

Research Article

**An Environmental Theory Approach to Predicting Treatment-Seeking Behavior
for Depression Among Indonesian Adolescents**

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Abstract

Depression is an increasingly prevalent mental health problem among Indonesian adolescents. Data from the 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) indicate a rise in emotional mental disorders among individuals aged 15 years and above, highlighting the growing vulnerability of youth. Despite experiencing depressive symptoms, many adolescents do not seek professional help due to social stigma and limited access to mental health services. Environmental factors—such as academic pressure, family conflict, social media influence, and socioeconomic conditions—significantly shape adolescents' willingness and ability to seek support. This study aims to analyze how environmental theory can be applied to predict help-seeking behavior among Indonesian adolescents experiencing depression. A qualitative literature review method was used to examine environmental determinants influencing decisions to access mental health services, drawing on academic articles, research reports, and institutional publications. The findings show that social stigma, cultural norms, and inadequate service availability remain major barriers to help-seeking. Limited mental health facilities, especially in rural areas, further restrict access. However, technological advancements and telemental health services present promising opportunities to improve accessibility and reduce stigma. In conclusion, improving adolescent help-seeking behavior requires strengthening mental health literacy, lowering stigma, and expanding digital-based services, supported by families, schools, and government institutions.

Keywords: Adolescent Depression, Mental Health Service Seeking, Environmental Theory, Social Stigma, Digital-Based Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

Depression is one of the mental health problems that continues to rise among adolescents, including in Indonesia. Data from the 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) show that the prevalence of emotional mental disorders among individuals aged 15 years and above has increased, with many adolescents experiencing depressive symptoms but not seeking medical help (Andoko et al., 2024). Various environmental factors, such as academic pressure, family conflict, and exposure to social media, serve as major triggers for the rising rates of depression among adolescents (Harjana et al., 2021). However, many adolescents do not seek professional help due to social stigma surrounding mental health and limited access to mental health services (Singh et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand how environmental factors influence the health-seeking behavior of adolescents experiencing depression in Indonesia.

Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders worldwide, characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities, as well as sleep and appetite disturbances (Himmerich et al., 2019). This condition not only affects the psychological well-being of individuals but can also influence physical, social, and economic aspects of life. According to research by Smith and Mazure (2021), depression is closely linked to socioeconomic factors, with individuals experiencing financial stress being more vulnerable to mental health disorders (Smith & Mazure, 2021). Moreover, a study by Di Giuseppe et al. (2020) found that children and adolescents with a history of chronic illness are more prone to depression than those who are physically healthy (Di Giuseppe et al., 2020).

In recent years, efforts to address depression have increasingly evolved, particularly through technology-based approaches and psychological interventions (Garrido et al., 2019). A study by Jacob et al. (2020) found that digital mental health interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy applications, have shown positive results in helping individuals manage depressive symptoms (Jacob et al., 2020). Additionally, research by Sileo and Kershaw (2020) revealed that social stigma toward mental disorders remains a major barrier preventing individuals with depression from seeking help (Sileo & Kershaw, 2020). Therefore, comprehensive strategies involving

mental health education, improved access to psychological services, and stigma reduction are necessary to ensure that individuals with depression receive appropriate and effective care.

Environmental theory in public health emphasizes that individual health behaviors, including help-seeking behavior, are influenced not only by personal factors but also by the social and physical environment surrounding them (Kwok, 2023). The social ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that the environment consists of several interacting layers that influence individual behavior, including the microsystem (family, peers, school), mesosystem (interactions between different social environments), exosystem (indirect environments that affect individuals), and macrosystem (culture and government policies) (Stangl et al., 2019). In the context of adolescent mental health, the interaction among these factors plays a significant role in determining whether an adolescent seeks medical help for depression or chooses to avoid it.

In Indonesia, stigma toward mental disorders remains a major barrier preventing adolescents from accessing mental health services. A study by Marthoenis (2024) found that many Indonesian adolescents with depression are reluctant to seek help due to fear of being labeled weak or “crazy” by family or peers (Marthoenis et al., 2024). Other research also shows that economic factors contribute to mental health service accessibility, with adolescents from low-income families less likely to receive psychological therapy due to high costs (Yulinda et al., 2023). Although mental health services have improved, such as the availability of online counseling and school-based mental health programs, the utilization rate among adolescents remains relatively low (Della Rahmadani et al., 2024).

Cultural factors also influence how adolescents respond to depressive symptoms. In some Indonesian communities, depression is often perceived as a spiritual weakness or lack of faith, leading many adolescents to seek religious or alternative solutions instead of professional mental health services (Suardana & Yunanto, 2024). A study conducted by Al Yasin et al. (2022) revealed that in traditional communities, family and community play a significant role in shaping adolescents' decisions to seek mental health services (Al Yasin et al., 2022). Thus, it is essential to explore how environmental theory can be applied to predict and understand mental health help-seeking patterns among Indonesian adolescents.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to understand the dynamics of health-seeking behavior in the context of adolescent depression in Indonesia. With the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders, it is crucial to identify the environmental factors influencing adolescents' decisions to seek medical assistance (Kuswardana, 2019). Without a deep understanding of the environmental factors contributing to these behavioral patterns, mental health interventions may be less effective in reaching the populations most in need. Therefore, this research is expected to provide deeper insights into how environmental theory can serve as a conceptual framework for understanding help-seeking behavior in adolescents experiencing depression.

Previous studies have examined various aspects related to help-seeking behavior in the context of adolescent depression. A study by Singh (2020) investigated how mental health literacy plays a role in increasing adolescents' awareness of the importance of obtaining medical treatment for depression. Meanwhile, research by Cipta et al. (2024) highlighted the role of social support in encouraging adolescents to seek professional help. Another study by Harjana et al. (2024) examined the psychosocial barriers contributing to low help-seeking rates among adolescents with depression. Although these studies have provided valuable insights, few have specifically utilized environmental theory as the primary approach in understanding mental health help-seeking behavior among Indonesian adolescents.

This study aims to explore how environmental theory can be used to predict help-seeking behavior in the context of adolescent depression in Indonesia. Specifically, this research will identify the environmental factors that influence adolescents' decisions to seek mental health services, including social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Additionally, the study will evaluate how community-based interventions can enhance awareness and access to mental health services among adolescents. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective intervention strategies to support the mental well-being of Indonesian adolescents.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review method to examine how environmental theory predicts health-seeking behavior related to depression among Indonesian adolescents. The literature review was chosen to

synthesize theoretical perspectives and previous research findings relevant to environmental factors influencing mental-health help-seeking behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data Sources

The study relied on secondary data obtained from academic literature, including peer-reviewed journals, books, research reports, and publications from national and international health organizations such as the Indonesian Ministry of Health, WHO, and UNICEF. Scientific databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, and ScienceDirect were used, focusing on publications from the past 10 years. Key literature on environmental theory and adolescent mental-health help-seeking served as the primary reference base (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Patel et al., 2018).

Data Collection

Data were collected through documentation techniques, involving systematic searches, selection, and review of relevant articles. Included studies were screened based on relevance, methodological rigor, and credibility to ensure academic quality (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, involving the identification, classification, and comparison of themes and findings across studies (Patton et al., 2015). A hermeneutic approach was also applied to interpret academic texts and explore how environmental factors—such as family, school, community, and social media—shape adolescents' decisions to seek mental-health support (Neuman Lawrence, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The table below presents the selection of 10 scientific articles forming the foundation of this study, *Assessing Environmental Theory to Predict Health-Seeking Behavior for Depression Among Indonesian Adolescents*. These articles were screened from major academic databases such as Springer, ScienceDirect, PubMed, ResearchGate, and JAMA Network. Selected studies were chosen for their strong

relevance to the research topic, particularly their use of environmental theory, ecological health models, and analyses of social and cultural factors influencing adolescents' mental-health help-seeking behavior.

Table 1. Literature Review

No	Author	Title	Findings
1	Rahimi, T., Morowatisharifabad, M. A., Farajkhoda, T.	A Comprehensive Health-Promoting Neighborhood Intervention to Improve Health Care Seeking Behavior Among Reproductive Age Iranian Women	A supportive social environment increases the search for mental health services.
2	Ramos, M.D.	The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Health-Seeking Behavior	Psychological and social factors play a role in seeking services for depression.
3	Zare-Farashbandi, F., Lalazaryan, A.	A Review of Models and Theories of Health Information Seeking Behavior	The social ecological model can influence mental health information seeking.
4	Maneze, D., Salamonson, Y., Poudel, C.	Health-Seeking Behaviors of Filipino Migrants in Australia: The Influence of Persisting Acculturative Stress and Depression	Acculturation factors influence the search for mental health services.
5	García, C. M., Gilchrist, L., Vazquez, G.	Urban and Rural Immigrant Latino Youths' and Adults' Knowledge and Beliefs about Mental Health Resources	Differences in knowledge between urban and rural communities influence access to mental health services.
6	Dai-Kosi, A.D., Acquaye, V.A., Anum, A.	Psychological Distress and Health-Seeking Behavior Among Patients with Orofacial Tumor: The Ghanaian Perspective	Social stigma influences patients' propensity to seek health services.
7	Kim, Y.K., Small, E., Pounders, R.D.	Ecological Factors of Telemental Healthcare Utilization Among Adolescents with Increased Substance Use	The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the use of

		During the COVID-19 Pandemic	telemental health services.
8	Lindsey, M.A., Chambers, K., Pohle, C.	Understanding the Behavioral Determinants of Mental Health Service Use by Urban, Under-Resourced Black Youth	Environmental and economic factors significantly influence the search for mental health services.
9	Yonemoto, N., Kawashima, Y.	Help-Seeking Behaviors for Mental Health Problems During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review	The pandemic has increased the need for mental health services, but access remains a barrier.
10	Lateef, H., Adams, L., Bernard, D.	Mental Health Treatment-Seeking Appraisal, Afrocentric Cultural Norms, and Mental Health Functioning	Cultural norms significantly influence the decision to seek mental health assistance.

This study focuses on how environmental theory can predict help-seeking behavior for mental-health services among adolescents experiencing depression. Based on an analysis of 10 selected scientific articles, various environmental factors were found to influence adolescents' mental-health help-seeking behavior, including social, cultural, economic, policy-related factors, as well as the impact of technology and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research by García et al. (2011) highlights that knowledge of and trust in mental-health resources significantly affect help-seeking behavior, particularly among Latino immigrant communities in urban and rural areas. The study revealed that adolescents living in urban settings have better access to information and mental-health services compared to those in rural areas, where stigma and limited resources contribute to low help-seeking rates. Social environments shape adolescents' perceptions of mental health, with cultural norms and community attitudes influencing whether they feel comfortable seeking professional assistance (García et al., 2011).

Another study by Dai-Kosi et al. (2021) also shows that social stigma remains a major barrier to mental-health help-seeking. In their research conducted in Ghana, individuals experiencing psychological distress due to physical illnesses such as orofacial tumors often avoid seeking mental-health support due to shame or fear of social

judgment. Similar patterns appear among adolescents with depression, where stigma discourages them from discussing their struggles or reaching out for professional help (Dai-Kosi et al., 2021).

Research by Maneze et al. (2016) examines how acculturation influences mental-health help-seeking among Filipino immigrant communities in Australia. The study found that low levels of cultural integration often hinder access to mental-health services due to differing cultural norms and distrust of the host country's healthcare system. This has significant implications for Indonesian adolescents, especially those from communities that still view mental illness as a taboo topic. Cultural norms emphasizing self-reliance and skepticism toward medical interventions often discourage adolescents from seeking professional support (Maneze et al., 2016).

This phenomenon is supported by a study by Lateef et al. (2024), which investigated Afrocentric cultural norms and their effect on mental-health help-seeking among young Black men. They found that individuals more strongly tied to certain cultural norms tend to hold negative views of mental-health services, leading to lower help-seeking rates. In the Indonesian context, many adolescents prefer to seek support from peers or family members rather than mental-health professionals, due to cultural and social norms that still consider psychological counseling uncommon (Lateef et al., 2024).

A study by Rahimi et al. (2023) emphasizes how environmental factors such as physical surroundings, access to health facilities, and government policies influence help-seeking behavior. Conducted within the context of reproductive health services in Iran, the study found that supportive environments—such as youth-friendly mental-health centers—increase help-seeking among young women. This finding is relevant to Indonesia, where access to adequate mental-health facilities remains limited. Many regions, especially outside urban centers, face shortages of mental-health services, contributing to low help-seeking rates among adolescents with depression (Rahimi et al., 2023).

Yonemoto and Kawashima (2023) examined help-seeking behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that changes in health policies and increased mental-health awareness encouraged more adolescents to seek help. However, limited access due to social restrictions and the insufficient availability of digital mental-health services became major obstacles. This indicates that environmental factors—including

policies and infrastructure—play a significant role in determining how adolescents access mental-health support (Yonemoto & Kawashima, 2023).

Technology also plays an increasingly important role in mental-health help-seeking, as demonstrated by Kim et al. (2024), who explored the use of telemedicine-based mental-health services among adolescents experiencing increased substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that adolescents with access to digital mental-health services were more likely to seek help than those relying solely on conventional services. This suggests that integrating telemental health into mental-health systems can enhance accessibility and reduce stigma among adolescents with depression (Kim et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, a study by Lindsey et al. (2013) shows that in communities with limited mental-health resources, support from family, schools, and peers is crucial in determining whether adolescents seek help. Those who feel supported by their immediate environment are more likely to reach out to mental-health services than those who feel isolated or lack access to adequate resources (Lindsey et al., 2013).

From the analysis of the 10 selected scientific articles, it can be concluded that adolescents' mental-health help-seeking behavior in Indonesia is strongly influenced by social, cultural, physical, policy-related, and technological factors. Social stigma and cultural norms remain major barriers, with many adolescents avoiding professional help due to fear of negative societal judgment. Limited access to mental-health services, especially in rural areas, further contributes to low help-seeking rates.

However, positive developments are emerging with the advancement of digital mental-health services. Studies indicate that telemental health can serve as a promising solution for adolescents reluctant to seek help in person due to stigma or geographic constraints. Therefore, intervention strategies to improve help-seeking behavior among Indonesian adolescents should include enhancing mental-health literacy, reducing stigma through public education, and expanding digital mental-health services.

Discussion

This study aims to explore how environmental theory can be used to predict health-seeking behavior among Indonesian adolescents experiencing depression, as well as to identify key environmental factors influencing their decisions to access mental-health services. In addition, this study examines how community-based interventions

can enhance awareness and access to mental-health care for adolescents.

Environmental Theory in Predicting Health-Seeking Behavior Among Depressed Adolescents

The literature review shows that environmental theories—particularly Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Framework (WHO, 2008)—are widely used to explain the factors affecting adolescents’ decisions to seek mental-health help. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that individual behavior is shaped by dynamic interactions across multiple environmental systems, from the microsystem (family, peers) to the macrosystem (social norms, cultural values, national policies).

In the context of depression, adolescents are more likely to seek help when they receive strong family and peer support, experience low social stigma, and have better access to mental-health services (Rickwood et al., 2005). Meanwhile, the SDOH framework highlights broader determinants—including socioeconomic status, education, and healthcare systems—that significantly influence whether adolescents choose to seek professional help (Marmot et al., 2012).

Environmental Factors Influencing Adolescents’ Mental-Health Help-Seeking

Health-seeking behavior among adolescents is not solely shaped by psychological conditions but also by various environmental factors that influence their perception and access to services. Four major factors identified include social, cultural, economic, and institutional influences.

1. Social Factors

Family support plays a crucial role in determining whether adolescents seek professional help. Studies indicate that adolescents with positive family relationships tend to be more open about emotional distress and more willing to seek assistance when experiencing depressive symptoms (Yap & Jorm, 2011). Conversely, family conflict or unsupportive communication can worsen mental-health conditions and discourage help-seeking. Peer influence also matters—supportive peers often encourage help-seeking, while negative peer norms and stigma may reinforce avoidance of professional care (Gulliver et al., 2010). In Indonesia, mental-health stigma remains high, leading many adolescents to fear being labeled as weak or

“abnormal” (Darmawan et al., 2021).

2. Cultural Factors

Indonesia’s collectivist culture often prioritizes addressing problems within the family rather than involving professionals (Nugraha, 2020). Many families prefer internal coping strategies or alternative healing practices such as prayer, religious rituals, and traditional medicine before considering formal treatment (Sari et al., 2020). These cultural norms limit adolescents’ opportunities to access appropriate mental-health support.

3. Economic Factors

Financial limitations are a major barrier for adolescents from lower-income families. Professional psychological services are often costly, and although Indonesia’s National Health Insurance (JKN) exists, coverage for mental-health services remains limited (WHO, 2018). Not all psychotherapy or counseling services are fully covered, leaving many adolescents unable to afford the care they need (Helmi et al., 2022).

4. Institutional Factors

Limited availability of mental-health services—especially in rural areas—also restricts access. Qualified psychologists and psychiatrists are concentrated primarily in urban regions, leaving remote areas underserved (Ministry of Health Indonesia, 2021). Service quality is another concern, as many healthcare facilities lack trained professionals specializing in adolescent mental health (Suryaputri et al., 2021).

Overall, adolescents’ decisions to seek mental-health services are influenced by a complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive, community-based approaches to expand access, reduce stigma, improve mental-health literacy, and strengthen institutional support. Such efforts are essential to ensure Indonesian adolescents with depression can receive timely and effective mental-health care.

Community-Based Interventions to Improve Mental-Health Awareness and Service Access

Enhancing mental-health awareness and access for Indonesian adolescents requires community-based approaches that effectively address existing barriers. The literature identifies several key strategies.

First, community education and anti-stigma campaigns—implemented through schools, social media, and local communities—have proven effective in improving public perceptions of mental health (Corrigan et al., 2012). Integrating mental-health education into school curricula also equips adolescents with knowledge and encourages early help-seeking (de Pablo et al., 2020).

Second, strengthening the role of schools and families is essential. Teachers and parents often notice early behavioral changes, so training them to identify symptoms of depression and provide appropriate support is crucial (Reavley & Jorm, 2011). Schools can further promote help-seeking by offering accessible, stigma-free counseling services.

Third, technology-based solutions such as telemedicine and mental-health apps expand access for adolescents in underserved areas. Digital platforms allow anonymous consultation and have been shown to increase service reach in contexts with limited mental-health professionals (Naslund et al., 2017).

Finally, collaboration between government, NGOs, and local communities can lead to the development of affordable, community-based mental-health centers and youth counseling programs, reducing financial and geographic barriers.

Overall, community-driven interventions that combine education, social support, technological innovation, and expanded service availability can significantly improve adolescents' willingness and ability to seek mental-health care in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Indonesian adolescents' help-seeking behavior for depression is strongly shaped by environmental factors, including social, cultural, economic, and policy-related influences. Social stigma remains the most significant barrier, preventing many adolescents from accessing professional support. Limited family and peer support, financial constraints, and inadequate availability of quality mental-health services further hinder help-seeking.

Despite these challenges, technological developments offer new opportunities. Tele-mental health services, digital applications, and online counseling platforms can expand access, especially for adolescents in underserved areas. Mental-health education in schools and community-based anti-stigma campaigns are also essential to improve awareness and acceptance.

This study recommends expanding community-based mental-health programs, providing free counseling services, training teachers and parents to recognize depression symptoms, and strengthening collaboration between government, health institutions, and digital platforms to ensure accessible and equitable services.

Overall, the findings emphasize that environmentally informed interventions can effectively encourage adolescents to seek professional help. With stronger support from families, schools, communities, and policymakers, more adolescents are expected to feel comfortable accessing the mental-health care they need.

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