

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perception Of Mental Health Among Indigenous Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Mental health conditions are increasing globally, particularly among adolescents in low- and middle-income countries. Indigenous women and children experience worse physical and mental health outcomes compared to non-indigenous counterparts. This study aims to explore the perspectives of indigenous adolescents on mental health. **Methods:** The study employed a qualitative research approach, targeting adolescent girls from the indigenous community of Kampung Adat Cirendeu, Cimahi. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted. An inductive qualitative approach with thematic analysis was used. The study involved 16 adolescents aged 10–19 years, and four themes were identified: perceived susceptibility and fears, perceived severity, perceived benefit, and perceived barriers. **Results:** In the interviews, many adolescents expressed concerns about future mental health issues. Although they recognized the benefits of therapy, they felt anxious discussing these matters with their parents. As a result, they sought information online and believed that a careful approach to mental health topics would be more beneficial. **Conclusion:** Adolescent girls in Kampung Adat Cirendeu Cimahi have diverse views on mental health. While some find it embarrassing, others seek professional help. Factors such as environment and family influence perceptions, with some believing mental health issues can affect learning and that therapy can provide solutions. Access to mental health services aids in early detection, but those with anxiety and depression often struggle to communicate their feelings to friends.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues, especially perinatal mental health disorders, are a significant challenge in low- and middle-income countries (1,2). Perinatal mental health encompasses difficulties during pregnancy and the early postnatal period (3). Perinatal mental health issues impact up to 20% of women (4). The burden of perinatal depression and anxiety is higher in low-income countries (LMICs) than in high-income countries (HICs) (5). Perinatal mental health issues are common and usually easy to treat, with most women needing only light support (6). The typical onset for perinatal mental health problems is during late adolescence and early to mid-20s, making young girls especially vulnerable as they enter the perinatal phase (3).

Before age 14, up to 50% of mental health conditions emerge. The global prevalence of mental disorders is 13.5% in 10-14 year olds and 14.7% in 15-19 year

olds (7,8). In Indonesia, one in three adolescents faced mental health issues in the past year, with one in twenty having a mental disorder (9). Females, especially young girls, are twice as likely as males to experience common mental disorders (10,11). Some groups at higher risk for mental health issues include indigenous populations (12,13). Indigenous women and children typically have worse physical and mental health outcomes compared to non indigenous counterparts (14,15). Owais et al 2020 found that indigenous women are at a higher risk of mental health issues, especially depression, anxiety, and substance misuse (16).

In Indonesia, there is a significant lack of studies and statistics on the mental well-being of indigenous communities, resulting in real-world implications. These communities face barriers such as geographic isolation, a shortage of culturally competent healthcare professionals, and limited access to healthcare facilities. The existing legal and policy framework does not address their unique socio-cultural needs, leading to increased vulnerability to neuropsychiatric and behavioral issues (17). Understanding the immediate thoughts of adolescents can enhance our comprehension of their mental well-being, enabling them to take specific

actions and seek assistance. This study aims to explore the perspectives of indigenous adolescents on mental health in order to gain a deeper understanding.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized a qualitative research approach and targeted adolescent girls from the indigenous community of Kampung Adat Cirendeu Cimahi. Participants were selected using convenience sampling due to accessibility and affordability considerations. While this technique has limitations, the researchers attempted to minimize bias by ensuring a diversity of perspectives through variations in participant characteristics, such as age and education level. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted. An inductive qualitative approach with thematic analysis was employed through several stages, including familiarization, coding, theme review, theme development, defining and naming, and reporting. The study involved 16 adolescents aged 10–19 years, with an average age of 15 years, and most of them have a junior high school education level. Four themes were identified: perceived susceptibility and fears, perceived severity, perceived benefit, and perceived barriers. The research was conducted in January 2024 within the indigenous community of Kampung Adat Cirendeu. Kampung adat Cirendeu is located in South Cimahi District, West Java, Indonesia. The village predominantly thrives on agriculture, and its inhabitants adhere to the Sunda Wiwitan belief system, which significantly shapes their personal characteristics.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected in January 2024. The instruments used in this research include cameras to capture images and a recording tool to record all conversations and speeches. In addition, interview guidelines were employed. The interview guidelines consisted of semi-structured questions with topics such as perceived vulnerability, perceived severity, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers related to mental health.

Ethical clearance

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Science and Health Technology, University of Jenderal Achmad Yani, with the ethical clearance number 014/KEPK/Fitkes-UNJANI/I/2024.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Perceived Susceptibility (Perceived Vulnerability)

Most participants expressed significant concern about potential future mental health issues, with feelings of fear, anxiety, and worry arising even among those without a family history of mental health disorders. This was evident from interview excerpts.

"...Feeling worried and afraid of experiencing mental health problems even though I felt that my family had

no history of mental health problems" (Participant 1).

Another participant reinforced another answer:

"...feeling anxious because I keep thinking about whether I will experience mental health problems in the future" (Participant 4).

Theme 2: Perceived Severity (Perceived Severity)

Participants recognized mental health issues as serious conditions that disrupt daily life, affecting learning, social interactions, feelings of safety, and motivation. This was discovered from excerpts from interviews with participants.

"...really affects daily life significantly and is afraid of being compared to others by the family, and will also be disrupted by learning activities while at school" (Participant 2).

However, other answers were also reinforced by other participants :

"... maybe if I experience mental health problems, I will reduce my activities with other people, my friends will stay away from me, and cause a loss of focus and enthusiasm" (Participant 6).

Theme 3: Perceived Benefits

Participants believe therapy is essential for addressing mental health issues, as it reduces symptoms, improves social interactions, and offers emotional relief. Additionally, therapy enhances perspectives on mental health and provides practical solutions to challenges. These findings were based on quotes from the interviews.

"...therapy will provide many benefits when experiencing mental health problems and help interact better with family, friends, and our partners in the future" (Participant 9).

However, other answers were also reinforced by participants :

"....with therapy, apart from providing benefits, it also provides solutions when talking about the problems we face, and when following therapy that has been scheduled regularly, it is possible that mental health problems will also be recovered" (Participant 3).

Theme 4: Perceived Barriers

Participants encountered several barriers in seeking mental health help, including shame, fear of social stigma, and anxiety about their identities being revealed. Some preferred to gather information or discuss therapy with their parents before proceeding. This insight was based on quotes from the interviews.

"...one day I will probably not tell anyone except my closest friends, because I'm afraid if other people find out, they'll make fun of me" (Participant 9).

However, other answers were also reinforced by other

participants :

"...I think I'll look for information on the internet first, I'm afraid that if I go to a therapist, I'll be afraid of other people finding out, so I'll tell my parents first how good it is" (Participant 11).

DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Perceived Susceptibility (Perceived Vulnerability)

Most interview participants expressed worry and anxiety about future mental health issues, echoing findings by Ningrum et al. (2022) that highlight environmental, familial, and individual factors contributing to adolescent mental health problems (18).

In indigenous communities, several factors strongly affect adolescents. Strict traditional norms can limit their ability to express feelings, leading to increased stress. Family pressures to follow traditional rules can prevent them from discussing mental health issues. Additionally, adolescents often face the challenge of balancing their traditional identity with adapting to the outside world, which can cause further stress and anxiety.

During adolescence, a key developmental stage, depressive symptoms can significantly impact personality and lead to serious outcomes. There is a pressing need to prioritize mental health in adolescents due to the high prevalence of mental disorders in this age group. The transition from childhood to adulthood presents complex social and psychological challenges that increase the risk of psychological disorders (19).

Theme 2: Perceived Severity (Perceived Severity)

Interviews reveal that many participants believe mental health issues negatively impact their lives and reduce confidence in social interactions. Mental health problems like depression and anxiety significantly affect children and adolescents. Despite growing awareness of the consequences of untreated mental illnesses, society often overlooks the need for mental health care for young people (20). The study suggests that the perception of the severity of a problem and the perceived barriers influence young people's adoption of healthy behaviors. Individuals need to see their behaviors as a threat and believe that changing them offers real benefits. Thus, feeling a sense of seriousness is crucial before recognizing personal risk as a key factor (21).

Theme 3: Perceived Benefits

Most participants in the interviews felt that regular therapy would be beneficial in finding solutions. Those who see themselves as vulnerable to disease are more likely to respond to the expected benefits. For adolescents, accessing mental health services is valuable for early detection and screening of their mental health, especially when they have high self-efficacy. (22). Interview findings revealed that many adolescents seek

professional help for their challenges, but a strong desire for independence often acts as a barrier. This coping mechanism, influenced by parental upbringing, impacts their resilience. Additionally, older teenagers and those who have never sought help may feel increased anxiety about tackling issues alone and hesitate to seek assistance due to pride (23). In indigenous communities, cultural values prioritizing personal and family dignity further discourage reaching out for outside support, especially for sensitive issues like mental health. While adolescents recognize the benefits of therapy, they are often reluctant to access formal mental health services, influenced by personal feelings and community expectations.

Theme 4: Perceived Barriers

Participant interviews indicated that many felt apprehensive about therapy and discussing it with their parents, often seeking information online first. To ease discomfort with therapists, they believed speaking slowly would help. Additionally, they felt mental health conversations should remain outside of friend groups. These perceived barriers could significantly affect adolescents' service utilization and the types of treatment they receive (24). Adolescents with anxiety and depressive disorders often struggle to seek help due to typical developmental challenges. They find it hard to communicate their emotional issues, especially to friends, due to fears of negative social repercussions (23). These findings highlight the need for intervention strategies that create safe spaces for adolescents to express their emotions without stigma. Community programs can promote open communication through peer counseling, mental health literacy, and support groups, helping to break down barriers and encouraging discussions about emotional issues and engagement with mental health services.

CONCLUSION

Perceptions of mental health among adolescent girls in Kampung Adat Cirendeu Cimahi vary. Some find it embarrassing, while others are open to seeking help. Various factors, including environment and family, affect susceptibility to mental health issues. Many adolescents believe these problems hinder learning and that therapy can provide a cure. However, those with anxiety and depression often struggle to communicate their feelings to peers. There is a need for culturally sensitive mental health interventions that involve family support. Community strategies like peer counseling and discussion groups can help reduce stigma. Additionally, tailored education programs for adolescents and their families can raise awareness and improve self-efficacy in seeking help.

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