



Differences in Help-Seeking Behavior in Adolescents with Anxiety Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Perbedaan Perilaku Pencarian Bantuan pada Remaja yang Mengalami Gangguan Kecemasan Saat Pandemi Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents represent one of the vulnerable groups that could suffer from mental and psychosocial health during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to analyze behavioral differences in adolescents who have experienced anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a cross-sectional design on 122 adolescents in East Java during the pandemic. Data was collected through a questionnaire via Google Forms in May 2021. Data analysis in this study used the Mann-Whitney test on SPSS Statistics 26. The current study found that male respondents (80%) show a higher tendency to have anxiety disorders compared with female respondents (74%). Meanwhile, there was no difference in the help-seeking behavior based on the gender of adolescent respondents' who experienced anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic ($p=0.291$). The current study also found that there is no difference in help-seeking behavior between adolescents who experience anxiety disorders or those who do not experience anxiety disorder ($p=0.449$). Most adolescents with anxiety disorders tend to discuss their issues with friends and family to relieve anxiety, whereas some do not seek help because they can cope with anxiety disorders on their own, they think they do not really need help, they feel that no one cares about their problems, and there is a lack of supporting health facilities in the youth environment. Teenagers in East Java are advised to consult their mental health problems with experts to find relevant solutions.

ABSTRAK

Remaja merupakan salah satu kelompok rentan yang dapat mengalami gangguan kesehatan mental dan psikososial saat Pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan perilaku remaja yang pernah mengalami gangguan kecemasan saat Pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain cross-sectional pada 122 remaja di Jawa Timur pada masa pandemi. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan kuesioner melalui Google Form pada bulan Mei 2021. Analisis data pada penelitian ini menggunakan uji Mann-Whitney test pada SPSS Statistic 26. Temuan pada penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa responden laki-laki (80%) cenderung mengalami gangguan kecemasan dibandingkan dengan responden perempuan (74%). Sementara itu, tidak terdapat perbedaan perilaku pencarian bantuan antara remaja laki-laki dan remaja perempuan yang mengalami gangguan kecemasan saat Pandemi Covid-19 ($p=0,291$). Penelitian saat ini juga menemukan bahwa tidak ada perbedaan perilaku mencari bantuan antara remaja yang mengalami gangguan kecemasan atau yang tidak mengalami gangguan kecemasan ($p=0,449$). Mayoritas remaja dengan gangguan kecemasan cenderung untuk bercerita kepada teman dan keluarga untuk menghilangkan kecemasan, sedangkan beberapa lainnya tidak mencari bantuan dikarenakan remaja dapat mengatasi gangguan kecemasan sendiri, remaja merasa tidak terlalu membutuhkan bantuan, remaja merasa tidak ada yang peduli terhadap permasalahan yang mereka hadapi, dan ketidakterediaan fasilitas kesehatan penunjang di lingkungan remaja. Remaja di Jawa Timur disarankan untuk melakukan konsultasi permasalahan kesehatan mentalnya kepada tenaga ahli untuk mendapatkan solusi yang relevan.

INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease), the number of COVID-19 cases worldwide has increased. As of December 31st, 2020, COVID-19 cases reached 81.485.119 cases globally, resulting in 1.798.154 deaths.¹ In Indonesia, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached 743.198 cases, causing 22.138 deaths.² became the region (in Indonesia) with the most number of cases reported. In May 2020, East Java was in the first rank of COVID-19 cases.³

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the psychological wellbeing of survivors or society.⁴ The pandemic had varied psychological impacts such as anxiety, frustration, fear of contracting the infection, insomnia, irritability, changes in eating patterns, and substance abuse.^{4,5} Vulnerable groups that can suffer from psychosocial health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic include women, the elderly, children, and adolescents.⁶ In Indonesia, 72% of 3.686 respondents admitted experienced anxiety and the remaining 23% reported being unhappy during the COVID-19 Pandemic.⁷ In addition, the results of the mental health survey conducted independently by *Perhimpunan Dokter Spesialis Kedokteran Jiwa Indonesia* (PDSKJI) found that the age groups that experienced the most psychological problems during the pandemic in Indonesia included individuals aged 17–29 years and over 60 years.⁸

Adolescence is a period characterized by vulnerability to mental health disorders.⁹ A literature review explained that the COVID-19 pandemic could negatively impact adolescents' mental health.¹⁰ In addition, adolescents were vulnerable and were going through a difficult transition period.¹⁰ Previous studies predicted that difficulties encountered in online education during the pandemic were predictors of depression and anxiety.¹¹ Furthermore, anxiety could be caused by unpleasant experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic such as fear of infection, frustration, loneliness, or limited mobility.¹²

Unfortunately, adolescents with anxiety disorder do not have access to mental health services because medical services are not accessible or are still limited near their place of residence.¹² Loss of peer interaction causes anxiety

in adolescents, meaning they miss out on the way to share their problems.¹³ Every adolescent has a way of dealing with anxiety. Adolescents' ability to seek help to overcome mental health problems, especially anxiety, during the COVID-19 pandemic is a very important issue.⁹ Therefore, this study is aimed at analyzing the differences in help-seeking behavior in adolescents with anxiety disorder during the Covid-19 pandemic.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study was conducted in May 2021, and it employed a cross-sectional design. The inclusion criteria in this study were adolescents aged 14–18 years old who lived in districts/cities in East Java province. The study's sample has been gathered using a non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling. The sample in this study comprised 122 adolescents in East Java who used social media. The data was collected using questionnaires via Google Forms. Data analysis was carried out descriptively and the differences in the help-seeking behavior among adolescents who experienced anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic were identified. This study employed the Mann-Whitney test on SPSS Statistics 26 because the data was not normally distributed. This study was registered in the Health Research Ethical Clearance Commission, Faculty of Dental Medicine, with the Ethical Clearance number 221/HRECC. FODM/V/2021.

RESULTS

Individual Characteristics

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents in this study were, at the time of participation, 17 years old, with 41 respondents from the total (37%). Most of the respondents in this study were female (80%). According to the school level, the sample was dominated by adolescents in high school, with 99 respondents from a total of 122 (81%).

Table 2 shows the number of respondents who experienced anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 Pandemic as 92 adolescents (75%). By gender, the highest percentage of adolescents who suffered anxiety disorders were male (80%). Based on the school level, the percentage of high school adolescents with anxiety disorders was 1% greater than that of junior high school adolescents.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	n=122	%
Age (Years)		
14	4	3
15	29	24
16	21	17
17	41	37
18	27	22
Gender		
Male	25	20
Female	97	80
School Level		
Junior High School	23	19
Senior High School	99	81

Source: Primary Data, 2021

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Based on the homogeneity test, the significant value was greater than 0.05. This indicated that the population variant was homogeneous. Consequently, the requirements of the comparative analysis of homogeneity were fulfilled. Table 3 shows that the analysis results gave a *p*-

value = 0.449. When compared with 0.05, the probability value was greater than 0.05, which indicated that there was no difference between adolescents with anxiety disorders and those without in seeking help. Moreover, Table 3 indicates that the results of data analysis showed that there was no difference in help-seeking behavior between male and female adolescents.

Table 4 indicates adolescents primarily relieved anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic by telling their friends and family. Meanwhile, only 5 adolescents used medical personnel services to relieve anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most female adolescents relieved anxiety disorders by telling their problems to friends, while male adolescents shared their problems with their families. Table 5 shows that the reason male and female adolescents did not seek help was that they felt they can cope with or solve their problems on their own.

Table 2. Cross Tabulation of Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders Based on Gender and School Level During Covid-19 Pandemic

Variable	Anxiety Disorders				Total	
	Yes		No		n=122	%
	n=92	%	n=30	%		
Gender						
Male	20	80	5	20	25	100
Female	72	74	25	26	97	100
School Level						
Junior High School	17	74	6	26	23	100
Senior High School	75	76	24	24	99	100

Source: Primary Data, 2021

Table 3. Help-Seeking Behavior Differences of Adolescents with Anxiety Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Analysis	Help-Seeking Behavior Differences of Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders Without Anxiety Disorders During the Covid-19 Pandemic	Help-Seeking Behavior Differences Between Male and Female Adolescents During the Covid-19 Pandemic
Man-Whitney U	1271.000	949.500
Wilcoxon W	1736.000	1810.500
Z	-0,757	-1,056
<i>p-value</i>	0,449	0,291
Grouping Variable	Anxiety disorder	Gender

Source: Primary Data, 2021

Table 4. Efforts Made by Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders to Relieve Anxiety Disorders During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Efforts	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
Told problems to friends	2	14	14	86	16	100
Told problems to family	3	33	6	67	9	100
Engaged in spiritual activity	1	20	4	80	5	100
Used medical personnel services	2	40	3	60	5	100
Did counseling at school	1	25	3	75	4	100
Did recreational activity	2	100	0	0	2	100

Source: Primary Data, 2021

Table 5. Reasons for Adolescents with Anxiety Disorders Not Seeking Help To Relieve the Anxiety Disorders During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Reasons	Gender				Total	
	Male		Female		n	%
	n	%	n	%		
Thought they could cope with it	8	24	26	76	34	100
Felt they do not need any help	1	13	7	87	8	100
Did not know	0	0	3	100	3	100
Felt no one cared for their wellbeing	0	0	5	100	5	100
The unavailability of supporting health facilities	0	0	1	100	1	100

Source: Primary Data, 2021

DISCUSSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several obstacles have been experienced by adolescents that are believed to cause anxiety.¹⁴ The majority of the respondents in this study (75%) experienced anxiety during the pandemic. A previous study conducted in Indonesia found that adolescents tend to suffer from a higher incidence of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ In addition, a meta-analysis identified that one in five adolescents experienced elevated anxiety symptoms.¹⁶

Based on gender, male adolescents are more likely to experience anxiety disorders than female adolescents. This is because it is more difficult for male adolescents to depend on social networks to get support for their anxiety than female adolescents.¹³ However, previous research showed that women were generally more likely to experience anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{16,17}

High school adolescents showed a higher tendency to experience anxiety disorders; the study explained that the higher the school level, the higher the number of students experiencing mental emotional symptoms.¹⁸ In addition, mental health problems in adolescents at higher school levels can be due to puberty and hormonal changes.¹⁶ It needs to be emphasized that age was not a factor determining adolescents' anxiety levels.¹⁶

Based on the assumption test performed for the normality and homogeneity test, the statistical test for analyzing differences that can be used was the Mann-Whitney test. The results showed no significant difference between adolescents who have anxiety disorders and those who do not seek help. However, a previous study mentioned that anxiety could predict someone's help-seeking behavior.¹⁹ The ap-

pearance of symptoms and the increase in mental health problems experienced can make a person more active in seeking help.^{20,21} The results of this study show no significant difference in help-seeking behavior between male and female adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in general, male adolescents depend on rational thoughts, while female adolescents cope with anxiety by praying and seeking help from friends.²²

This finding supports another study that suggested that adolescents generally discuss their issues with friends to cope with the anxiety disorders they experienced.²³ Besides, the study results also showed that the second most widely used attempt to relieve anxiety is to share their problems with the family. Adolescents seeking help from their families feel that they receive sufficient support and do not need additional support from mental health services.²⁴ Generally, adolescents will seek help for mental disorders from friends, classmates, and relatives or family.^{25,26} Seeking help from informal sources like friends and family has the potential to decrease adverse psychosocial impact among adolescents.⁹

The results demonstrated that the biggest reason adolescents did not seek help was that they felt like they could cope with their anxiety disorders themselves. This finding supports previous research that stated that students felt there was nothing wrong with their mental health and felt they were not experiencing severe problems.²⁷ The results also showed that one of the reasons adolescents did not get help was the unavailability of mental health services near their place of residence. In providing mental health services, Indonesia is still considered not optimal. Mental health programs are still not a priority in primary healthcare programs in Indonesia.²⁸ On the other hand, men-

tal health services are also limited during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁹ This study has a research limitation. There was no measurement of the level of adolescent anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There is no difference in help-seeking behavior between adolescents who experience anxiety disorders or those who do not experience anxiety disorder. There is no difference in help-seeking behavior between male and female adolescents who experienced anxiety disorders during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The majority of adolescents with anxiety disorders seek help from friends and family. Some adolescents do not seek help because they felt they could cope with their anxiety disorders themselves, they felt they did not need help, they felt that no one cared and understood, and supporting health facilities were unavailable in their environment. Further research is suggested to examine the severity of anxiety experienced by adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, health facilities providing mental health services are suggested to provide facilities for adolescents in overcoming perceived mental health problems. In addition, adolescents in East Java are advised to consult their mental health problems with experts to find relevant solutions.

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