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## Regular vs Boarding Schools: Uncovering Indonesian Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being Needs and Implications for SDG 3

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To analyze and compare the psychological well-being of adolescents in regular and boarding schools in Indonesia. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based guidance for school counselors to identify adolescents' most urgent psychological needs and to optimize counseling services tailored to the characteristics of each school setting. **Method:** A quantitative study employing a cross-sectional group-comparison survey design was conducted. The participants comprised 798 adolescents, including 399 students from regular schools and 399 from boarding schools at the junior and senior high school levels. Data were collected using the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS). The data were analyzed through normality testing and an independent-samples t-test to examine differences in psychological well-being between the two groups. **Results:** The findings revealed no significant difference in overall psychological well-being between adolescents in regular schools and those in boarding schools ( $p > .05$ ). Although students in regular schools had a slightly higher mean score, the difference was not statistically significant. Descriptive analysis showed that self-acceptance was the weakest dimension among students in regular schools, whereas autonomy was the weakest dimension among students in boarding schools. Positive relationships with others represented the strongest dimension in both school types. **Novelty:** Extending previous research by directly comparing adolescents' psychological well-being across regular and boarding school contexts while identifying the most urgent psychological dimensions requiring intervention in each setting. The findings have practical implications for school counselors designing targeted interventions that focus on self-acceptance in regular schools and autonomy in boarding schools. These insights also offer important implications for SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by informing school-based mental health strategies that support adolescents' psychological well-being and healthy development.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Dewi et al., 2021; Guerra Bustamante et al., 2019). Physiological, cognitive, social, and environmental changes, or crucial phases, can affect adolescents' growth and development (Arboleda, 2022). This phase makes teenagers happy to try new things without seeing the impact on them. This phase allows adolescents to experience indecision and confusion as they pass through adolescence (Jannah, 2016). In addition, the psychological development adolescents undergo can cause problems as they adjust to new roles. A social life full of external influences can also add to students' list of pressures. These pressures will later affect students' psychological well-being, so it is necessary to understand and maintain their stability.

The phenomenon among adolescents occurs in both regular and boarding schools. So far, schools are classified as regular or boarding schools (Dalimunthe et al., 2022). The number of boarding high schools in Indonesia is 7%. Especially in Central Java Province, there are dozens of boarding junior high schools, with the number increasing. A regular school is one where students carry out learning activities at a set time and then return home. Boarding school means that after completing their studies, students continue their activities at the

school and live near the school. The definition emphasizes a place where students live for a relatively fixed period, together with teachers as caregivers who assist students in personal development through the process of appreciating and developing cultural values. Thus, differences in the environments where students engage in activities after learning in class can lead to differences in students' psychological development.

The adolescent phase is more crucial than other phases. Teenagers at school experience various dynamics that can disturb their mental health (Bono et al., 2020). Life at school often produces some demands that put teens in stressful situations. The pandemic and post-pandemic transition have harmed adolescents' psychological well-being (Zolopa et al., 2022). Across the U.K., mental health problems in adolescents are increasing while their well-being is deteriorating. Around 80% of U.K. teenagers experience exam stress, which is detrimental to their mental health (Cowburn & Blow, 2017). In Indonesia, 44% of students experience stress in facing exams and assignments, and 12% of adolescents are overwhelmed by anxiety due to the fear of not going to class. Suicides by teenagers at the junior high school level after taking national exams are also the result of fear and stress in academics.

Data from the National School-Based Health Survey in Indonesia in 2015 showed that as many as 42% of male students and 24% of female students experienced at least one physical assault, 23% of students had been involved in a fight in the past 12 months (Puslitbang, 2015). In 2022, there was much news about violence in boarding schools in Indonesia. From these data, it can be seen that junior and senior high school students in Indonesia experience low welfare. Thus, adolescents need attention because it will impact their social, emotional, and physical lives. Juveniles often engage in delinquency, such as brawls and truancy, during school hours due to the child's lack of psychological well-being (Fitri et al., 2017). In addition, it is reinforced that the lack of psychological well-being in adolescents leads to juvenile delinquency (Zeck & Lai, 2020).

Adolescents' psychological well-being has also become a global concern reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which emphasizes ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. Schools play a strategic role in fostering mental health because adolescents spend a substantial portion of their developmental period within educational settings. Therefore, understanding adolescents' psychological well-being needs across different school contexts is essential to inform school-based mental health initiatives and support healthy adolescent development.

Meanwhile, mental health issues have been a concern for many researchers and academics lately (Aulia et al., 2020; Westberg et al., 2022). One researcher suggested that future research supports students' psychological well-being (Park et al., 2023). In addition, research shows that students in boarding schools under 12 are more prone to psychological problems (Hopkins, 2021). The psychological well-being of students attending regular and boarding schools may differ and may be influenced by social support, sleep patterns, and parental involvement. Social Support Dynamics: Boarding students tend to rely more on peer support, which positively correlates with their emotional well-being, whereas regular students benefit more from parental support (Li et al., 2023). The absence of parental presence in boarding schools can lead to frustration with autonomy, negatively impacting psychological well-being (Manindjo et al., 2023). Sleep Patterns: Boarding students report better sleep quality, averaging 40 more minutes of sleep per weeknight than regular students, which is associated with structured routines and lower technology use in the evening (Reardon et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, how students' psychological well-being differs between the two types of schools has not been studied. In fact, school counselors need this knowledge to structure

guidance and counseling services, particularly to improve adolescents' psychological well-being. Moreover, researchers have suggested that counselors focus on context to improve adolescents' psychological well-being (Wolk & Bat Or, 2023). Therefore, given the needs in the field, research is needed to compare the psychological well-being of adolescents in regular schools and boarding schools. The purpose of the study is to examine whether, based on the sub-aspects of psychological well-being, adolescents in regular schools differ from those in boarding schools. In addition, for each of these sub-aspects, it will be explained which are most urgent and should be given follow-up services by counselors immediately.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research focused on uncovering adolescents' psychological well-being in regular and boarding middle and high school schools. The study used a quantitative cross-sectional group-comparison design. Through this design, researchers compared the psychological well-being of adolescents in regular and boarding schools. The study's results are intended to contribute as input and suggestions for improving the education system to optimize adolescents' psychological well-being.

The population in this study was all adolescents in junior high schools throughout Central Java, Indonesia. The study population comprised 5,037 junior high schools and 3,129 equivalent high schools in Central Java, so the estimated number of adolescents exceeded 1 million. The sample from the study was taken using a random sampling technique. Researchers select participants with this technique to represent the population by considering the vast population. Using the Slovin formula, the minimum sample size was 399 adolescents in junior high and high school for each of the regular and boarding schools. Based on the study, 399 respondents (median age: 15 years; 87% female) were adolescents in boarding schools, and 399 adolescents (median age: 16 years; 64% female) were in regular schools.

Data collection techniques used to gather quantitative data rely on psychological scales. Researchers distributed research instruments to respondents via Google Forms. The instruments used were adapted from those developed by Ryff and comprised 42 items assessing psychological well-being (Abbott et al., 2010). The PWBS-42 has been utilized in diverse samples with respect to age, race, and gender (Maher et al., 2017; Sasaki et al., 2020; Warren et al., 2016). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 26 to conduct a two-sample t-test to support the achievement of the research objectives, following a parametric group prerequisite test for normality and homogeneity of variance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In junior high or high school, teenagers must make many choices. Adolescents are synonymous with transitional periods that show they are in a trial-and-error phase. Adolescents have many changes and are likely influenced by the surrounding environment. Adolescents exhibit labile behavior. They want to act like adults but have been unable to condition themselves properly, so they tend to commit delinquent and criminal acts.

**Table 1.** Result of independent-sample t-test

School	Mean	Levene's Test	
Regular	170.4386	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Boarding	168.7820	0.418	0.296

Regular and boarding school data were normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ), so they were tested parametrically. Levene's test results showed that the data on both types of schools were homogeneous ( $p > 0,05$ ). After that, the differences between the two types of schools were analyzed. Based on Table 1, a significance value of  $p > 0.05$  is obtained, which means there is no significant difference. Both schools have nearly the same average level of psychological well-being. However, it can be concluded that adolescents in regular schools are slightly more psychologically well-off than those in boarding schools, as indicated by an average difference of 1.66 ( $\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2$ ).

To be more detailed, descriptive analyses identified differences in students' psychological well-being between regular and boarding schools across each dimension. The construct of psychological well-being theory is developed from Ryff's concept of multidimensional psychological well-being. Some of the theoretically covered dimensions are independence and self-determination (autonomy); having satisfied and high-quality relationships with others; the ability to regulate life or control the environment; open to new experiences (personal growth); believing that one's life is meaningful (purpose in life); and a positive attitude towards oneself and one's past life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In boarding schools, the independence dimension has the lowest percentage, at 59.41%, a difference of 7.13% from the average. Meanwhile, the positive relationship dimension had the highest percentage, at 72.82%, a difference of 6.27% from the average. Then, in regular schools, the positive relationships dimension was also the highest, at 72.28%, a difference of 4.89% from the average. The self-acceptance dimension has the lowest percentage, at 62.16%, a difference of 5.22% from the average. Meanwhile, other dimensions, such as environmental mastery, personal growth, and life purpose, are average.

In boarding schools, the dimension of independence is the lowest. This phenomenon can be a concern for teachers to facilitate their students' independence in thinking and acting. Meanwhile, the ability of individuals to be independent, for example, in making decisions, affects psychological well-being (Páez-Gallego et al., 2020). The study revealed that many respondents are still dependent on or influenced by others. This issue may be due to respondents' adaptation to a new environment in boarding schools, which requires them to manage activities independently. New students adapting to a dormitory environment may experience stress (Ghofar et al., 2022). Student endurance affects their psychological condition (Turner et al., 2017). Many respondents cannot be independent and therefore need help. Then, it is reinforced by a study that adolescent self-efficacy in regular schools is higher than in boarding schools (Gyeltshen & Rai, 2023). In boarding schools, teenagers experience loneliness, parental absence, and irregular sleep patterns (Reardon et al., 2023).

Associated with self-regulation, students who are less independent and lack good regulation of their psychological well-being are disturbed (Rodríguez et al., 2022). Therefore, externally, the school can support this by preparing a dormitory environment that is standardized in both psychological and physical terms (Department for Education, 2022). Strengthened, some measures that can keep boarding schools viable are counseling services, the provision of mentors, and co-parenting activities (Chadha et al., 2021; Khusumadewi, 2021). The higher the social support, the higher the level of psychological well-being (Poudel et al., 2020). The more socially involved they are with their environment, the more prosperous students will be in boarding school (Mudzkiyyah et al., 2022). Socially, they also need to recognize each student's cultural diversity to support better mental well-being. More broadly, it is recommended that boarding schools incorporate a mental health perspective into their curricula (Anwar & Julia, 2022). The opposite condition occurs if students do not

immediately get help when in need and if counseling services are unavailable; according to research, the student's mental health condition becomes disturbed.

Meanwhile, the positive relationship dimension was the highest in both regular and boarding schools. Respondents can build optimal, relatively healthy relationships with those around them. Social environmental factors influence this dimension. Among them are teachers who play a vital role in the school environment (Hasbiyallah et al., 2023; Nopembri & Sugiyama, 2021). In addition, increasingly sophisticated technology makes teacher communication with students easier (Kholiq & Solehuddin, 2020). However, because respondents can foster good relationships, it can be concluded that regular and boarding school environments are conducive. Teachers in the school can further help maintain and develop it. Counselors can facilitate the school environment as a support system that supports adolescents' psychological well-being (Brooker et al., 2019).

The self-acceptance dimension is lowest in regular schools. Students are less accepting of themselves for whatever their circumstances, less understanding of their strengths, and less confident in their abilities. Psychological well-being can suffer without self-acceptance, and the help provided often becomes ineffective. Students need help to understand their circumstances, strengths, and weaknesses. Externally, teachers can help students to have the ability to reason and focus on their potential. One of the causes of a lack of psychological well-being is comparing oneself with others or being excessively self-demanding, which is considered irrational thinking (Wibowo et al., 2021). In this case, there is a difference with boarding schools, which have greater strength because psychological assistance and guidance for students are more intensive (Tang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the difference test indicated that students' average levels of psychological well-being in regular and boarding schools were homogeneous. The difference between the two average scores was 1.66. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the psychological well-being of students in regular schools and boarding schools. The percentage of students' psychological well-being in both types of schools falls in the middle category. Furthermore, school counselors can help facilitate development in every dimension, especially those that are low, so students' psychological well-being increases. A conducive environment increases student motivation and academic success (Agbesanwa et al., 2022). The school can also create policies and climates that support the optimal development of students' psychological well-being (Abidin et al., 2023; Kachchhap & Horo, 2021). One of the effective psychological well-being improvement curricula that has been carried out is technology-based, such as MOOCs (Brett et al., 2020; Lister et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021).

### ***Discussion***

In the context of adolescents' lives at school, discussions of psychological well-being affect their cognitive and affective abilities. People whose psychological condition is well-being have positive cognitive abilities and experience positive emotions. In more detail, the person can develop themselves and complete their tasks and work. Furthermore, those with positive emotions can be productive and engaged in their social environment. In school, such students can complete lesson assignments on time, understand the subject matter, be accepted by their peers, and have good relationships with teachers and parents. In addition, students will be able to behave normatively and adaptively both directly and when using technological devices.

Ultimately, the results of this study that did not show a significant difference may be due to offsetting factors. For example, although boarding students have more opportunities to develop independence (Muqodas et al., 2020), they may also experience emotional difficulties such as homesickness and a lack of parental support. Emotional difficulties such as homesickness and lack of direct support from parents can reduce students' psychological well-being (Pavletic et al., 2016) because they interfere with basic emotional needs, such as safety, social support, and self-confidence. Without parental support, students often feel lonely, anxious, and isolated, hindering their ability to adapt to a new environment. Homesickness also triggers stress and frustration, especially when students feel they do not have sufficient autonomy or are unable to cope with emotional challenges independently. As a result, their psychological well-being declines, negatively affecting their emotional and social development. In contrast, regular school students who live with their families may receive better emotional support. However, they may also face external distractions, such as household responsibilities or disruptions from the family environment, which can affect their psychological well-being (Zulkarnain et al., 2019).

The research implies that teachers, especially school counselors, through their services, help students prosper psychologically (Côté et al., 2014; Son et al., 2020). Implications for school counselors from this study suggest supporting students' psychological well-being through various programs and interventions. Counselors must focus on increasing students' independence, especially in boarding schools, where independence tends to be lower. In addition, intensive social support from mentors and parental involvement is essential for helping students cope with emotional difficulties. In both types of schools, positive social relationships should be nurtured.

In contrast, self-acceptance, especially in regular schools, must be enhanced through mentoring programs encouraging self-reflection and understanding. Counselors can also leverage technology to provide psychological support and collaborate with schools to develop policies and train teachers to be more responsive to students' well-being needs. In doing so, counselors can create an environment conducive to students' psychological development. This idea aligns with the WHO's movement to create a well-being school where students can grow and develop optimally. School is a great place to establish human psychological well-being (Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019). It is scientifically established that a healthy mindset affects physical health and human life. Good mental health in adolescents is associated with physical health and the ability to build positive relationships with others (Piñeiro-Cossio et al., 2021; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014).

Psychological Well-Being is a concept that describes the positive functioning of the mind. Psychological well-being is associated with a picture of a healthy and optimally functioning mental state. Mental health is the quality of life or a good life. It is conceptualized as a fluid spectrum that can change at any time. Humans are known as dynamic beings, namely bio-psycho-socio-spiritual beings whose meaning is influenced by internal and external factors so that they can change their thoughts, feelings, and behavior at any time. Positive Psychology is a branch of psychology that studies the optimal functioning of individuals, groups, and communities (Castellanos-Simons et al., 2020). According to positive psychology, mental health leads to well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness (Charry et al., 2020). Psychological well-being is a favorable condition that enables a person to realize their full potential and is also interpreted as meaning and self-realization (Cardona, 2021). A well-being mental state is associated with a healthy personality.

Psychological well-being is essential for adolescents to be adaptive and fully functional in the environment (Manindjo et al., 2023). Psychological well-being has a significant influence on adolescents' lives. Adolescents with high psychological well-being can achieve optimal development (Idele et al., 2022). When a teenager's psychological well-being is heightened, emotional intelligence and social support surround them. In addition, adolescents' psychological well-being can support their psychological functioning, especially in achieving academic success (Chow, 2007). From this, it is clear how crucial psychological well-being is for each teenager. This is reinforced by research showing that positive expectations or optimism can improve adolescents' psychological well-being (Ilhamudin & Muslihati, 2017).

These findings also highlight the relevance of this study to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), particularly in promoting mental health among adolescents within educational settings. The identification of self-acceptance and autonomy as the most urgent dimensions requiring intervention provides evidence for schools and counselors to prioritize preventive and promotive mental health strategies tailored to students' contextual needs. Strengthening school-based support systems may therefore contribute to healthier developmental outcomes and improved psychological well-being among adolescents.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding:** This study found no significant difference in psychological well-being between students in regular schools and boarding schools. However, regular school students showed a slightly higher level of psychological well-being. In boarding schools, autonomy or independence was the weakest dimension, while in regular schools, self-acceptance was the lowest aspect. Positive relationships with others appeared as the strongest dimension in both types of schools. **Implication:** These findings suggest that school counselors need to design counseling services tailored to the specific needs of each school context. Boarding school students require stronger support to develop independence, while regular school students need more assistance in strengthening self-acceptance. Schools should also maintain positive social relationships, provide solid social support, and create an environment conducive to students' psychological and academic development. These implications are also aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), highlighting the importance of school-based mental health promotion and preventive interventions to foster adolescents' psychological well-being and healthy development. **Limitation:** This study was limited to adolescents in regular and boarding schools in Indonesia and used a cross-sectional survey design, so the findings cannot explain changes in psychological well-being over time. **Future Research:** Future studies are recommended to involve broader school contexts, use longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and explore other factors that may influence adolescents' psychological well-being, such as family support, peer relationships, school climate, and the effectiveness of counseling programs.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Muslikah** contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation, visualization, and writing the original draft of the manuscript. **Abdul Kholiq** contributed to conceptualization, supervision, validation, interpretation of findings, and critical review and editing of the manuscript. **Niswatul Baroroh** contributed to investigation, data curation, project administration, and manuscript review. **Oktavia Puspita Dewi** contributed to validation, literature review, manuscript review, and editing. All authors have

read, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state that no financial or personal conflicts of interest exist that may have affected the content or findings of this research.

### STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools or other digital writing assistants were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All stages of the research process, including data analysis, interpretation, and manuscript writing, were conducted solely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the content presented in this article.

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