



The Relationship Between Mental Health Literacy and The Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help in Junior High School

Rhifa Sasqi Nurazijah^{1*}, Sifa Fauziah¹, Papat Patimah¹


1. Stikes Permata Nusantara,
Cianjur, Indonesia

Article History

Submitted: 01-04-2026

Revised: 18-04-2026

Accepted: 21-04-2026

 doi.org/10.58545/jkki.v6i1.682

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Abstract

Adolescent mental health is an important aspect of individual development. However, a limited understanding of mental health causes adolescents to have difficulty recognizing psychological issues, which tends to result in attitudes that are less supportive when seeking professional help. This study aims to analyze the relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help among adolescents at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School. This study used a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. The research sample consisted of 83 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted using the Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ) and Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH) questionnaires. Data analysis was carried out univariately and bivariately using the Chi-Square test. The results shows that the majority of respondents have a moderate level of mental health literacy (56.6%) and a positive attitude toward seeking professional psychological help (57.8%). The bivariate analysis results show a p-value of 0.020, indicating a meaningful relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. There is a significant relationship between mental health literacy and the attitude toward seeking professional psychological help among adolescents. The higher the level of mental health literacy, the more positive the attitude in seeking professional psychological help.

Keywords

Mental health literacy, Help-seeking behavior, Adolescents, Professional psychological help, School-based mental health

Correspondence

Rhifa Sasqi Nurazijah

Stikes Permata Nusantara, Cianjur

Jl. Pasirgede Raya No.6-19, Bojongherang, Cianjur, Jawa Barat, Indonesia. 43216

Email: rhifanrz15@gmail.com

How to cite:

Nurazijah, R. S., Fauziah, S., & Patimah, P. (2026). The Relationship Between Mental Health Literacy and The Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help in Junior High School. *Jurnal Kesehatan Komunitas Indonesia*, 6(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.58545/jkki.v6i1.682>

1. BACKGROUND

Adolescent mental health is a critical component of individual development, particularly during the junior high school phase, which is characterized by rapid

biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional transitions. According to Jorm's (2000) mental health literacy framework, adolescents' capacity to recognize, manage, and prevent psychological distress is

heavily influenced by their knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders. At this developmental stage, adolescents face academic pressures, social adjustments, and identity formation, which can increase vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and depression (Salsabila et al., 2022; Hartati et al., 2022; Novianty, 2021). Despite the high prevalence of psychological distress, limited mental health literacy, and unsupportive cultural attitudes often delay or prevent adolescents from accessing appropriate care (Zakiah et al., 2024; Iriani et al., 2022).

Mental health literacy serves as a foundational factor that shapes how individuals perceive and respond to psychological challenges. Individuals with adequate literacy are more likely to accurately identify symptoms, reduce self-stigma, and consider professional help as a viable option, whereas low literacy often reinforces misconceptions and avoidance behaviors (Jorm, 2000; Maya, 2021; Tambunan, 2022; Defani, 2025). National data indicate a stark gap between need and service utilization: the 2022 Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey reported that 34.9% of adolescents experience mental health problems, yet only 2.6% access counseling services (Riskita, 2022). In addition to literacy,

help-seeking attitudes are shaped by personal, social, and systemic factors, as outlined in Fischer's (1990) model of barriers to help-seeking. Cultural norms, perceived stigma, and environmental support significantly moderate adolescents' translation of awareness into action (Handayani et al., 2024; Riziana, 2023).

While the relationship between mental health literacy and help-seeking attitudes has been widely documented in international and Indonesian contexts, most studies focus on university students or general populations. Empirical evidence remains scarce among adolescents in faith-based integrated Islamic junior high schools (SMP IT) in Indonesia, where religious values, collectivist norms, and school-specific counseling structures may uniquely shape psychological awareness and help-seeking preferences. Preliminary observations at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School revealed signs of academic stress, mild depressive symptoms, and emotional dysregulation among students. However, these issues were not matched by adequate mental health understanding, and many students exhibited reluctance toward formal psychological support.

Guided by Jorm's mental health literacy framework and Fischer's help-seeking barrier model, this study explicitly addresses the gap in faith-based secondary education settings. It aims to examine the relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help among adolescents at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School, providing context-specific evidence to inform school-based mental health promotion strategies.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design (Sahir, 2022). The research was conducted at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School, from November 2025 to April 2026.

The population comprised all active students at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School (N=304). A sample of 83 respondents was selected using purposive sampling based on predefined inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled as active students at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School, (2) aged 12–15 years, and (3) provided completed informed assent and parental consent. The sample size was determined based on practical feasibility, expected response rate, and adequacy for chi-square analysis,

consistent with recommendations for single-school cross-sectional surveys (Widarsa et al., 2022). The Slovin formula was intentionally excluded as purposive sampling does not rely on probability-based population representation.

The independent variable was mental health literacy, and the dependent variable was the attitude toward seeking professional psychological help. Mental health literacy was measured using the 20-item Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ), adapted from Wang (2013) and validated for Indonesian adolescents through expert review (content validity index >0.80) and a pilot test (n=33) yielding a Cronbach's α of 0.879. Scoring followed a dichotomous Yes/No format, with cut-offs: Low (0–6), Moderate (7–13), and High (14–20). Help-seeking attitudes were assessed using the 20-item shortened Indonesian version of the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH) scale, originally developed by Fischer & Turner (1970). The adapted version demonstrated acceptable internal consistency in our pilot test (Cronbach's α = 0.701) and utilized a 4-point Likert scale. Total scores ranged from 20 to 80, categorized as Negative (20–50) and Positive (51–80).

Data were collected via an online Google Form. The study received ethical

approval from the Research Ethics Committee of STIKes Permata Nusantara (Approval No. 083/9.V/KEPK-PERNUS/III/2026). Given that participants were minors (<18 years), a dual-consent process was implemented: written informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians, and written assent was secured from students prior to data collection. All procedures adhered to the principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data anonymization.

Data analysis was performed univariately to describe respondent characteristics and variable distributions, and bivariately using the Chi-Square test to examine the relationship between

variables. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

In this study, univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted. Univariate analysis was conducted to examine the characteristics of respondents by age, gender, level of mental health literacy, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Meanwhile, a bivariate analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, using the Chi-square test.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 83)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	12	1	1.2
	13	11	13.3
	14	57	68.7
	15	14	16.9
Gender	Male	28	33.7
	Female	55	66.3

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 83 adolescent respondents participating in this study. Regarding age distribution, the majority of participants were 14 years old (n = 57; 68.7%), followed by those aged 15 years (n = 14; 16.9%), 13 years (n = 11; 13.3%), and 12 years (n = 1; 1.2%). This age profile reflects the typical enrollment range for junior high school students in Indonesia. In terms of

gender composition, female respondents constituted the larger proportion of the sample (n = 55; 66.3%), while male respondents accounted for 33.7% (n = 28). The predominance of female participants should be considered when interpreting findings, as gender may influence both mental health literacy and help-seeking attitudes, as discussed in the literature. Overall, the sample represents early-to-mid

adolescents, a developmental period characterized by heightened vulnerability to psychological stressors and evolving help-seeking behaviors.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Mental Health Literacy (N=83)

Literacy level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	0	0
Moderate	47	56.6
High	36	43.4

Table 2 shows the distribution of mental health literacy levels among 83 respondents, the majority (47, 56.6%) had a moderate level. Furthermore, 36

respondents (43.4%) had a high level of mental health literacy. Meanwhile, no respondents had a low mental health literacy level (0%).

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (N=83)

Attitude	Frequency (f)	Percentage (n)
Negative	35	42.2
Positive	48	57.8

Table 3 shows the distribution of attitudes towards seeking psychological help among 83 respondents, the majority (48, 57.8%) have a positive attitude. Meanwhile, respondents with a negative

attitude numbered 35 (42.2%). Thus, the majority of respondents in this study have a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help.

Table 4. The Relationship Between Mental Health Literacy and the Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help (N=83)

Variable		Attitude of Seeking Help				Total	%	p-value
		Negative	%	Positive	%			
Mental Health Literacy	Low	0	0	0	0	0	0.020	
	Moderate	25	53.2	22	46.8	47		
	High	10	27.8	26	72.2	36		
Total		35		48		83	100	

Based on the analysis of the relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help among 83 respondents, it was found that respondents with a moderate level of mental health literacy mostly had negative attitudes, totaling 25

people (53.2%), while those with positive attitudes were 22 people (46.8%).

Meanwhile, among respondents with a high level of mental health literacy, the majority had positive attitudes (26 people, 72.2%), while those with negative attitudes numbered 10 (27.8%).

The statistical test results showed a p-value of 0.020 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Thus, it can be concluded that the higher the respondent's level of mental health literacy, the more positive the attitude toward seeking psychological help.

4. DISCUSSION

This study was guided by Jorm's (2000) mental health literacy framework and Fischer's (1990) help-seeking barrier model, which together emphasize that knowledge acquisition, belief modification, and contextual barriers collectively shape adolescents' decisions to seek professional support. The following discussion interprets key findings, compares them with prior literature, explores contextual and cultural mechanisms, acknowledges limitations, and proposes actionable recommendations.

The results reveal that the majority of adolescents possess moderate to high mental health literacy (100%) and predominantly positive help-seeking attitudes (57.8%). This aligns with recent Indonesian studies indicating that structured school environments and access to digital information have improved baseline mental health awareness among

youth (Andri, 2024; Mar'ati Indah Pakerti, 2021). The significant association ($p=0.020$) confirms that enhanced literacy reduces misconceptions, lowers self-stigma, and increases willingness to engage with professional services, consistent with findings by Lestari (2023) and Zakiah et al. (2024). Notably, 42.2% still held negative attitudes, underscoring that literacy alone does not guarantee help-seeking behavior.

The demographic profile (majority aged 14, female-dominated sample) reflects typical junior high school structures in Indonesia. Developmental theory suggests that mid-adolescence marks a period of increased cognitive abstraction and emotional awareness, enabling better symptom recognition and consideration of help-seeking (Syakarofath & Widyasari, 2023). Gender differences further contextualize the findings: female adolescents often exhibit greater emotional expressiveness and lower perceived stigma, whereas males may internalize help-seeking as a threat to masculine norms (Hapsari & Krianto, 2023). In an Islamic-integrated school context like Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School, religious framing of mental distress (e.g., viewing it as a test of faith or spiritual imbalance) may coexist with psychological literacy. This dual framework can either facilitate help-seeking (through

community support and pastoral counseling) or hinder it (if psychological services are perceived as conflicting with religious coping). The persistence of negative attitudes among moderately literate students suggests that cultural stigma, peer influence, and unfamiliarity with formal counseling pathways remain salient barriers, echoing Fischer's agency and sociocultural barrier model.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to establish directionality. Second, reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces potential social desirability and recall biases. Third, the purposive sampling from a single faith-based school limits generalizability to broader Indonesian adolescent populations or secular educational settings. Finally, while psychometric properties were adequate for this sample, future studies should employ confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the adapted instruments across diverse demographic groups.

Based on these findings, school-based interventions should integrate mental health literacy programs with stigma-reduction campaigns, peer-mentoring systems, and culturally sensitive counseling frameworks that harmonize

psychological and religious coping strategies. Educators and school counselors should normalize help-seeking through classroom discussions, parent workshops, and anonymous screening tools. Policymakers and school administrators should allocate resources to train guidance counselors in adolescent mental health first aid and establish clear, low-threshold referral pathways within the school ecosystem.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows a significant relationship between mental health literacy and the attitude toward seeking professional psychological help among adolescents at Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School. Adolescents with higher levels of mental health literacy tend to have a more positive attitude toward seeking professional help when facing mental health issues. Nevertheless, this attitude is influenced not only by literacy but also by other factors such as social stigma, cultural norms, and environmental support. Therefore, efforts to improve mental health literacy are needed, accompanied by education to reduce stigma and strengthen environmental support so that adolescents are more open to accessing mental health services.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author was responsible for conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. The second author supervised the research process, contributed to the methodological design, validated the research instruments, and critically revised the manuscript. The third author contributed to data interpretation and provided critical review and final approval of the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Bersemi Integrated Islamic Junior High School for granting permission and providing support for conducting this research, as well as to all respondents who participated in the study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are not publicly available. However, the datasets can be accessed from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with permission from the institution.

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