p = 0.295$). Among the dimensions of peer support, only appraisal support demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with depressive symptoms ($p = 0.011$). Emotional support ($p = 0.193$), instrumental support ($p = 0.239$), informational support ($p = 0.566$), and companionship support ($p = 0.143$) were not significantly associated with depressive symptoms because all p-values exceeded the significance level of 0.05.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that 44 respondents (53.7%) perceived supportive peer support, while 38 respondents (46.3%) perceived less supportive peer support. These results indicate that most twelfth-grade students had positive peer relationships and perceived adequate support from their social environment. During adolescence, peers become an important source of social interaction, emotional comfort, and acceptance, which may contribute to adolescents' psychosocial development (Delawalla, Rhew, Jenness, McCauley, Lyon, & Vander Stoep, 2025). This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting that adolescents generally rely on peer

groups as a primary source of support during their developmental transition. Positive peer relationships have been associated with improved self-esteem, social competence, and psychological well-being. Adolescents who receive adequate support from their peers are more likely to feel accepted and valued within their social environment, which may facilitate healthy emotional development (Cao, Li, Yang, Guo, Hua, Zhang, & An, 2025). The results showed that 50 respondents (61.0%) experienced mild depressive symptoms, 21 respondents (25.6%) reported no depressive symptoms, and 11 respondents (13.4%) experienced moderate depressive symptoms. These findings indicate that depressive symptoms remain prevalent among adolescents, although most respondents experienced symptoms at a mild level. The presence of depressive symptoms among students may be influenced by academic demands, future educational concerns, and various psychosocial challenges experienced during late adolescence. The findings are in line with previous studies showing that depressive symptoms are common among adolescents and represent one of the most prevalent mental health concerns in this age group (Crandall, Powell, Bradford, Magnusson, Hanson, Barnes, & Bean, 2020). Adolescence is

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characterized by substantial emotional and social changes that may increase vulnerability to psychological distress. Previous evidence has shown that academic pressure, social expectations, and developmental transitions contribute significantly to the occurrence of depressive symptoms among adolescents (Friedman & Jones, 2022).

The findings showed that 44 respondents (53.7%) perceived supportive peer support, while 38 respondents (46.3%) perceived less supportive peer support. This result indicates that most adolescents had positive social relationships and received adequate support from their peers. During adolescence, peer groups become increasingly important as sources of emotional comfort, social acceptance, and identity development. Positive peer interactions may contribute to better social adjustment and psychological well-being among adolescents (Pushap, Sudershan, Bhagat, Sachdeva, Younis, Sudershan, & Kumar, 2025).

The results revealed that most respondents experienced mild depressive symptoms (61.0%), while 25.6% reported no depressive symptoms and 13.4% experienced moderate depressive symptoms. Although severe depressive symptoms were not identified, the findings suggest that emotional distress remains prevalent among adolescents. Academic demands, concerns about future educational opportunities, social expectations, and developmental transitions may contribute to the occurrence of depressive symptoms during late adolescence (Surinto, Saifudin, & Rokhman, 2025).

The Chi-Square analysis demonstrated that overall peer support was not significantly associated with depressive symptoms among twelfth-grade students ($p = 0.295$). This finding indicates that the level of peer support received by adolescents was not sufficient to explain variations in depressive symptoms. Depression is a multifactorial condition influenced by numerous factors, including family relationships, academic stress, socioeconomic status, personality traits, coping strategies, and environmental influences. Therefore, peer support alone may not be a dominant determinant of depressive symptoms among adolescents (Wang, Chow, & Amemiya, 2017).

The study found no significant relationship between emotional support and depressive symptoms ($p = 0.193$). Emotional support refers to empathy,

care, understanding, and emotional closeness provided by peers. Although emotional support is considered beneficial for psychological well-being, the findings suggest that emotional reassurance from peers alone may not be sufficient to reduce depressive symptoms among adolescents. Other psychosocial factors may have a stronger influence on emotional health outcomes (Nashon, Metta, & Chande-Mallya, 2025). Appraisal support was significantly associated with depressive symptoms ($p = 0.011$). This finding suggests that adolescents who receive positive recognition, appreciation, encouragement, and affirmation from their peers tend to experience fewer depressive symptoms. Positive appraisal can strengthen self-esteem, improve self-confidence, and enhance adolescents' perceptions of self-worth. Furthermore, recognition from peers may increase feelings of belonging and social acceptance, which serve as protective factors against depression (Doumas, Midgett, & Peck, 2023).

No significant relationship was found between instrumental support and depressive symptoms ($p = 0.239$). Instrumental support refers to tangible assistance provided by peers, such as helping with academic tasks or practical problems. Although such support may facilitate daily functioning, it may not directly address the emotional and cognitive aspects of depression. Therefore, instrumental assistance alone may be insufficient to influence depressive symptoms among adolescents (Hesapcioglu & Yesilova, 2020).

The results showed no significant relationship between informational support and depressive symptoms ($p = 0.566$). Informational support includes advice, suggestions, and guidance provided by peers. The absence of a significant relationship may indicate that information obtained from peers is not always perceived as helpful in managing emotional distress. Adolescents may rely more heavily on parents, teachers, or mental health professionals when facing serious psychological difficulties (Cai, Niu, Gao, Liu, Liu, Guo, & Luo, 2025).

Companionship support was not significantly associated with depressive symptoms ($p = 0.143$). Companionship support reflects the availability of peers for social interaction, recreational activities, and shared experiences. While spending time with friends may provide enjoyment and social connection, the findings suggest that companionship alone may not

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substantially reduce depressive symptoms. The quality of relationships and emotional validation received from peers may be more important than the frequency of social interaction itself (Zapolski, Rowe, Fisher, Hensel, & Barnes-Najor, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Overall peer support was not significantly associated with depressive symptoms, appraisal support showed a significant relationship. These findings suggest that peer recognition, encouragement, and positive feedback may serve as important protective factors against depressive symptoms in adolescents. Strengthening appraisal support within peer relationships may therefore contribute to improving adolescent mental well-being.

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