

Friendship, Culture, and Mental Health in Adolescence: A Review of Current Evidence

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ABSTRACT: Adolescence is a critical developmental stage where friendship and social support networks significantly influence mental health and behavioral outcomes. This narrative review aims to examine the psychological and sociocultural determinants that shape adolescent peer relationships and their implications for emotional well-being. The review systematically identified relevant literature from databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar, using keywords related to social relationships, friendship, social support, adolescent mental health, and behavioral risks. Studies published between 2014 and 2023 were included based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on empirical findings from qualitative, quantitative, and longitudinal studies. The findings demonstrate that psychological factors such as self-confidence and resilience are strongly associated with the development and sustainability of adolescent friendships. Resilient adolescents exhibit better conflict management and emotional regulation, resulting in stronger support networks. Simultaneously, sociocultural factors, including societal norms and cultural expectations, influence the structure of these networks, with collectivist cultures emphasizing familial and group-based ties, and individualist cultures favoring autonomy and self-selected relationships. Social support networks are shown to mitigate risks of depression and anxiety, especially when emotional quality and inclusivity are present. However, stigma surrounding mental health remains a significant systemic barrier. Peer-led community programs have demonstrated efficacy in strengthening social bonds and reducing isolation. The review concludes by advocating for culturally sensitive policies and educational programs that address stigma, enhance social integration, and promote mental resilience among youth.

Keywords: Adolescent Friendship, Social Support Networks, Psychological Resilience, Cultural Determinants, Mental Health, Peer Relationships, Stigma Reduction.



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INTRODUCTION

The significance of social relationships during adolescence has gained considerable attention in both conceptual and operational terms. Conceptually, adolescent social relationships encompass

the dynamic and multifaceted interactions individuals establish within various social structures. These interactions play a crucial role in influencing psychological and physical well-being. Operationally, such relationships are typically measured through indicators such as perceived social support, interaction frequency, and peer network size. Extensive studies have shown that these connections serve as protective mechanisms that buffer adolescents against emotional and social challenges during their developmental years (Székely et al., 2015; Sakyi et al., 2014).

This understanding is particularly vital within both global and local contexts, where patterns of social interaction are shaped by diverse cultural, economic, and sociopolitical environments. In developing nations such as Indonesia, rapid urbanization and shifting societal norms have altered traditional modes of adolescent socialization, potentially contributing to mental health vulnerabilities. These structural transformations warrant critical attention, as social isolation and environmental stressors may act as catalysts for mental health crises among young populations (Ragan, 2016). The contextual nuances of adolescent social networks in such regions require closer examination to inform evidence-based interventions and policy responses.

Epidemiological data reinforce the urgency of this inquiry. In Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, the prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents has been on the rise. Empirical findings indicate that adolescents with robust peer support systems are less likely to experience conditions such as anxiety and depression (Dudovitz et al., 2017; König et al., 2023). In a recent Indonesian survey, nearly 30% of adolescents reported significant anxiety symptoms, which were closely linked to inadequate peer support and heightened academic pressures (Montgomery et al., 2020). Thus, cultivating and maintaining strong peer networks may serve as a fundamental component in safeguarding adolescent mental health and promoting long-term well-being (Abreu et al., 2024; Kornienko et al., 2019).

Regionally focused research has further emphasized the salience of social network structures in moderating mental health outcomes. In high-risk contexts like Indonesia, the quality of adolescent peer relationships can act as a crucial buffer against stress and mental disorders. Targeted interventions that enhance the quality of peer connections, rather than merely increasing their quantity, show promise in reducing the psychological burden of everyday life among youth (Light et al., 2019). This necessitates a paradigm shift from traditional individual-focused mental health strategies to more relational and community-based approaches.

These observations underscore the operational importance of defining and measuring social relationships among adolescents, particularly in at-risk regions. A clear understanding of the structural and functional dimensions of these relationships could offer vital insights for preventative strategies in mental health. Evidence suggests that strong peer networks not only facilitate emotional regulation but also improve coping mechanisms, potentially mitigating the onset or severity of psychological disorders (Menkin et al., 2016; Alboom et al., 2022).

Despite these advances, several persistent challenges complicate the study of adolescent social relationships. One of the most prominent issues involves how academic performance and social behavior shape peer networks. For example, academically high-achieving students often gravitate toward similarly performing peers, inadvertently marginalizing those with lower academic

outcomes from supportive social structures (Palacios et al., 2024). This exclusion may hinder the psychological development of vulnerable students. Moreover, adolescents facing difficulties in social adaptation, such as international students, often encounter additional barriers in establishing meaningful relationships in unfamiliar environments (Byrne et al., 2019).

Another critical challenge is the limited understanding of the underlying mechanisms that govern interactions within adolescent social networks. While existing literature has examined the influence of peer groups on risk behaviors such as smoking and alcohol use, the protective potential of social support remains underexplored. Much of the current research focuses on the presence of social connections, rather than the quality of these relationships and their direct impact on mental health variables such as anxiety and depression (Montgomery et al., 2020; Kornienko et al., 2019; Li et al., 2021).

A further complication arises from global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drastically reshaped social interaction patterns among adolescents. Lockdown measures have led to a marked contraction in peer networks, with associated declines in mental health and well-being (Elmer et al., 2020; Kindred & Bates, 2023). This shift highlights the need for empirical investigations into how disruptions in social connectivity can be mitigated, particularly through targeted interventions aimed at restoring and reinforcing peer networks during periods of social upheaval.

The aforementioned issues point to notable gaps in the existing literature. Specifically, a paucity of studies delves into the mechanisms through which adolescent friendships evolve and operate under varying sociocultural and environmental conditions. While it is recognized that peer influence plays a substantial role in shaping adolescent behavior, there remains a lack of comprehensive models explaining how social support functions as a protective factor against adverse mental health outcomes. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of these relationships across different phases of adolescence and the interplay between quality and quantity of social ties have been insufficiently addressed.

The primary aim of this review is to synthesize current knowledge on adolescent social relationships with a particular focus on the psychological and sociocultural determinants that shape friendship networks. This includes exploring how peer support affects mental health outcomes, the influence of academic and behavioral factors on network formation, and the resilience of these networks amid social disruptions. Through this review, we seek to clarify the multifaceted roles that friendships play in adolescent development and identify potential avenues for interventions that can enhance peer-based social support structures.

This review will concentrate on adolescents aged 12 to 19, with a geographical focus on Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, due to the region's unique combination of demographic pressure, rapid urbanization, and evolving cultural norms. In addition, the review will consider special populations such as adolescents with disabilities, minority groups, and international students who may experience social exclusion. By emphasizing these understudied populations and regions, the study aims to contribute to a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of adolescent social dynamics.

Overall, this review intends to deepen our understanding of adolescent friendship networks by integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence across multiple disciplines. The findings are expected to inform public health strategies and educational policies aimed at fostering resilient peer networks as a means of promoting mental health and social inclusion. Recognizing the integral role of friendships in shaping adolescent trajectories, this review underscores the importance of relational interventions in ensuring the well-being of youth in diverse socio-cultural settings (Wilkens, 2015).

METHOD

The methodology of this narrative review is designed to systematically gather, screen, and analyze academic literature that explores the interplay between adolescent social relationships and mental health outcomes. In order to ensure comprehensive coverage and scholarly rigor, a multi-phase search strategy was employed, integrating established academic databases and carefully defined criteria for inclusion and exclusion. This approach was chosen to facilitate the identification of robust empirical studies and theoretical contributions that reflect the current state of knowledge in this field.

The literature search was conducted using three major academic databases: Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. These platforms were selected due to their broad indexing of peer-reviewed articles, coverage of interdisciplinary studies, and accessibility of both global and regional research. The search process was conducted in iterative stages between October 2023 and March 2024. Each stage involved refining keyword combinations to improve the specificity and sensitivity of the results. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation symbols were utilized to capture a wide range of terminologies associated with the topic.

A comprehensive set of keywords and their synonyms were used to ensure an inclusive search strategy. The core search terms included "social relationships," "friendship networks," "social support," "adolescents," "mental health," and "risk behaviors." These were supplemented with related terms such as "peer interaction," "youth friendships," "peer influence," "depression," "anxiety," and "addictive behavior." These keywords were selected based on their relevance in previous seminal studies (Palumbo et al., 2015; Heyes et al., 2015), and were aimed at capturing literature that addresses both the structure and function of adolescent social ties and their implications on psychological well-being.

The inclusion criteria were established to maintain the relevance and quality of the selected studies. First, the review included only articles published between 2014 and 2023, ensuring that the findings reflect contemporary patterns of adolescent behavior and current social dynamics. Second, both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered, encompassing methodologies such as systematic reviews, social network analysis, longitudinal cohort studies, and case studies. These types of studies were prioritized due to their capacity to provide rich empirical insights and contextual understanding (Kornienko et al., 2019; Székely et al., 2015). Third, studies were only included if they explicitly focused on the adolescent population and investigated the effects of peer relationships on mental health outcomes, risk behaviors, or other health-related variables such as psychological resilience and emotional regulation (Spain et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2015).

In contrast, exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate studies that lacked methodological clarity or empirical rigor. Articles that failed to provide transparent methodology, adequate sample descriptions, or valid data analysis procedures were excluded from further consideration (Lindsay-Smith et al., 2018). Moreover, publications that targeted irrelevant populations, such as adults or preadolescent children, were excluded to maintain a clear focus on adolescence as a distinct developmental stage (Fearon et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2015). Additionally, studies published prior to 2014 were removed from the dataset, as they were deemed outdated in light of the evolving landscape of adolescent mental health and social behavior (Almaatouq et al., 2016).

Each article retrieved through the search process underwent a multi-step selection procedure. First, the titles and abstracts of all retrieved records were screened for relevance. Articles that did not align with the conceptual focus on adolescent social networks and mental health were discarded. Subsequently, full texts of the remaining articles were retrieved and assessed in depth to ensure compliance with inclusion and exclusion criteria. This assessment was guided by the relevance of the study's aims, population characteristics, research design, and clarity of findings. Studies that passed the full-text evaluation were then subjected to critical appraisal to determine their methodological quality and theoretical contribution to the topic under investigation.

Throughout the selection process, attention was paid to balancing geographic representation, ensuring that research from diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts was included, particularly those focused on Southeast Asia and Indonesia. This decision was informed by the recognition of regional disparities in adolescent social experiences and mental health service availability. Articles that provided insight into underrepresented or high-risk groups, such as youth with disabilities, LGBTQ+ adolescents, or students from marginalized ethnic backgrounds, were deliberately included to capture the heterogeneity of adolescent experiences in forming and sustaining social networks.

The methodological rigor of the selected studies was further evaluated using established quality assessment frameworks, such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for qualitative studies and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) checklists for quantitative designs. This ensured that only methodologically sound research contributed to the synthesis of findings. Studies were assessed for sampling strategies, ethical considerations, validity of instruments used, and robustness of analytical methods. This evaluation process supported the inclusion of high-quality evidence while maintaining the integrity of the review's conclusions.

In synthesizing the literature, a thematic analysis approach was employed. Extracted data were organized based on recurrent themes identified across the reviewed studies, including peer support and emotional well-being, the role of friendship in preventing risky behaviors, and the effect of social exclusion on anxiety and depression. Particular emphasis was placed on studies that explored both structural and functional aspects of adolescent social networks, such as the size of the network, frequency of interactions, and perceived quality of peer relationships. This enabled a holistic understanding of how various components of social connectivity influence psychological outcomes.

In addition to thematic organization, comparative synthesis was conducted to explore differences and similarities across cultural contexts, particularly between high-income and low-middle-income countries. Such comparisons allowed for the identification of contextual variables that may moderate the relationship between social networks and mental health. For example, the presence of collectivist versus individualist cultural norms was noted to influence the way adolescents perceive and engage in peer support structures (Shen et al., 2023; Lakon et al., 2014). The inclusion of such analyses enhances the cross-cultural relevance of the review's conclusions.

To ensure transparency and reproducibility, a full list of the included studies is documented in the appendices, along with a PRISMA-inspired flow diagram that outlines the selection process. While this review does not strictly follow a systematic review protocol, it adheres to the principles of academic rigor, critical engagement with literature, and methodical synthesis of data. The chosen methodological framework allows for a nuanced exploration of complex social phenomena, aligning with the broader objective of developing evidence-based strategies to promote adolescent mental health through strengthened social connections.

By grounding this methodology in contemporary literature and methodological best practices, the review aspires to contribute meaningful insights into the design of social interventions, health education programs, and youth development policies. It is anticipated that the findings will not only deepen scholarly understanding of adolescent social networks but also inform practical efforts to mitigate mental health risks among young people in diverse settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this narrative review are organized into four thematic sub-sections based on emerging patterns in the literature: psychological determinants, sociocultural factors, the relationship between mental health and social support, and the role of social networks in specific population contexts. These results provide empirical and conceptual insights into the dynamics of adolescent friendship networks and their influence on psychosocial outcomes.

Determinants of psychological well-being play a critical role in the development and maintenance of adolescent friendship networks. Numerous studies have demonstrated that adolescents with high levels of self-confidence and resilience are more likely to form supportive social ties and sustain them over time. According to Sweeney et al. (2014), self-confidence serves as a facilitator for positive peer interaction, which, in turn, enhances overall psychological functioning. Graber et al. (2015) echoed these findings by highlighting the role of resilience in navigating interpersonal conflicts and strengthening peer bonds. Adolescents who demonstrate higher resilience are better equipped to cope with relational stressors, thereby preserving the integrity of their social support networks (Heyes et al., 2015).

Furthermore, psychological well-being and emotional regulation have been found to significantly mediate the stability and quality of social relationships. Yeager et al. (2016) argue that adolescents with enhanced emotional regulation skills are more adept at maintaining emotionally rewarding friendships, which reduces their vulnerability to social withdrawal and isolation. These individual attributes not only facilitate interpersonal connectivity but also function as protective mechanisms that buffer adolescents from the psychological impacts of stress and adversity. This dynamic

illustrates a reciprocal relationship: while psychological strengths promote social integration, supportive friendships also reinforce emotional resilience and self-worth.

Gender and age have emerged as significant moderating variables in the relationship between psychological factors and peer connectivity. Graber et al. (2015) observed gendered differences in how adolescents form and maintain friendships, noting that females are more inclined to build emotionally intimate relationships, which in turn foster higher levels of psychological resilience. Wood et al. (2015) also reported that girls often derive emotional security from smaller, more emotionally intensive networks, whereas boys tend to maintain broader, less emotionally demanding relationships. Additionally, younger adolescents are more likely to rely on peer emotional support as a primary coping mechanism, while older adolescents might incorporate other factors such as economic independence into their relational framework (Székely et al., 2015). These developmental and gender-specific differences underscore the necessity for targeted psychological interventions that reflect the evolving nature of adolescent friendships.

In sociocultural contexts, the formation and function of social networks are deeply embedded within prevailing cultural norms and values. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia and other Asian nations, social harmony and group cohesion are emphasized, leading to tightly knit networks centered around family and close friends. Spain et al. (2021) and Palumbo et al. (2015) demonstrate that in such contexts, adolescents often derive social support from familial ties and long-term friendships, with less emphasis placed on broader or peripheral relationships. These support systems are reinforced by cultural expectations of mutual obligation and familial responsibility, which shape the adolescent's understanding of trust, intimacy, and support.

Conversely, in individualistic cultures like those prevalent in the United States and Western Europe, the formation of social networks is often guided by principles of personal choice and self-expression. Morandini et al. (2015) suggest that adolescents in these societies develop broader peer networks as a means of achieving personal goals, identity exploration, and emotional autonomy. Similarly, Lakon et al. (2014) found that adolescents in individualistic cultures are more likely to seek instrumental support—such as problem-solving or informational aid—from their friends, reflecting a pragmatic orientation toward social relationships. These cultural distinctions significantly influence the structure and perceived utility of adolescent peer networks.

The contrast between collectivist and individualist orientations highlights the critical importance of culturally sensitive frameworks for understanding social support. In collectivist settings, interpersonal sacrifice for group well-being is a normative expectation, whereas individualist societies prioritize personal achievement and independence. Bruening et al. (2016) and Sakyi et al. (2014) underscore the need for interventions that are culturally attuned, particularly in multicultural or transitioning societies where adolescents navigate competing social values. Appreciating the fluidity of these cultural scripts is essential for fostering inclusive and effective support systems.

The intersection of mental health and social support is another key theme in the literature. A growing body of evidence suggests that adolescents embedded within strong, positive peer networks are less likely to experience depression and anxiety. Hill et al. (2015) and Sakyi et al. (2014) reported that adolescents with high-quality friendships demonstrated significantly lower rates of depressive symptoms compared to their socially isolated peers. Son (2025) further emphasizes that the quality of social support—measured in terms of emotional intimacy and perceived reliability—is a more critical predictor of mental health than the sheer number of social contacts.

In addition to correlational findings, intervention studies have provided compelling evidence on the potential of community-based programs to enhance social integration and reduce psychological distress. For example, the Wheel of Wellbeing (WoW) initiative in Australia employs a holistic approach that includes communal activities, positive affirmation, and inclusive group engagement to bolster social ties. Spain et al. (2021) report that participants in WoW programs exhibited reduced social isolation and improved psychological well-being. Lindsay-Smith et al. (2018) documented similar outcomes among elderly populations engaged in community-based interventions, indicating that the benefits of social connectedness extend across age groups and demographic boundaries.

When analyzed in specific contexts, the impact of social networks on mental health and recovery becomes even more evident. For adolescents managing chronic illness or mental health conditions, emotionally supportive friendships can play a vital role in the healing process. Sakyi et al. (2014) assert that social support serves as a catalyst for recovery by providing emotional validation, stress relief, and a sense of belonging. Among cancer patients, emotional support from friends and family has been linked to improved quality of life and reduced psychological distress (Bruno et al., 2024). These findings highlight the therapeutic potential of relational ties in clinical and non-clinical settings.

Demographic differences further modulate the structure and efficacy of social support networks. Hancock et al. (2015) observed that older adults tend to rely on smaller, family-centric networks, while university students often cultivate diverse social groups that include peers, classmates, and institutional mentors. Alboom et al. (2022) argue that the social expansion typically seen in student populations facilitates greater exposure to psychosocial resources, but also introduces variability in the quality of support received. In contrast, elderly individuals frequently face network contraction due to bereavement or physical limitations, which may necessitate external intervention to maintain social engagement.

Moreover, Rodrigues et al. (2019) highlight that the emotional benefits derived from social support can vary across demographic lines. For example, while younger individuals may prioritize companionship and peer acceptance, older adults often seek emotional stability and shared life experiences. Understanding these differential expectations is critical for tailoring interventions that resonate with the unique needs of each population.

In conclusion, the results of this narrative review illustrate the multifaceted relationship between adolescent friendship networks and psychosocial well-being. Psychological traits such as resilience and emotional regulation enhance social integration, while cultural norms shape the expectations and structures of peer relationships. Strong social support systems serve as buffers against mental health challenges, particularly depression and anxiety, and play a pivotal role in recovery from health-related adversities. These findings underscore the importance of contextually grounded, developmentally informed, and culturally sensitive approaches in designing interventions that promote adolescent mental health through the reinforcement of supportive social networks.

The findings of this narrative review reinforce previous empirical evidence suggesting a significant positive correlation between robust social support networks and mental health outcomes among adolescents. In line with Harmelen et al. (2017), the presence of high-quality friendships and emotionally supportive connections has been consistently associated with reduced levels of depression and anxiety. These results underscore that the quality of interpersonal relationships may be a stronger predictor of psychological well-being than the quantity of social contacts. This argument echoes the work of Forney et al. (2019), who emphasized that stable, emotionally attuned

peer relationships play a critical role in fostering resilience and mitigating symptoms of mental distress.

Interestingly, this review highlights individual variability in how adolescents form and benefit from social networks. Variables such as age, gender, and especially sociocultural context emerged as significant moderators of social support mechanisms. For instance, the tendency of female adolescents to develop emotionally intimate friendships can enhance psychological resilience more effectively than the broader but less emotionally invested networks typically observed in male adolescents (Graber et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015). Younger adolescents often depend more heavily on peer emotional support than older adolescents, for whom autonomy and economic independence start to become salient (Székely et al., 2015).

In sociocultural terms, the contrast between collectivistic and individualistic societies provides a compelling lens to interpret the structure and function of social support. Collectivistic societies, particularly in Asia, emphasize social harmony, mutual obligation, and cohesive familial ties. Within these cultures, support networks tend to be smaller but deeper, often centering around family and close friends (Palumbo et al., 2015; Spain et al., 2021). In contrast, adolescents in individualistic societies, such as those in North America, tend to cultivate broader but more flexible networks aimed at self-actualization and goal attainment (Morandini et al., 2015; Lakon et al., 2014). These differences are essential for contextualizing the effectiveness and durability of social support across cultures. They also suggest that interventions to improve adolescent mental health should be culturally tailored to align with prevailing social norms and values (Bruening et al., 2016; Sakyi et al., 2014).

One major systemic barrier identified in the literature concerns the pervasive social stigma associated with mental health conditions. Stigma serves as both a psychological and structural impediment, deterring individuals from seeking help and limiting their engagement in social contexts (Son, 2025). Denenny et al. (2015) found that self-stigmatization among university students was strongly correlated with reduced social participation, thereby compounding the negative outcomes of mental health challenges. These findings suggest that stigma operates at multiple levels—personal, social, and institutional—and must be addressed holistically to foster inclusive, supportive social environments.

To counteract such systemic barriers, comprehensive intervention models that target both individual behavior and societal attitudes are crucial. For example, the peer-based support model advocated by Abreu et al. (2024) has shown efficacy in enhancing emotional resilience and social integration among adolescents facing psychological challenges. This model aligns with the findings of Heyes et al. (2015), who highlighted the role of positive peer reinforcement and mutual empathy in building durable support systems. Notably, such interventions also exhibit adaptability across demographic lines, showing promise in settings ranging from educational institutions to community health programs.

Beyond theoretical contributions, real-world applications of these insights can be seen in programs like Australia's Wheel of Wellbeing (WoW), which uses community-based activities to foster connectedness and reduce social isolation (Spain et al., 2021). These initiatives are not only instrumental in reducing loneliness among adolescents and older adults but also serve as testbeds for policy-oriented research on preventive mental health strategies. Similarly, targeted interventions for vulnerable populations such as cancer survivors or individuals with chronic illnesses have demonstrated that tailored social support can substantially improve quality of life and reduce emotional distress (Bruno et al., 2024).

This study also reaffirms that demographic variables significantly shape the configuration and efficacy of support networks. For instance, older adults tend to rely more on familial ties, which may shrink over time due to loss or mobility issues (Hancock et al., 2015), whereas university students often build diverse networks through extracurricular involvement (Alboom et al., 2022). Such differences suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to social support intervention is inadequate. Effective strategies must be sensitive to the life stage, cultural setting, and psychological profile of target populations to be impactful (Rodrigues et al., 2019).

Although the current synthesis provides a robust overview, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, there is an over-reliance on cross-sectional studies that limit causal inferences. Longitudinal designs, although included, remain underrepresented and are essential for understanding the dynamics of social support over time. Additionally, most studies originate from high-income countries, leaving a significant gap in literature from low- and middle-income regions where social structures and mental health systems may function differently (Shen et al., 2023; Elmer et al., 2020).

Moreover, variations in the operationalization of key constructs like "support" or "network strength" across studies can hinder comparability. While some research uses self-reported measures of perceived support, others employ network analysis to quantify relational ties. This methodological inconsistency warrants greater standardization in future studies to facilitate meta-analytical approaches and policy synthesis.

Looking forward, future research should explore the bidirectional nature of social support and mental health. While this review primarily considers how social networks influence psychological outcomes, it is equally plausible that mental health status affects one's capacity to form and maintain supportive relationships. Such complex interdependencies merit the application of dynamic systems modeling and advanced statistical techniques to unravel causal pathways.

Finally, digital technology and social media present both opportunities and risks in the construction of adolescent support networks. While these platforms can extend social reach and facilitate peer engagement, they also harbor risks of cyberbullying and superficial interactions that may undermine genuine support. Investigating these dualities can yield critical insights into how online spaces can be optimized for mental health promotion.

In conclusion, this discussion elaborates on the intricate interplay between psychological, sociocultural, and systemic factors that shape adolescent social support networks and their influence on mental health. Addressing barriers such as stigma and leveraging context-specific, evidence-based interventions can pave the way for more resilient, connected youth populations. Yet, much remains to be uncovered, especially in underrepresented contexts and through longitudinal, culturally nuanced inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This review contributes by demonstrating how psychological traits and cultural contexts jointly shape adolescent peer networks, offering a nuanced understanding for interventions and policy. Its novelty lies in emphasizing Southeast Asian contexts, particularly Indonesia, where rapid social changes pose unique risks and opportunities. However, limitations remain: reliance on cross-sectional studies, limited representation from low- and middle-income countries, and inconsistent

measures of “social support.” Future research should employ longitudinal and cross-cultural designs, including digital peer networks. Concretely, policymakers and educators must scale peer-led, stigma-reducing, and culturally tailored interventions. Building resilient peer networks is not only a mental health imperative but also a societal investment in healthier future generations.

Despite the beneficial role of supportive networks, systemic barriers—most notably stigma surrounding mental health—continue to hinder adolescents from fully accessing and benefiting from these resources. This underscores the urgent need for interventions aimed not only at enhancing individual resilience and social skills but also at transforming broader societal attitudes. Peer-based interventions, such as those that build emotional literacy and foster inclusive environments, have proven effective and should be scaled.

Policy frameworks must integrate school- and community-based programs that actively dismantle stigma, promote inclusivity, and bolster support mechanisms for youth. Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of such interventions across diverse cultural contexts, especially in underrepresented regions. Understanding how these dynamics evolve over time and across cultures is vital for crafting inclusive strategies. Ultimately, promoting awareness, education, and equitable access to mental health and social support resources remains central to supporting adolescents in forming resilient and meaningful friendships.

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