Peer Support Amplifies the Benefits of Psychological Help-Seeking on Adolescent Well-Being in Indonesia's Collectivist Culture

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian adolescents are increasingly exhibiting reduced engagement in psychological help-seeking. This study investigates the moderating role of Peer Support (PS) in the relationship between Psychological Help-Seeking (PHS) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB), with the hypothesis that PS amplifies the positive effects of PHS. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 1,385 adolescents (510 males, 875 females; M = 14.2, SD = 2.1) in Central Java using stratified random sampling. Three validated self-report instruments were employed: the 42-item PWB scale (α = .91), whose six-factor structure was confirmed via CFA in the present sample (N = 1,374; CFI = .962, RMSEA = .042); the 14-item PHS scale (α = .83); and the 23-item PS scale (α = .88). Hierarchical regression controlling for gender and age showed that PHS significantly predicted PWB (β = .35, p < .001, R² = .28). The interaction term PHS × PS accounted for an additional 3% of the variance (ΔR² = .03, p = .002). Simple slope analyses indicated that the positive association between PHS and PWB was stronger among adolescents with high PS (+1 SD; β = .53) than among those with low PS (−1 SD; β = .17), confirming the strengthening effect of peer support. Findings highlight the role of peer support in moderating the relationship between PHS and PWB in collectivist contexts, supporting the use of peer networks to enhance the effectiveness of help-seeking. Practically, these results encourage school counselors to prioritize peer-support training and integrate peer-facilitator programs to strengthen adolescents' help-seeking and psychological well-being.

ABSTRAK

Remaja Indonesia semakin menunjukkan penurunan upaya dalam mencari bantuan psikologis. Untuk menanggapi hal ini, penelitian ini mengkaji peran moderasi dukungan teman sebaya (*Peer Support*) dalam hubungan antara perilaku mencari bantuan psikologis (*Psychological Help-Seeking*) dan kesejahteraan psikologis (*Psychological Well-Being*), dengan hipotesis bahwa PS memperkuat manfaat dari PHS. Survei potong lintang dilakukan pada 1.385 remaja (510 laki-laki, 875 perempuan; M = 14,2, SD = 2,1) di Jawa Tengah menggunakan stratified random sampling. Tiga instrumen self-report terstandarisasi digunakan: skala PWB 42 item (α = .91), dengan struktur enam faktornya terkonfirmasi melalui CFA pada sampel penelitian ini (N = 1.374; CFI = .962, RMSEA = .042); skala PHS 14 item (α = .83); dan skala PS 23 item (α = .88). Regresi hierarkis dengan mengontrol jenis kelamin dan usia menunjukkan bahwa PHS secara signifikan memprediksi PWB (β = .35, p < .001, R² = .28). Interaksi PHS × PS memberikan tambahan 3% varian yang dijelaskan (ΔR² = .03, p = .002). Analisis simple slope menunjukkan bahwa hubungan positif antara PHS dan PWB lebih kuat pada remaja dengan PS tinggi (+1 SD; β = .53) dibandingkan mereka dengan PS rendah (−1 SD; β = .17), mengonfirmasi peran penguat dari dukungan teman sebaya. Temuan ini menyoroti peran dukungan teman sebaya dalam memoderasi hubungan antara PHS dan PWB dalam konteks kolektivistik serta mendukung pemanfaatan jejaring teman sebaya untuk meningkatkan efektivitas PHS. Secara praktis, hasil ini mendorong konselor sekolah untuk memprioritaskan pelatihan dukungan teman sebaya dan mengintegrasikan program fasilitator sebaya guna memperkuat perilaku mencari bantuan dan kesejahteraan remaja.

Kata kunci: Analisis Moderasi; Dukungan Teman Sebaya; Kesejahteraan Psikologis; Pencarian Bantuan Psikologis; Remaja

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by rapid emotional, social, and cognitive transitions that shape identity formation and adjustment into adulthood (Sawyer et al., 2018). Globally, approximately one in seven adolescents aged 10 to 19

experience a mental health disorder, indicating substantial vulnerability during this phase (World Health Organization, 2025). In Indonesia, more than 25 million adolescents face increasing academic demands, extensive digital exposure, and cultural expectations that influence their psychological well-being (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023). Although online environments support learning and social interaction, they also heighten risks related to social comparison, loneliness, and emotional distress (James et al., 2017). National data similarly reveal that one in seven Indonesian adolescents report symptoms of anxiety or depression, yet relatively few seek professional psychological assistance (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023; Pham et al., 2024). Schools, where adolescents spend much of their daily lives, represent a strategic environment for addressing these challenges and promoting student well-being. Previous research demonstrates that schools can play an important role in nurturing emotional resilience and adaptive coping skills (Khadijah & Fauziah, 2025).

Psychological Well-Being (PWB), as conceptualized by Ryff and Keyes (1995), reflects individuals' sense of purpose, autonomy, and positive functioning across six domains, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations, and self-acceptance. Adolescents with higher levels of well-being are generally more capable of managing stress, performing academically, and maintaining constructive social relationships (Hoying et al., 2016; Kern et al., 2015). Within the Indonesian collectivist cultural context, well-being extends beyond individual functioning and is closely associated with social harmony and mutual cooperation, traditionally expressed through the values of *rukun* and *gotong royong*. These cultural values provide a foundation for belonging and meaningful engagement within social relationships (Bahagia et al., 2021).

Psychological Help-Seeking (PHS) refers to the process of actively seeking assistance from formal sources, such as counselors or psychologists, and informal sources, including peers or family members, when experiencing psychological difficulties (Rickwood et al., 2015). Despite growing public awareness of mental health, many Indonesian adolescents remain hesitant to seek help (Yani et al., 2025). Cultural norms that emphasize endurance of hardship (*tahan banting*) and acceptance of suffering (*nrimo*) may discourage adolescents from openly expressing emotional distress (Kuswaya, 2020). Qualitative research among

Javanese students indicates that adolescents often feel more comfortable confiding in peers than in school counselors, as peer interactions are perceived as more confidential and less stigmatizing (Fauziah et al., 2019). PHS contributes to better psychological well-being by supporting emotional regulation and adaptive coping, particularly in the domains of environmental mastery and interpersonal relations (Rickwood et al., 2015). These patterns highlight the need to further explore culturally and developmentally appropriate mechanisms that encourage Indonesian adolescents to seek psychological support.

Peer Support (PS) plays a central role in shaping adolescents' willingness to seek help and maintain psychological well-being. Peer support includes emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance exchanged among individuals of similar age or developmental experiences (Roach, 2018). Peers often function as the first point of contact for adolescents experiencing distress, offering empathy, validation, and encouragement (Pavarini et al., 2023). Intervention research indicates that structured peer-to-peer programs, such as Mind Your Mate, can improve help-seeking behaviors and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (Birrell et al., 2023). Positive peer relationships have also been associated with stronger school engagement and improved emotional well-being, particularly in Asian sociocultural contexts (Lestari & Antika, 2023; Lestari & Safitri, 2023).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study draws on Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and Resilience Theory (Masten et al., 2021) to explain how peer relationships may amplify the benefits of adaptive coping. Social Support Theory posits that supportive networks can buffer individuals from the negative effects of stress, thereby enhancing overall well-being. During adolescence, peers serve as key agents of support who normalize help-seeking, reduce perceptions of stigma, and cultivate a sense of belonging (Sun et al., 2022). Resilience Theory describes resilience as the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully through coordinated processes when facing adversity. The theory highlights that caring and reciprocal interpersonal relationships are essential for psychological recovery and developmental growth (Masten et al., 2021). Together, these frameworks suggest that adolescents who receive strong peer support may experience a stronger positive effect of help-seeking on psychological well-being.

Gender differences further shape help-seeking patterns. Empirical studies consistently show that boys tend to be less willing to seek emotional support due to masculine norms

that emphasize toughness and emotional restraint, while girls generally demonstrate greater openness and empathy in expressing emotional difficulties (Liddon et al., 2018; Seidler et al., 2016; Yousaf et al., 2015). Although research in Indonesia remains limited, emerging studies point to similar trends. Indonesian boys report higher stigma toward help-seeking and stronger adherence to traditional masculine ideals, which may hinder emotional disclosure. In contrast, girls are more likely to express emotions openly and seek interpersonal support (Isni et al., 2024; Lesmana & Chung, 2024). These findings suggest that global gendered patterns may also operate within Indonesian cultural contexts, although potentially influenced by unique sociocultural norms.

A substantial body of research from Western and Asian samples has demonstrated that help-seeking intentions or behaviors are positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively associated with emotional distress among adolescents (Hosozawa et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2015; Sotardi et al., 2021). Additional research shows that the source of support significantly influences mental health outcomes (Mackenzie et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Systematic reviews also highlight the importance of social and contextual factors, including stigma and access to peer networks, in shaping help-seeking patterns (Divin et al., 2018; Yonemoto & Kawashima, 2023). Despite these developments, studies examining whether peer support moderates the association between PHS and PWB remain scarce in Indonesia.

Although adolescent mental health has attracted increasing scholarly attention, empirical examinations of the moderating role of peer support on the relationship between psychological help-seeking and well-being among Indonesian adolescents remain limited. It is not yet clear whether this association holds in collectivist contexts, where adolescents may rely heavily on peer networks compared to formal sources of support. Only a small number of studies have investigated the moderating role of peer support on help-seeking and well-being in collectivist societies. The current study addresses this gap by incorporating key cultural dimensions of Indonesian collectivism, such as *rukun* and *gotong royong*, into the help-seeking framework. This approach emphasizes peer-based relational strengths rather than individual autonomy. By integrating Western psychological models with local cultural constructs, this study contributes to the contextual adaptation of help-seeking and well-being theories for Indonesian adolescents.

Understanding this dynamic provides insight into how culturally embedded peer systems shape adolescent well-being and underscores the need to integrate these perspectives into school counseling practices in Indonesia. School-based guidance and counseling (BK) programs, including peer-counselor initiatives, have already been implemented but require further enhancement to ensure cultural relevance. Strengthening these programs is essential for developing robust school mental health systems (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022). In addition, the *Merdeka Belajar* policy, which promotes flexible and student-centered learning with an emphasis on holistic development, creates opportunities to incorporate peer-led strategies into school counseling practices (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022).

Based on these perspectives, the present study proposes two hypotheses. First, psychological help-seeking is expected to positively predict psychological well-being. Second, peer support is expected to moderate this relationship such that adolescents with higher levels of peer support exhibit a stronger positive association between help-seeking and well-being. By testing these hypotheses, the study aims to provide contextually grounded evidence on the role of peer support in strengthening adolescent well-being and to inform culturally responsive and gender-sensitive school counseling practices in Indonesia. Situating peer support within the sociocultural realities of Indonesian adolescents offers novel insights into how collectivist values influence help-seeking processes.

METHODS

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design to examine the moderating role of Peer Support (PS) in the relationship between Psychological Help-Seeking (PHS) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) among adolescents. The findings contribute to the refinement of school counseling practices by emphasizing relational strengths, collaborative coping, and interventions that are culturally aligned with local contexts. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model guiding this study, which outlines the proposed relationship between psychological help-seeking and psychological well-being with peer support as the moderating variable. Data were collected from several lower and upper secondary schools (junior and senior high schools) in Central Java, Indonesia. A total of 1,385 adolescents

participated in the study (510 males and 875 females; *M* age = 14.2 years, *SD* = 2.1). Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across school type, gender, and grade level. Because participants were nested within 12 schools, the data were examined for potential clustering effects using a two-level null model in hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was 0.038, indicating that 3.8% of the variance in psychological well-being was attributable to between-school differences (τ_{00} = 16.42; σ^2 = 413.88). Since the ICC was below the recommended threshold of .05 and the design effect, calculated as $1 + (115.4 - 1) \times 0.038 \approx 5.36$, was well under 10, clustering effects were minimal and the use of single-level analyses was considered appropriate (Hox et al., 2017). To further reduce potential bias, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were estimated using robust standard errors clustered by school, employing the HC3 estimator in SPSS (Hayes & Cai, 2007). Informed consent was obtained from students and their parents or legal guardians prior to data collection. Ethical approval for all study procedures was granted by the Institutional Review Board.
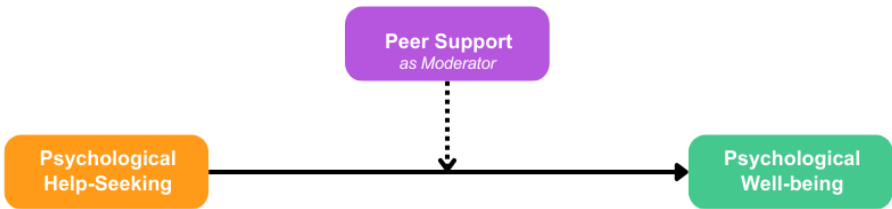

Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 1,385)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	510	36.8
	Female	875	63.2
School Level	Junior High School	712	51.4
	Senior High School	673	48.6
Age Group (years)	12–13	425	30.7
	14–15	545	39.3
	16–17	340	24.5
	18 and above	75	5.4
Mean Age (SD)	—	—	14.2 (2.1)

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and formal permission was secured from all participating schools. Adolescent assent was collected in accordance with ethical standards for research involving minors. Students received an age-appropriate information sheet describing the purpose and procedures of the study, and they provided voluntary agreement before completing the questionnaire. After coordination with school administrators and teachers, data collection took place during regular school hours in supervised classroom settings. Researchers provided standardized instructions, ensured confidentiality, and emphasized that participation was voluntary and that students could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participants completed the online questionnaire individually using either school-provided computers or their personal devices. Completion time averaged approximately 25 minutes. After finishing the survey, all students received a debriefing statement and a mental health resource sheet that listed school counseling services and national helplines. The collected data were then screened for completeness and checked for outliers before statistical analysis. Descriptive and inferential analyses were subsequently conducted to examine the proposed relationships among psychological help-seeking, peer support, and psychological well-being. Interpretation of results considered the cultural and developmental characteristics of Indonesian adolescents, including collectivist values, reliance on peer groups, and the existing structure of school-based counseling services, to ensure contextual relevance.
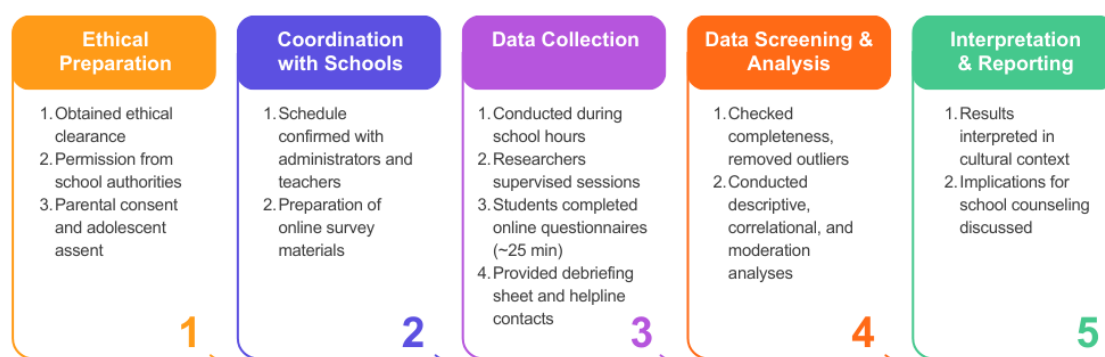

Figure 2. Research Procedure Flow

Three standardized self-report instruments were administered through a secure online survey platform (Google Forms). All items used a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Among the three measures, only the PWB scale underwent cross-cultural adaptation, whereas the PHS and PS scales were originally developed within the Indonesian cultural context and therefore required no adaptation procedures. The PWB scale consisted of 42 items adapted from Abbott et al. (2010), based on Ryff's multidimensional framework of eudaimonic well-being. The adaptation followed established international procedures for cross-cultural equivalence, including forward translation by bilingual counseling lecturers, expert panel review for conceptual and cultural relevance, independent back-translation into English, and pilot testing to ensure clarity and semantic accuracy. Minor linguistic adjustments were made to enhance cultural appropriateness while maintaining the integrity of the construct. The PHS scale (14 items; Tedra, 2015) assesses adolescents' willingness to seek professional and informal assistance for emotional or psychological difficulties. The scale was developed in Bahasa Indonesia and has demonstrated adequate construct validity in previous studies through expert judgment and exploratory factor analysis. The PS scale (23 items; Shiddiq, 2013) measures emotional, informational, and instrumental support provided by peers. Prior research involving Indonesian adolescents has established the scale's satisfactory psychometric properties, supporting its suitability for this population.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted for the PWB scale because it involved cross-cultural adaptation from an international instrument. CFA was performed using maximum likelihood estimation. After listwise deletion of less than one percent missing data, the final sample consisted of $N = 1,374$, resulting in a respondent-to-item ratio of approximately 32.7 to 1, which exceeds recommended standards for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023). The six-factor structure demonstrated excellent model fit (CFI = .962; RMSEA = .042), and all standardized factor loadings were above .60, indicating strong convergent validity. The PHS and PS scales were not subjected to CFA in the present study because both instruments had previously established construct validity in Indonesian samples. Consistent with earlier research, both scales showed high internal consistency (PHS α = .83; PS α = .88).

Table 2.
Description, Reliability, and Validity Evidence of Measurement Instruments (Main Study N = 1,385; CFA Conducted Only for PWB)

Measure	No. of Items	Example Item	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α	CFA χ^2/df	CFA CFI	CFA RMSEA	del Fit Interpretation
PWB	42	" I have a sense of direction and purpose in life."	162.50	21.30	42–252	.91	1.87	.962	.042	Excellent fit
PHS	14	" I would seek help from a school counselor if feeling distressed."	45.80	6.20	14–84	.83	-	-	-	Not applicable (validated scale)
PS	23	" My friends listen when I talk about my problems."	98.40	14.70	23–138	.88	-	-	-	Not applicable (validated scale)

Note. *CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation. CFA was performed only for the PWB scale because it was the only cross-culturally adapted instrument. The PHS and PS scales have established validity in Indonesian*

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were screened for normality, linearity, and multicollinearity, and all assumptions were met (Shapiro–Wilk $p > .05$; VIF < 2.0). Missing data below five percent were handled using listwise deletion. Gender was dummy-coded (0 = female and 1 = male), and age was treated as a continuous predictor. Scores for psychological help-seeking (PHS) and peer support (PS) were mean-centered before computing the interaction term to reduce multicollinearity.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was employed to test the study hypotheses. In Step 1, covariates (gender and age) and the main effects of PHS and PS were entered. In Step 2, the interaction term (PHS × PS) was added to examine the moderation effect. This approach allows researchers to determine the additional variance explained by the interaction after accounting for covariates and main predictors, making it appropriate for testing moderation hypotheses (Aiken and West, 1991). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Moderation strength was evaluated through changes in explained variance (ΔR^2) and standardized beta coefficients (β). Significant interactions were further examined using simple slopes analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean of peer support. Statistical power exceeded .99 for detecting medium effects ($f^2 = .15$; $\alpha = .05$), as determined through G*Power 3.1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the six-factor structure of the 42-item Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale. After listwise deletion of cases with missing data (less than 1%), the final CFA sample consisted of $N = 1,374$ adolescents. The hypothesized model demonstrated excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2/\mathrm{df} = 1.87$, CFI $= .962$, and RMSEA $= .042$ with a 90% confidence interval of [0.038, 0.046]. These results provide strong support for the multidimensional structure originally proposed by Ryff (1989). All items showed satisfactory standardized factor loadings above .60, and no cross-loadings or residual correlations exceeded acceptable thresholds. Accordingly, all 42 items were retained for subsequent analyses.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The PWB scale showed high reliability with $\alpha = .91$. The Psychological Help-Seeking (PHS) scale

demonstrated good reliability with $\alpha = .83$, and the Peer Support (PS) scale demonstrated strong reliability with $\alpha = .88$. These values indicate that all instruments used in the study possess adequate internal consistency for research applications.

Descriptive statistics indicated that participants generally reported scores in the mid-to-high range on PWB, PHS, and PS. Gender differences were minimal. Female adolescents reported slightly higher PWB and PS, whereas males showed marginally higher PHS levels. Correlational patterns aligned with theoretical expectations, as both help-seeking and peer support were positively associated with psychological well-being. Adolescents who engaged in more frequent help-seeking and perceived stronger peer support tended to report higher levels of overall well-being. Regression analyses further showed that peer support strengthened the positive association between help-seeking and well-being. This pattern suggests that help-seeking was most beneficial for adolescents who also experienced strong support from their peers, highlighting the role of supportive friendships in enhancing the effectiveness of help-seeking.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the study's hypotheses (Table 3). In Step 1, psychological help-seeking ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$) and peer support ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted psychological well-being, accounting for 28 percent of the variance, $F(4, 1380) = 134.20$, $p < .001$. Gender and age were not significant predictors. In Step 2, the interaction term representing the moderating effect of peer support (PHS × PS) was entered and accounted for an additional 3 percent of the variance in psychological well-being, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, 95% CI [.010, .058], $F(1, 1379) = 9.61$, $p = .002$. This increase corresponds to a small-to-small-moderate effect size, calculated as $f^2 = \Delta R^2 / (1 - R^2\text{previous}) = .03 / (1 - .28) \approx .042$ (Cohen and Wills, 1985). The interaction term was statistically significant ($\beta = .18$, $p = .002$), thereby supporting the second hypothesis.

Follow-up analyses of the conditional effects showed that the positive association between PHS and PWB was stronger at higher levels of peer support (b = .42, 95% CI [.27, .56], $p < .001$) than at lower levels of peer support (b = .21, 95% CI [.09, .33], $p = .001$). These findings indicate that peer support amplifies the beneficial impact of psychological help-seeking on adolescents' well-being. The final model explained 31 percent of the variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = .31$).

Table 3.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Well-Being

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	sr^2	VIF	Tol	ΔR^2
Step 1									**.28**
Psychological Help-Seeking (PHS)	0.48	0.04	.35	12.10	<.001	.038	1.52	.66	
Peer Support (PS)	0.62	0.04	.41	14.30	<.001	.052	1.49	.67	
Gender (1 = male)	1.21	0.67	.05	1.80	.072	.002	1.03	.97	
Age	−0.19	0.17	−.03	−1.10	.271	.001	1.06	.94	
Step 2									**.03**
PHS × PS	0.09	0.03	.18	3.10	.002	.007	1.18	.85	

Note. *N = 1,385. Total R^2 = .31. All continuous predictors were mean-centered except gender and age. ICC = 0.038 confirmed low clustering; robust SE (HC3) applied. VIF < 2.0 and Tolerance > .60 indicated no multicollinearity problems. sr^2 = squared semi-partial correlations indicating unique variance explained by each predictor.*

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PWB (Y-axis: 140–180)

↑
180 |         ●●●●●●●●● (High PS: β = .53***)
    |      /
    |     /
170 |    /
    |   /
160 | /      ●●●●●●●● (Low PS: β = .17*)
    |/
150 +------------------→ PHS (X-axis: -15 to +15, centered)
    Low (-1SD)    Mean    High (+1SD)
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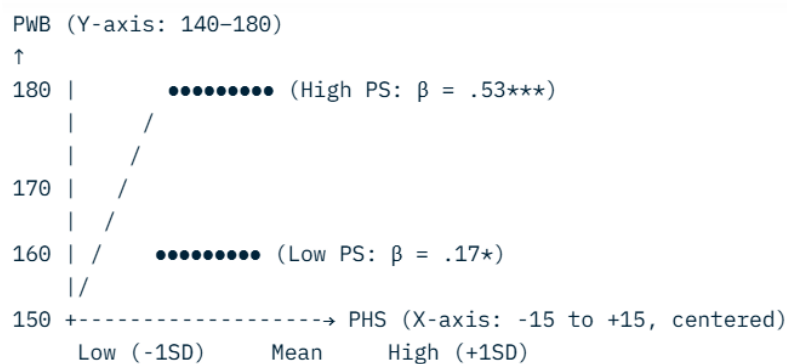
Note. Solid line = high PS (+1 SD); dashed line = low PS (−1 SD).
The shaded area indicates the region of significance (p < .05).

Figure 3. Moderating Effect of PS on the Relationship Between PHS and PWB

Simple slopes analysis (Figure 3) showed that PHS had a markedly stronger positive association with PWB at higher levels of PS, with a coefficient of β = .53 (*p* < .001) at one standard deviation above the mean. In contrast, the association was weaker at lower levels of peer support, with a coefficient of β = .17 (*p* = .040) at one standard deviation below the mean. The region-of-significance test further indicated that the moderation effect remained statistically significant for values of peer support exceeding 0.82 standard deviations below the mean. Although the findings are consistent with theoretical expectations, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; the direction of the associations is theoretically assumed rather than empirically established.

The present study examined how PS moderates the association between PHS and PWB among Indonesian adolescents. Using a large, stratified sample drawn from multiple schools, the study confirmed both hypotheses: PHS significantly predicted higher PWB, and PS strengthened this positive association. These results highlight the importance of interpersonal contexts, particularly the quality of peer relationships, in shaping how adolescents translate help-seeking attitudes into meaningful gains in psychological well-being. Peer interactions appear to function not only as supportive environments but also as social catalysts that enhance the effectiveness of help-seeking behaviors. Overall, the findings contribute new evidence to the growing literature on adolescent mental health in Southeast Asia by providing a culturally grounded understanding of how social support processes operate within collectivist educational settings.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, PHS was positively associated with PWB. Adolescents who reported a greater willingness to seek help, whether from teachers, counselors, or peers, tended to experience higher levels of life purpose, self-acceptance, and positive relationships. This pattern aligns with prior findings that portray help-seeking as an adaptive coping mechanism that facilitates emotional regulation and problem solving (Gulliver et al., 2010). Help-seeking reflects both awareness of distress and confidence in interpersonal resources, which are crucial for maintaining mental health during adolescence (O'Neill et al., 2023). The findings reinforce the idea that readiness to seek help may serve as an early indicator of psychological resilience (Chang et al., 2024).

The second hypothesis was also supported. PS moderated the relationship between PHS and PWB. Adolescents with higher perceived PS experienced stronger positive effects of help-seeking on well-being, whereas those with lower PS showed weaker associations. In Step 2 of the analysis, the PHS × PS interaction term accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in PWB. Although modest, this increase reflects a meaningful contribution in large-scale psychological research, where small effect sizes often capture important behavioral or social mechanisms that inform intervention development (Prentice & Miller, 1992).

Specifically, adolescents who perceived higher PS benefited more from their help-seeking behaviors (Goodwin et al., 2025). Simple slope analyses showed that at high levels of PS, help-seeking was robustly associated with well-being, while at low levels, the

association was weaker and only marginally significant. This pattern suggests that help-seeking is not uniformly beneficial; its efficacy depends on the social environment surrounding the adolescent (Chen, 2019). When peers are empathetic, nonjudgmental, and responsive, help-seeking is reinforced and validated, increasing the likelihood of emotional relief (Van den Toren et al., 2019). Conversely, in contexts where peers are indifferent or stigmatizing, adolescents may hesitate to seek help, limiting potential benefits (Rickwood et al., 2015). These findings echo research among adolescents living with HIV in South Africa, where peer support facilitated disclosure, reduced stigma, and enhanced well-being through increased self-acceptance (Rencken et al., 2023). Collectively, the results emphasize that the presence or absence of peer support significantly shapes the impact of help-seeking on adolescent well-being.

This moderating pattern aligns with social support theory, which proposes that supportive relationships can buffer the negative effects of stress and amplify the benefits of adaptive coping behaviors. In this context, peer support enhances the extent to which help-seeking contributes to improved well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Within this theoretical framework, peer support acts both as a direct enhancer of well-being and as a contextual amplifier of adaptive behaviors such as help-seeking. The findings therefore support the buffering hypothesis in Indonesian adolescents, suggesting that supportive peer relationships strengthen the positive impact of help-seeking on well-being.

These findings contribute to existing theory in several ways. First, the study extends the application of social support and resilience theories to a non-Western adolescent population. Much prior work on peer support and help-seeking has focused on Western contexts where autonomy and self-disclosure are culturally endorsed. In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, help-seeking is shaped by norms of interdependence and social harmony (Virdiyanti, 2025), influencing adolescents' willingness to disclose distress and the role peers play in supporting their well-being. The present results extend Western findings by showing that help-seeking can be adaptive in collectivist settings when supported by culturally congruent peer norms. However, because help-seeking may be stigmatized in collectivist societies, further research is needed to explore these dynamics more fully. Evidence suggests that help-seeking can coexist with relational interdependence when

social approval and emotional reciprocity are salient (McLaren et al., 2025), indicating an important avenue for future exploration.

The study also sheds light on potential developmental interactions. Prior research suggests that adolescents' willingness to seek help may depend more on their immediate peer ecology than on broader cultural norms (Newman, 2000). When adolescents perceive peers as emotionally available and nonjudgmental, they tend to view help-seeking as prosocial rather than as a sign of weakness. These findings imply that the moderating role of PS may be particularly salient during adolescence, a developmental period marked by strong orientation toward peer approval (Tanti et al., 2011). This developmental perspective helps explain why adolescents may be more flexible, or even resistant, to cultural constraints related to help-seeking.

Second, the findings highlight peer support as a resilience mechanism rather than merely a source of comfort. Resilience theory describes positive adaptation as arising from dynamic interactions between individual assets (such as help-seeking motivation) and contextual resources (such as supportive peers; Masten et al., 2021). Peer support provides the relational scaffolding that enables adolescents to translate their intentions to seek help into actual improvements in PWB. This perspective integrates relational and behavioral components of adolescent adjustment (Chu et al., 2010) and conceptualizes resilience as an evolving process shaped by reciprocal interactions between the individual and the environment. The moderating effect observed in this study illustrates this dynamic: empathic and trustworthy peers enhance the effectiveness of help-seeking, whereas unsupportive environments diminish it (Gulliver et al., 2010). This underscores the need to consider the quality of peer relationships when assessing resilience.

Third, the study emphasizes the relational nature of well-being. Adolescents develop meaning, purpose, and emotional stability through social interactions that validate their emotional experiences (Miething et al., 2016). PWB can thus be viewed as an emergent property of social connection that thrives when peer relationships are characterized by empathy, acceptance, and understanding (Alsarrani et al., 2022). This perspective challenges individualistic models and highlights the co-regulatory nature of emotional development, where peers influence affective balance and self-concept (Herd & Kim-

Spoon, 2021). Supportive exchanges foster belonging and competence, while negative interactions may contribute to isolation or inadequacy (Atkinson et al., 2020).

These insights also have implications for intervention design. Programs focusing solely on individual coping strategies may overlook the relational infrastructure that enables these skills to be maintained. Embedding peer support components, such as peer mentoring or peer-led mental health initiatives, can help schools cultivate environments that normalize help-seeking and mutual care (Booth et al., 2023). Such approaches align with community-based models of mental health that emphasize empowerment, participation, and shared responsibility (Ma et al., 2022).

The descriptive analyses revealed gender differences across the principal variables. Females reported higher PWB and PS, while males reported slightly higher PHS. This pattern may reflect gendered socialization processes influencing how adolescents access and interpret support. Girls often form more emotionally expressive and reciprocal friendships (Liddon et al., 2018), which may explain their higher perceived PS and PWB. They are also generally more comfortable discussing personal issues, which can enhance social connectedness and emotional well-being (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2018).

The finding that males reported slightly higher PHS is somewhat unexpected, given evidence that boys often hesitate to seek emotional support due to masculine norms emphasizing independence (Seidler et al., 2016; Yousaf et al., 2015). One possibility is that the help-seeking items were interpreted as referring to instrumental rather than emotional support, which aligns more closely with traditional masculine coping patterns. Another possibility is that the schools sampled had established guidance programs that normalized help-seeking for male students. Future qualitative research could clarify how boys and girls interpret help-seeking and how these interpretations influence engagement with counseling services.

These gender patterns also relate to the moderation findings. Because females reported higher PS, the moderating effect of PS on the PHS–PWB link may be more pronounced among them. This interpretation aligns with prior work showing that girls are more sensitive to peer relationship quality (Kreiner, 2014). Nevertheless, because the moderation effect remained significant after controlling for gender, PS appears to be a

strong moderator for both boys and girls, albeit through potentially different mechanisms (Khoury, 2020).

Exploratory analyses indicated that the PHS × PS interaction was slightly stronger among females. This suggests that PS may play a somewhat greater facilitating role for girls, who often place greater value on emotional reciprocity within friendships. For boys, help-seeking may be more strongly associated with instrumental support that aligns with masculine norms (Seidler et al., 2016). Future studies should examine these gender-specific pathways in Southeast Asian contexts, where cultural expectations surrounding emotion and collectivism may shape help-seeking differently across genders.

Indonesia's sociocultural context offers important insights for interpreting these findings. Adolescents commonly navigate tensions between traditional values emphasizing endurance (nrimo) and social harmony (rukun), and global norms encouraging emotional expression (Yani et al., 2025). These competing influences shape how help-seeking is interpreted. Traditional norms may position help-seeking as inappropriate, while global influences may frame it as self-awareness. In this context, peer support becomes a culturally acceptable middle ground, allowing adolescents to seek help informally through peers rather than approaching adults or professionals (Azzahrah et al., 2025).

In traditional Javanese communities, values such as nrimo and rukun promote emotional restraint and avoidance of burdening others. In contrast, adolescents in more urbanized settings with greater exposure to globalized culture tend to express emotions more openly and seek external support (Allen et al., 2014). These contrasts underscore how cultural norms and modernization influence help-seeking. The findings therefore highlight peer networks as culturally suitable entry points for mental health promotion in Indonesian schools. Peers offer informal spaces for sharing emotions in ways that align with local values such as empathy and togetherness (Kane et al., 2023).

These dynamics also resonate with Islamic values such as *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, which emphasizes empathy, cooperation, and mutual responsibility (Tahir, 2023). Within this ethical framework, providing emotional support is both a social and spiritual expectation (Haque, 2004). In school settings, peer support can thus function not only as a psychosocial mechanism but also as an expression of everyday religious practice (Shen et al., 2023), reinforcing belonging and resilience (Brown et al., 2025).

Although the results support the proposed model in which PHS predicts PWB and PS moderates this association, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. It is plausible that adolescents with higher PWB are more inclined to seek help and perceive their social environments positively, instead of help-seeking directly improving well-being. Prior evidence suggests that individuals with greater well-being interpret social interactions more positively due to positivity bias in social cognition (Chu et al., 2010). Peer support may also influence both help-seeking and well-being by fostering emotionally secure environments (Affuso et al., 2024).

Longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to clarify temporal and reciprocal relationships. Longitudinal data would allow researchers to track whether changes in PHS precede changes in PWB or vice versa. Experimental or quasi-experimental interventions that manipulate PS, such as peer mentoring programs, could help establish causality (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024). Cross-lagged panel analyses would offer stronger evidence by accounting for autoregressive and reciprocal effects (Mund & Nestler, 2019).

Despite these limitations, the hypothesized causal direction is supported by established theoretical frameworks. Help-seeking is conceptualized as a proactive coping strategy that activates psychological and social resources conducive to well-being (Gulliver et al., 2010). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping posits that adaptive coping promotes psychological adjustment. Within the Resilience Framework, help-seeking is an asset that mobilizes contextual support, including peers (Masten et al., 2021). The present findings align with these perspectives, suggesting that help-seeking serves as a self-regulatory mechanism that fosters sustained well-being when supported by caring relationships (Rickwood et al., 2015).

Recognizing the noncausal nature of the findings helps ensure appropriate interpretation (Rohrer, 2018). These associations should be understood as meaningful connections rather than definitive causation. Future studies in Indonesia could integrate longitudinal tracking within school counseling structures, such as Bimbingan dan Konseling monitoring across key educational transitions (Aningtyas & Setyawati, 2025). Cross-lagged approaches could be embedded within socio-emotional learning activities under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Rozy et al., 2025). Quasi-experimental designs may draw on existing peer mentoring programs in Indonesian schools. Mixed-methods approaches exploring

cultural values such as *gotong royong* or *tepo seliro* could further contextualize help-seeking and peer support (De Luca et al., 2019).

The findings have several practical implications. First, peer relationships should be treated as integral components of school-based support ecosystems (Azzahrah et al., 2024; Rickwood et al., 2015). Counselors can train selected students as peer helpers who recognize signs of distress and provide initial emotional support (Risnawaty et al., 2019). Such peer-led support can reduce stigma and create pathways to professional help.

Second, teachers and counselors can design classroom experiences that promote emotional awareness and collaborative problem solving, enabling students to build the capacity to offer and receive support (Elbertson et al., 2025). Integrating these practices into school counseling structures ensures cultural relevance and sustainability. Structured peer-led activities, such as mentoring or facilitated discussion circles, can normalize supportive interactions and reduce barriers to expressing emotional needs.

Third, the gender-related findings, although modest, highlight individual differences in support needs. Rather than implementing gender-specific strategies, schools should provide flexible support structures that accommodate varied communication styles. This research significantly advances the discourse on gender awareness in counseling practices, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive training among counseling professionals to foster a more inclusive environment conducive to students' psychological well-being (Irawan et al., 2025). In practice, offering multiple pathways for students to seek or offer support, such as individual check-ins, small-group discussions, and peer-facilitated activities, allows adolescents to choose formats that align with their preferences. Mixed-group workshops and mentoring could further encourage inclusive peer dynamics.

More broadly, peer networks can act as accessible platforms for mutual support. Schools can integrate activities that foster empathy, perspective taking, and awareness of mental health resources (Buchan et al., 2024). Extending peer-support opportunities beyond formal counseling sessions, such as through extracurricular groups or supervised student communities, may broaden their impact (Coelho et al., 2025).

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference among PHS, PS, and PWB (Savitz & Wellenius, 2023). Reliance on self-report data introduces potential biases, including social desirability and perception errors (Koller et al.,

2023). Because students were nested within 12 schools, clustering effects were examined and found to be minimal, yet clustered robust standard errors were applied to ensure accuracy. The sample, although stratified, was limited to one province, reducing generalizability. Gender was controlled for, but possible interactions between gender and the main variables were not tested. Finally, the measures assessed general perceptions of help-seeking and peer support without distinguishing between formal and informal help sources or positive and negative peer interactions.

Future research should employ longitudinal or cross-lagged designs to clarify temporal processes, incorporate multi-informant data, and sample diverse regions across Indonesia. Multi-group analyses could investigate gender-specific moderation. More nuanced instruments are needed to differentiate forms of support and varying qualities of peer interactions. Mixed-methods approaches would deepen understanding of adolescents' lived experiences and cultural interpretations of help-seeking and peer support.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the pivotal role of peer relationships in promoting adolescents' psychological well-being within school settings, offering one of the first empirical demonstrations in the Indonesian context that peer support significantly enhances the benefits of psychological help-seeking. This moderating effect advances current understandings of adolescent mental health, which often consider help-seeking and relational factors separately, by showing that the effectiveness of help-seeking is not uniform but is shaped by the quality of peer support available to students. Rather than functioning as peripheral influences, peer networks emerge as integral components of a comprehensive counseling ecosystem. Empowering students to serve as peer helpers may reduce stigma surrounding professional help-seeking and create more accessible and empathetic pathways to care. At the same time, acknowledging individual differences in how adolescents seek and experience peer support ensures that interventions remain responsive to diverse emotional and cultural needs. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening peer-based relational resources as a practical and culturally grounded approach to enhancing adolescent well-being, particularly in collectivist contexts where interpersonal harmony and group belonging influence help-

seeking behavior. Future research should examine how peer support can be systematically cultivated and integrated into school mental health initiatives to maximize the developmental benefits identified in this study.

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