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Factors Contributing to Adolescent Depression in the Post-Pandemic Era: A Case Study of Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent depression in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period has emerged as a growing public health concern in Malaysia, particularly following the reopening of schools for face-to-face learning. This study aims to explore the factors contributing to adolescent depression in the post-pandemic context. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed, involving six informants consisting of school counselors, adolescent students, and parents in Selangor. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings identified three main themes: socio-emotional crisis, family dynamics, and technological influence. In conclusion, post-pandemic adolescent depression is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires holistic interventions involving schools, families, and policymakers. This study provides important implications for policy development and counseling practices related to adolescent mental health.

Keywords: *adolescent depression, post-pandemic, socio-emotional crisis, family dynamics, digital technology*

ABSTRAK

Depresi pada remaja di era pasca pandemi COVID-19 telah muncul sebagai masalah kesehatan masyarakat yang semakin meningkat di Malaysia, khususnya setelah dibukanya kembali sekolah untuk pembelajaran tatap muka. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap depresi remaja dalam konteks pasca pandemi. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus digunakan, melibatkan enam informan yang terdiri dari konselor sekolah, siswa remaja, dan orang tua di Selangor. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan mengidentifikasi tiga tema utama: krisis sosial-emosional, dinamika keluarga dan pengaruh teknologi. Berdasarkan penelitian tersebut disimpulkan bahwa depresi remaja pasca pandemi adalah fenomena multidimensional yang membutuhkan intervensi holistik yang melibatkan sekolah, keluarga, dan pembuat kebijakan. Studi ini memberikan implikasi penting untuk pengembangan kebijakan dan praktik konseling terkait kesehatan mental remaja.

Kata kunci: *depresi pada remaja, post-pandemi, krisis sosial-emosional, dinamika keluarga, teknologi digital*

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INTRODUCTION

Depression among adolescents has emerged as a significant public health concern in Malaysia, particularly following the reopening of educational institutions in April 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition from prolonged periods of remote learning to face-to-face education required substantial adjustments not only in academic performance and social interactions but also in psychological adaptation. While the reopening of schools marked an important step towards educational recovery, it also exposed many adolescents to renewed academic demands, social pressures, and emotional challenges that had been exacerbated during the pandemic (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2022). The post-pandemic environment has created a range of stressors that adversely affect adolescents' mental well-being. Academic pressure resulting from learning loss, concerns about future educational and career prospects, difficulties in re-establishing peer relationships, and challenges in adapting to new routines have collectively contributed to increased psychological distress among young people (Aziz & Salleh, 2023). These stressors may heighten adolescents' vulnerability to depression, a mental health disorder characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, a loss of interest in daily activities, and impaired social and academic functioning.

Evidence from recent national reports indicates a growing prevalence of mental health problems among Malaysian adolescents. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS, 2024), mental health issues continue to affect a substantial proportion of young people in the country, with depression being among the most commonly reported disorders. This trend is particularly concerning given the increasing incidence of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and other high-risk behaviours among school-going adolescents (Yahya & Md Sham, 2020; NHMS, 2024). These findings suggest that adolescent depression has evolved beyond an individual psychological problem and has become a critical public health issue with significant social, educational, and economic implications. Moreover, depression during adolescence can have long-term consequences that extend into adulthood. Previous studies have shown that untreated depression may negatively affect academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and overall quality of life. In severe cases, it may increase the risk of substance abuse, self-injurious behaviour, and suicide. Given that adolescence represents a crucial developmental stage characterised by rapid biological, psychological, and social changes, understanding the factors associated with depression is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Despite growing awareness of adolescent mental health issues in Malaysia, there remains a need for a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the increasing prevalence of depression in the post-pandemic context. Identifying these factors is important for informing evidence-based policies and mental health programmes aimed at supporting adolescents' psychological well-being and resilience. Therefore, this article aims to critically examine the factors contributing to the depression crisis among adolescents in the post-pandemic period and to discuss their implications for mental health interventions and policy development.

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Depression among adolescents in the post-pandemic era has emerged as a significant and increasingly complex public health concern. The issue has attracted growing attention due to its association with a range of adverse outcomes, including self-harm, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, academic difficulties, and impaired psychosocial functioning. Following the reopening of educational institutions after the COVID-19 pandemic, many adolescents experienced challenges in readjusting to academic demands, social interactions, and daily routines, thereby increasing their vulnerability to psychological distress and depressive symptoms. Recent national reports indicate a rising prevalence of mental health problems among Malaysian adolescents. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS, 2024), mental health disorders continue to affect a substantial proportion of young people, with depression identified as one of the most prevalent conditions. The increasing number of reported incidents involving emotional distress, self-harm, and suicidal behaviour among school-going adolescents further highlights the seriousness of this issue and underscores the urgent need for effective mental health interventions.

Depression should not be regarded merely as a temporary emotional reaction to stress. Rather, it is a serious psychiatric disorder that can significantly impair emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social functioning. According to Karaman and Durukan (2013), comorbidity between depression and other mental disorders, particularly anxiety disorders, substantially increases the risk of suicidal behaviour among adolescents. Similarly, Abdul Kadir et al. (2018) reported that a majority of adolescents who experienced suicidal ideation or had attempted suicide were diagnosed with at least one psychiatric disorder, with depression identified as a primary contributing factor. From a clinical perspective, depression is characterised by persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, excessive fatigue, sleep and appetite disturbances, and difficulties in concentration (Ministry of Health Malaysia [MOH], 2012b; American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Among adolescents, these symptoms are often overlooked or misinterpreted as normal developmental changes associated with puberty, resulting in delayed identification and treatment (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

The post-pandemic environment has further intensified adolescents' exposure to psychosocial stressors. Factors such as disruptions to educational experiences, reduced social connectedness, uncertainty about future prospects, family-related stress, and difficulties in rebuilding social relationships have contributed to increased levels of psychological distress among young people (Lee, 2020; Tang et al., 2022). When effective coping mechanisms are lacking, prolonged exposure to these stressors may increase the likelihood of depressive symptoms and maladaptive behaviours. Given the potential long-term consequences of adolescent depression, including poor educational outcomes, interpersonal difficulties, substance abuse, and an elevated risk of suicide, there is an urgent need to identify and address the factors contributing to depression in the post-pandemic context. Understanding these factors is essential for developing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies aimed at promoting adolescents' mental well-being and resilience.

Mental health problems among students in Malaysia have become increasingly concerning, particularly in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. The significant rise in various mental health indicators, including depression and emotional distress,

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indicates that adolescents are facing complex psychosocial challenges (National Security Council, 2023; Ministry of Health Malaysia [MOH], 2022). The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) further confirms a substantial increase in mental health issues among adolescents, reflecting the presence of multiple escalating risk factors in their daily lives (MOH, 2022a). Although previous studies have identified several factors contributing to adolescent mental health problems, such as gender, bullying experiences, loneliness, and eating behaviours (Halim et al., 2023; Abdul Rahman et al., 2024), these findings are largely based on quantitative approaches and provide limited in-depth understanding of how these factors influence depression within adolescents' real-life contexts. In addition, post-pandemic lifestyle changes and psychosocial stressors may have introduced new risk factors or intensified existing ones, thereby contributing to the increasing prevalence of depression among adolescents.

Furthermore, there is a lack of studies that comprehensively examine the factors contributing to adolescent depression from a holistic perspective, taking into account multiple viewpoints, including adolescents themselves, as well as school counsellors and parents (Sahide & Mohd Pauzi, 2023). This limited understanding of the underlying factors may result in intervention strategies that are less effective and not fully aligned with adolescents' actual needs. Therefore, this study is essential to explore in depth the factors contributing to adolescent depression in the post-pandemic context, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding and support the development of more targeted and context-specific interventions.

Several studies have identified factors contributing to depression among students before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these, academic uncertainty, lack of social support, and social isolation have been recognised as major factors that increase depressive symptoms among students (Cao et al., 2022). Changes in learning methods and reduced social interaction have resulted in emotional stress and feelings of isolation among students. In addition, socioeconomic and psychosocial factors such as job loss, family conflict, health-related anxiety, and traumatic experiences have also contributed to emotional instability among adolescents (MHPSS, 2021). Previous studies have further shown that family problems, academic failure, and social media influence are important factors affecting depression among adolescents (Rosman & Jasmi, 2022). Moreover, fear of infection, loneliness, and financial stress have also been identified as significant contributors to students' mental health problems (Salman et al., 2022). Other factors, including biological aspects, personality traits, genetics, and traumatic experiences, have also been found to be associated with the development of depressive symptoms (Wan Abdullah & Zaki, 2020). Furthermore, challenges associated with online learning, such as poor internet connectivity, heavy academic workload, and lack of emotional readiness, have further worsened students' mental health conditions during the pandemic (Khairudin et al., 2022). Overall, research findings indicate that depression during the pandemic was influenced by a combination of academic, social, psychological, and technological factors that interact and collectively affect students' mental well-being. However, in the post-pandemic context, the factors contributing to depression appear to have shifted and become more complex.

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A study by Caqueo et al. (2023) found that depressive symptoms such as persistent sadness, emotional exhaustion, and fear in social interactions have increased, even though academic pressure has shown a slight decline. This suggests that post-pandemic depression is not only influenced by external stressors but also by deeper and more persistent psychological changes. In addition, the increased use of technology after the pandemic has also contributed to mental health problems. Dwiputri et al. (2024) reported that internet addiction is significantly associated with depressive symptoms among adolescents. Excessive use of social media and online gaming has been linked to increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and emotional distress. Furthermore, reliance on virtual interactions has negatively affected adolescents' social skills and increased the risk of social anxiety. Zhang et al. (2024) further supported these findings by showing that social comparison on social media can trigger feelings of inferiority and persistent psychological stress. Although various factors have been identified, research on specific determinants of depression in the post-pandemic context remains limited. The mechanisms linking psychosocial changes to adolescents' mental well-being have not been explored in depth. Therefore, further studies are needed to identify more specific factors in order to better understand and effectively address depression among adolescents.

The Transactional Stress Model, introduced by Richard S. Lazarus in 1966 and further developed with Susan Folkman in 1984, explains that stress is the result of the interaction between an individual and their environment, which is influenced by cognitive appraisal processes of a given event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this model, the level of stress is not determined solely by external factors but also by how individuals interpret the situations they encounter and their ability to apply appropriate coping strategies. The model emphasises that primary appraisal involves an individual's evaluation of a situation as a threat, challenge, or harm/loss, whereas secondary appraisal refers to the individual's assessment of their ability to manage or cope with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the post-pandemic context, adolescents may perceive experiences such as changes in family structure, loss of social relationships, and uncertainty about the future as threats to their well-being, thereby increasing the risk of depression (Ye et al., 2021; Yusuf et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2023). In addition, psychosocial stressors arising from disruptions to daily routines, limited social interaction, and changes in the education system have been identified as important factors influencing adolescents' mental well-being.

These factors interact dynamically with adolescents' emotional and cognitive states, thereby affecting their level of psychological stress (Selian et al., 2020). Within this model, coping strategies are broadly categorised into two main types: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Adolescents who adopt problem-focused coping tend to seek practical solutions to the stressors they face, whereas emotion-focused coping involves efforts to regulate emotional responses, such as seeking social support or diverting attention away from stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, the effectiveness of both strategies depends on their appropriateness in context and the level of social support received by adolescents. From a theoretical perspective, the Transactional Stress Model provides an important conceptual framework for understanding how environmental, social, and psychological factors

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contribute to depression among adolescents in the post-pandemic period. The theory emphasises that depressive experiences are influenced not only by external circumstances but also by individual cognitive appraisal processes and coping capacities, thereby offering a strong foundation for a more in-depth examination of contributing factors in this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the factors, impacts, and coping mechanisms related to the depression crisis among adolescents in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. The case study design was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). The study was conducted in the state of Selangor, focusing on the districts of Sepang, Hulu Langat, and Kuala Langat. These locations were selected due to their high student population density and access to mental health services and educational institutions. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, involving six informants consisting of school counsellors, adolescent students, and parents, in line with the principle of data saturation (Palinkas et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to the factors, impacts, and coping strategies of adolescent depression (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through data source triangulation and peer debriefing, in accordance with the framework of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Table 1: Background of Study Participants

Participant Code	Participant Status
R 1	School Counsellor
R2	School Counsellor
R3	School Counsellor
R4	Student
R5	Student
R6	Parent
Total	**6 participants**

The study participants consisted of three school counsellors, two students who experienced post-pandemic depression, and one parent whose child had been diagnosed with depression. Each participant was assigned a reference code, where R1 to R3 represented school counsellors, R4 and R5 represented students, and R6 represented the parent (see Table 1).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that three dominant themes emerged from the data analysis, namely socio-emotional crisis, family dynamics, and technological influence. These themes collectively demonstrate that post-pandemic adolescent depression is shaped by a multidimensional interaction of psychological, social, and environmental factors that significantly affect adolescents' emotional stability and psychosocial functioning.

Socio-Emotional Crisis Factors

The socio-emotional crisis represents a central factor contributing to post-pandemic adolescent depression, encompassing interrelated dimensions of anxiety, trauma, social withdrawal, and negative peer influence. The findings indicate that emotional dysregulation among adolescents has intensified following the pandemic, reflecting difficulties in psychological readjustment to face-to-face schooling and social reintegration.

Participants reported heightened levels of anxiety and insecurity among students, characterised by low self-esteem and excessive concern about self-image. R1 stated that depressive and anxiety symptoms were highly prevalent among students after the pandemic, resulting in significant emotional insecurity:

> *"Depression among students after the pandemic was very high. Anxiety was also very common among students. When this happens, students become insecure about themselves." (R1)*

This was supported by R2, who observed persistent self-consciousness among students, including continued use of face masks due to perceived physical inadequacy:

> *"Nowadays, children are very insecure… even now they still wear face masks because they feel they are not attractive." (R2)*

These findings suggest that distorted self-perception and reduced self-confidence have become prominent manifestations of post-pandemic psychological distress.

In addition, trauma-related responses associated with the school environment were evident, including school refusal behaviour and avoidance tendencies. R2 reported that some students developed fear of attending school, indicating trauma-like responses linked to educational settings. Emotional distress was further intensified by experiences of loss, including parental and peer bereavement, which increased psychological vulnerability among adolescents (R1). Furthermore, psychosomatic symptoms such as panic attacks, trembling, and shortness of breath were reported during academic or social situations, reflecting acute anxiety responses and the somatisation of psychological distress.

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Another significant pattern identified was social withdrawal, described as "students within boundaries," where adolescents increasingly preferred isolation and digital engagement over face-to-face interaction. R1 and R3 reported that many students preferred staying at home, spending time on mobile phones and online games, indicating reduced social participation and avoidance behaviour. From the student perspective, R4 described prolonged isolation and difficulty forming peer relationships since early secondary school.

Furthermore, recurrent absenteeism and emotional instability were observed, reflecting disengagement from academic and social functioning. R1 and R2 noted that some students frequently avoided school due to emotional distress and perceived negative interactions within the school environment.

Negative peer influence emerged as a reinforcing factor that exacerbates socio-emotional distress. R1 highlighted that students increasingly express emotional distress through social media, which in some cases escalates into cyberbullying behaviour. R5 reported peer influence contributing to risky behaviours such as vaping, while R2 noted the spread of self-harming behaviour within peer groups, suggesting emotional and behavioural contagion among adolescents. Additionally, R3 described peer provocation that led to emotional outbursts and physical conflict.

Overall, the findings indicate that socio-emotional crisis in the post-pandemic context is not merely an individual psychological issue but a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by emotional vulnerability, disrupted social integration, and negative peer ecosystems. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of post-pandemic anxiety, social isolation, and peer influence in shaping adolescent mental health outcomes (Mucci et al., 2023; Cohen et al., 2021; Meade, 2021).

Family Dynamics Factors

Family dynamics represents a significant factor contributing to socio-emotional crises and depression among adolescents in the post-pandemic period. Changes in family structure, marital conflict, emotional neglect, poor communication patterns, and economic pressure have been found to significantly affect adolescents' mental well-being. These stressors are often internalised in daily life, thereby increasing the risk of prolonged emotional distress and depressive symptoms.

Family conflict and emotional neglect were identified as key factors affecting adolescents' emotional stability. One prominent form of conflict involves parental comparison among siblings, which leads to feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth, and emotional distress. As reported by R6:

> *"We compare her with her sister… she becomes stressed and feels like she is a burden." (R6)*

Communication breakdown within the family also contributes to emotional suppression among adolescents, where they choose to withhold their feelings due to fear of being misunderstood. R4 explained:

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"If I tell my family, they might think I am being egoistic… so I prefer to keep it to myself." (R4)

In addition, negative criticism and lack of emotional affirmation from family members were reported to have a profound psychological impact. R5 expressed feelings of sadness and emotional invalidation due to constant negative remarks and lack of encouragement:

"I am not smart, and I have never made my parents proud." (R5)

Emotional neglect due to parental work commitments was also identified as a contributing factor to adolescent depression. R2 noted:

"Parents are too busy with work until their children's welfare is neglected." (R2)

Furthermore, marital conflict, including divorce and parental disputes, was found to significantly affect adolescents' mental well-being. R3 described how such experiences often lead to sadness, emotional isolation, and a lack of support:

"Her parents are divorced… she stays alone at home… she does not receive what others receive." (R3)

Emotional burden is further intensified when adolescents are required to keep family secrets, which creates psychological strain and internal conflict. R5 shared:

"I know my father has another woman… but I cannot tell my mother." (R5)

School counsellors also highlighted that family conflict and economic difficulties exacerbate adolescents' emotional distress. R2 stated:

"Parental conflict causes children to remain preoccupied with issues at home even while they are at school, which may negatively affect their concentration and emotional stability."

In addition, unequal distribution of household responsibilities, particularly gendered expectations placed on daughters, was identified as another source of emotional stress. R1 explained:

"When girls are given too many responsibilities… over time they become emotionally overwhelmed." (R1)

Unrealistic parental expectations were also found to contribute to emotional pressure and loss of direction among adolescents. As emphasised by R2:

"High family expectations make children feel increasingly lost." (R2)

Overall, the findings indicate that family dynamics—including conflict, emotional neglect, ineffective communication, and unrealistic expectations—play a

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crucial role in intensifying socio-emotional crises among adolescents in the post-pandemic context. These factors significantly increase the risk of depression and long-term emotional difficulties. The findings are consistent with previous studies by Linda et al. (2023), Agustina and Maemunah (2022), and Zara (2023), which highlight that lack of family support, inappropriate parenting styles, and family conflict contribute to a higher risk of mental health problems among adolescents.

Technological Influence Factors

Technological influence is a significant factor contributing to socio-emotional crises and depression among adolescents in the post-pandemic period. The rapid development of digital technologies and the increasing use of social media have transformed the ways adolescents interact, communicate, and regulate their emotions. This growing dependence on technology not only reduces face-to-face social interaction but also has a direct impact on adolescents' mental and emotional well-being.

A key issue emerging from the findings is digital addiction, which refers to excessive and uncontrolled use of digital devices such as smartphones, online gaming platforms, and social media, leading to disruptions in emotional balance, social relationships, and daily functioning. Following the pandemic, the use of digital technology increased significantly due to the shift to online learning and social interaction, which subsequently contributed to problematic dependency patterns. R6 stated:

> *"Excessive use of social media… taking seriously what others say… what damages them most is uncontrolled social media." (R6)*

Similarly, R3 noted that adolescents experiencing emotional distress and boredom were easily influenced by online environments, including harmful digital communities:

> *"When they are depressed and bored… suddenly someone who pretends to care comes… there are groups that lead them towards negative things." (R3)*

R1, a school counsellor, explained that smartphones were initially introduced to support online learning during the pandemic. However, they later became tools for social media engagement and gaming. Attempts by parents to regulate usage often resulted in conflict and emotional outbursts:

> *"When parents try to take the phone away, there is conflict… they become tantrum-like even in Form 3 or Form 4." (R1)*

In addition, adolescents showed a preference for virtual interaction over face-to-face communication, leading to social detachment in real-life settings:

> *"They interact in the virtual world… once they are allowed to go out, they are already used to staying in their rooms with their phones." (R1)*

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Digital addiction was also linked to uncontrolled exposure to negative online content. R1 emphasised that unrestricted internet access exposes adolescents to harmful influences:

> *"The internet is unlimited… when the phone is in everyone's hands, this is what happens." (R1)*

Emotional dependence on smartphones was also evident, particularly among adolescents experiencing distress. R5 expressed strong reliance on digital devices for emotional regulation:

> *"I get stressed when I don't have my phone… I feel stressed." (R5)*

Excessive screen time was further associated with disrupted daily routines and poor sleep patterns, which negatively affect academic engagement and emotional stability:

> *"Screen time is too high… at school they feel sleepy, so they become bored." (R2)*

Beyond addiction, cyber-related effects also play a critical role in exacerbating adolescent mental health issues. Social media has become a primary space for identity formation and emotional expression; however, it simultaneously exposes adolescents to harmful influences. R2 noted:

> *"They learn from social media how to become anxious." (R2)*

R3 added that emotionally distressed adolescents often seek validation or information through online platforms:

> *"When stressed… I look on the internet, on YouTube." (R3)*

Exposure to inappropriate content, including sexual materials, further contributes to psychosocial distress:

> *"Many adolescents nowadays are exposed to sexual content from the internet." (R3)*

Misuse of social media among peer groups, including the sharing of inappropriate content, was also reported:

> *"They share explicit videos… then the video goes viral." (R5)*

Cyberbullying and online conflict were identified as additional stressors affecting adolescents' emotional well-being:

> *"When people talk negatively about one another, they tend to respond in the same way, which can lead to conflict." (R1)*

> *"She body-shamed me on Instagram." (R3)*

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Furthermore, the use of beauty filters on social media contributes to distorted body image and increased self-insecurity among adolescents:

"There are so many filters… it increases insecurity." (R2)

Overall, the findings indicate that technological influence exacerbates socio-emotional crises among adolescents in the post-pandemic context. Digital addiction, exposure to harmful content, online conflict, body image distortion, and the normalisation of risky online behaviours contribute significantly to emotional distress and depressive symptoms. These findings are consistent with previous studies which highlight associations between internet addiction and depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and disrupted daily routines (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Lin et al., 2021; Keles, McCrae & Grealish, 2020; Norazman, 2023; Norazlinawati et al., 2023). In addition, cyber-related harms such as cyberbullying and exposure to negative online content have been shown to further increase levels of depression and anxiety among adolescents (Kowalski et al., 2019; Barlett et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that adolescent depression in the post-pandemic COVID-19 context is a complex phenomenon influenced by socio-emotional, family, and technological factors. The findings indicate that socio-emotional crises, family dynamics, and technological influences interact in both triggering and exacerbating depressive symptoms among adolescents. Socio-emotional crises are characterised by anxiety, trauma, social isolation, and negative peer influence. Family dynamics, including conflict, emotional neglect, ineffective communication, and economic pressure, further intensify adolescents' emotional distress. In addition, technological influences and social media usage contribute to digital addiction, exposure to negative content, cyberbullying, and body image issues, thereby increasing the risk of depression. The findings highlight the need for holistic intervention strategies involving schools, families, communities, and policymakers. These interventions should include strengthening psychosocial support systems, enhancing coping skills among adolescents, promoting active parental involvement, and improving digital literacy and online safety awareness. Overall, this study contributes to a contextual understanding of adolescent mental health in post-pandemic Malaysia, with important implications for policy development, counselling practice, and educational intervention strategies.

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