

# Psychosocial Factors Related to Depression Among High School Students in Narathiwat Province: The Roles of Social Media Usage, Cyberbullying, Academic Stress, Family Support, and Self-Esteem

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## ABSTRACT

Depression among adolescents has become a growing public health concern worldwide, yet evidence from culturally distinct and conflict-affected regions remains limited. This study investigated psychosocial factors associated with depression among high school students in Narathiwat Province, Southern Thailand, a Muslim-majority region characterized by strong family traditions, socioeconomic challenges, and prolonged social instability.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 400 adolescents aged 13–18 years selected through stratified random sampling across all 13 districts of Narathiwat Province. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire measuring social media usage, cyberbullying, academic stress, family support, self-esteem, and depression. Descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and multiple regression were employed to examine relationships among variables.

Results revealed that 29.5% of participants reported elevated depressive symptoms. Depression was positively associated with social media usage ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ), cyberbullying ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ), and academic stress ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ), while family support ( $r = -.47, p < .001$ ) and self-esteem ( $r = -.61, p < .001$ ) were negatively associated with depression. Multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 48.2% of the variance in depression ( $R^2 = .482, p < .001$ ). Self-esteem emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = -.32$ ), followed by academic stress ( $\beta = .29$ ), cyberbullying ( $\beta = .22$ ), family support ( $\beta = -.18$ ), and social media usage ( $\beta = .14$ ).

The findings highlight the critical role of both risk and protective psychosocial factors in adolescent mental health. Strengthening self-esteem, reducing academic stress, preventing cyberbullying, and promoting family support may serve as effective strategies for depression prevention. This study contributes novel evidence from an underrepresented Southeast Asian conflict-affected setting and offers implications for culturally responsive mental health interventions.

**KEYWORDS:** adolescent depression, psychosocial factors, self-esteem, academic stress, cyberbullying, family support, social media, Thailand.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Depression among adolescents has become one of the most pressing public health concerns worldwide. Although adolescence is often viewed as a period of growth, exploration, and opportunity, it is also a developmental stage marked by emotional vulnerability and increasing social demands. In recent years, researchers, educators, and healthcare professionals have reported a noticeable rise in depressive symptoms among young people, particularly among secondary school students who are navigating academic expectations, changing social relationships, and uncertainty about the future (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). The consequences of depression extend beyond emotional suffering. Previous research has linked adolescent depression to declining academic performance, social withdrawal, substance misuse, self-harm, and suicide, highlighting its significance as a major public health challenge (Patel et al., 2018).

At the same time, adolescents today appear more willing to discuss mental health concerns than previous generations. Conversations surrounding depression, anxiety, and emotional well-being have become increasingly visible in schools, online spaces, and public health campaigns. This shift has helped reduce some of the stigma historically associated with mental health problems and has encouraged more young people to seek support when needed (Gulliver et al., 2010). However, greater openness has also revealed the extent to which many adolescents continue to struggle with psychological distress. Understanding why some young people are more vulnerable than others remains an important challenge for both researchers and practitioners.

In Thailand, growing concerns regarding adolescent mental health have been reflected in increasing numbers of young people seeking counseling and mental health services (Department of Mental Health, 2024). Yet much of what is currently known comes from studies conducted in urban centers or more economically developed regions. Comparatively little attention has been given to adolescents living in the southern border provinces, where social, cultural, religious, and economic conditions differ considerably from those found elsewhere in the country. As a result, important aspects of adolescent mental health in these communities remain insufficiently understood.

Narathiwat Province provides a particularly important context for examining these issues. Home to a predominantly Muslim population, the province is characterized by strong family ties, religious traditions, and community-oriented values that shape everyday life. As researchers who work closely with adolescents in this region, we have observed that many students grow up within supportive family and community environments while simultaneously facing pressures that are often less visible to adults. These pressures include academic expectations, changing social norms, online influences, and concerns about future educational and employment opportunities. Such experiences are rarely captured in national statistics yet frequently emerge in conversations with students, teachers, school counselors, and families.

For many adolescents in Narathiwat, daily life involves balancing two worlds. One is rooted in longstanding cultural and religious traditions that emphasize family responsibility, respect for elders, and collective values. The other is shaped by digital technology and social media, where young people are exposed to global trends, alternative lifestyles, and constant opportunities for social comparison (Yusuf & Baharudin, 2020). While these influences may broaden perspectives and create new opportunities, they may also generate tension as adolescents attempt to reconcile competing expectations regarding identity, success, and belonging. Such tensions may contribute to emotional distress and, in some cases, depressive symptoms.

The broader environment in which adolescents live must also be considered. For more than two decades, communities across Thailand's southern border region have experienced varying degrees of social unrest and insurgency-related violence. Although not every adolescent is directly affected by these events, many grow up in an environment where uncertainty and concerns about safety form part of the social landscape (Jitpiromsri, 2022). Research conducted in other conflict-affected settings has shown that prolonged exposure to instability can influence emotional well-being and increase the risk of psychological difficulties among young people (Betancourt et al., 2013).

Economic challenges further shape the experiences of many families in Narathiwat. Household incomes remain below the national average, and poverty rates continue to exceed those observed in many other regions of Thailand (National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023). These circumstances may place additional burdens on adolescents, particularly when educational aspirations, family responsibilities, and financial limitations intersect. For some young people, concerns about the future begin long before graduation and may contribute to ongoing stress during critical developmental years.

Against this backdrop, psychosocial factors such as social media usage, cyberbullying, academic stress, family support, and self-esteem warrant closer examination. Previous studies have identified social media use, cyberbullying, and academic stress as potential risk factors for depression (Keles et al., 2020; Kowalski et al., 2019; Pascoe et al., 2020), while family support and self-esteem have consistently been recognized as important protective factors that promote resilience and psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Mann et al., 2004). However, relatively little is known about how these factors operate within the distinctive cultural and social environment of Narathiwat Province.

Given the province's unique combination of religious traditions, strong family networks, socioeconomic challenges, and prolonged exposure to social instability, findings from other regions may not fully explain the experiences of adolescents living in Southern Thailand. Therefore, this study examines psychosocial factors related to depression among high school students in Narathiwat Province. By exploring both risk and protective factors, the study aims to contribute contextually grounded evidence that can inform culturally responsive mental health interventions and support the work of educators, counselors, healthcare professionals, families, and policymakers seeking to improve adolescent well-being in the region.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study will employ a quantitative survey research design to examine psychosocial factors related to depression among high school students in Narathiwat Province. The study will focus on five independent variables: social media usage, cyberbullying, academic stress, family support, and self-esteem. The dependent variable is depression. A cross-sectional survey approach will be used because the study aims to collect data from a large group of adolescents at one point in time and analyze patterns, levels, differences, and relationships among the study variables.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study consists of high school students aged 13–18 years who are enrolled in secondary schools in Narathiwat Province during the 2025 academic year. The target population includes students from all 13 districts of Narathiwat Province in order to ensure that the sample reflects the geographic, cultural, and educational diversity of the province. The sample group will consist of 400 adolescents aged 13–18 years. Stratified random samplings will be used. The 13 districts of Narathiwat Province will be treated as strata. The number of participants selected from each district will be proportionate to the estimated number of high school students in that district. This sampling method is appropriate because it helps ensure that students from each district are represented and reduces the risk of overrepresenting only large urban schools or easily accessible areas.

### **Sampling Procedure**

First, the researchers will identify secondary schools from all 13 districts of Narathiwat Province. Second, the student population in each district will be estimated through school records or educational office data. Third, the sample size for each district will be calculated proportionately. Finally, students within each district will be randomly invited to participate through school coordination. For example, if one district contains approximately 10% of the high school student population, around 40 students will be selected from that district. This procedure will continue until the total sample reaches 400 students.

### **Research Timeframe**

**Research Schedule**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Nov 2025</b>	<b>Dec 2025</b>	<b>Jan 2026</b>	<b>Feb 2026</b>	<b>Mar 2026</b>
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework Development	✓	✓			
Research Proposal Development	✓	✓			
Instrument Development	✓	✓			
Expert Validation (IOC Assessment)		✓			
Ethical Approval Application		✓	✓		
Pilot Testing and Reliability Analysis			✓		
Revision of Research Instrument			✓		
Data Collection via Google Forms			✓	✓	
Data Cleaning and Screening				✓	
Statistical Analysis				✓	✓
Interpretation of Findings					✓
Research Report and Manuscript Preparation					✓

### **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured electronic questionnaire developed by researchers and administered through Google Forms. The use of an online survey platform was deemed appropriate because it allowed efficient access to participants across all 13 districts of Narathiwat Province while ensuring

convenience, anonymity, and ease of data management. The questionnaire was designed based on an extensive review of literature related to adolescent depression and psychosocial factors influencing mental health among adolescents. The questionnaire consisted of seven sections. The first section collected demographic information, including gender, age, grade level, school type, district of residence, and average daily social media usage. The second section assessed social media usage, focusing on the frequency, intensity, and psychological impact of social media engagement. The third section measured experiences of cyberbullying, including exposure to online harassment, exclusion, humiliation, and other forms of negative online interactions. The fourth section examined academic stress by exploring students' perceptions of educational demands, examination pressure, academic expectations, and concerns regarding future educational opportunities. The fifth section focused on family support and assessed the extent to which adolescents perceived emotional, informational, and practical support from family members. The sixth section measured self-esteem, reflecting participants' perceptions of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal competence. The final section assessed depressive symptoms experienced by participants during recent months, including feelings of sadness, hopelessness, loss of interest, emotional distress, and other indicators commonly associated with adolescent depression. All items in Sections Two through Seven were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Response options ranged from 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Agree), 3 (Neutral), 2 (Disagree), to 1 (Strongly Disagree). Higher scores indicated higher levels of the construct being measured.

### **Validity of the Instrument**

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was evaluated by a panel of three experts specializing in educational research, adolescent psychology, and mental health. The experts reviewed each item to determine its relevance, clarity, and consistency with the research objectives. Content validity was assessed using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). The IOC values for individual constructs ranged from 0.91 to 0.98, while the overall IOC value of the questionnaire was 0.95. These values exceeded the acceptable criterion of 0.50 (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977), indicating excellent content validity and a high degree of consistency between the questionnaire items and the research objectives.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 40 high school students who shared characteristics similar to those of the target population but were not included in the final sample. The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was employed to assess the reliability of each scale. The pilot study results demonstrated high levels of reliability across all constructs. The Social Media Usage Scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86, while the Cyberbullying Experience Scale produced a coefficient of .88. The Academic Stress Scale demonstrated a reliability coefficient of .90, indicating excellent internal consistency. The Family Support Scale and Self-Esteem Scale yielded reliability coefficients of .89 and .87, respectively. The Depression Scale demonstrated the highest reliability coefficient at .91. When all questionnaire items were considered collectively, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .94. These findings indicate that the instrument possessed a high degree of internal consistency and reliability. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered suitable for investigating psychosocial factors related to depression among high school students in Narathiwat Province.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Following approval from the ethics committee and educational authorities, data were collected electronically through Google Forms between January and February 2026. The survey link was distributed through participating secondary schools across all 13 districts of Narathiwat Province with the assistance of school administrators and teachers. Participants were required to be high school students aged 13–18 years enrolled in schools in Narathiwat Province during the 2025 academic year. Incomplete, duplicate, or invalid responses were excluded from the final analysis.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted to examine differences in depression across demographic groups. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to investigate relationships between social media usage, cyberbullying, academic stress, family support, self-esteem, and depression. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which these psychosocial factors predicted depression among high school students.

## **RESULT**

A total of 400 high school students from all 13 districts of Narathiwat Province participated in the study. Of the participants, 236 (59.0%) were female and 164 (41.0%) were male. The mean age of participants was 15.7 years ( $SD = 1.42$ ), with ages ranging from 13 to 18 years. Students were fairly distributed across grade levels, with the largest proportion enrolled in Mathayom 5 (22.8%), followed by Mathayom 4 (21.0%), Mathayom 6 (18.5%), Mathayom 3 (15.8%), Mathayom 2 (12.5%), and Mathayom 1 (9.4%). Approximately 68.5% of participants attended private schools, including Islamic private schools, while 31.5% attended public schools. The average daily social media use was 5.3 hours ( $SD = 2.1$ ), with 42.3% reporting more than six hours of social media use per day.

For the levels of Social Media Usage, Cyberbullying, Academic Stress, Family Support, Self-Esteem, and Depression, the results indicated that participants reported a high level of social media usage ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) and a moderate level of academic stress ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ). Experiences of cyberbullying were reported at a low-to-moderate level ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). Family support was perceived at a relatively high level ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), while self-esteem was reported at a moderate-to-high level ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ). The mean depression score was 3.08 ( $SD = 0.81$ ), indicating a moderate level of depressive symptoms among participants. Based on the established cut-off scores, 29.5% of students demonstrated elevated depressive symptoms that may warrant further mental health assessment.

As for the differences in Depression by Demographic Characteristics, an independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in depression scores between male and female students,  $t(398) = 2.84$ ,  $p = .005$ . Female students reported significantly higher levels of depression ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) than male students ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). One-way ANOVA demonstrated significant differences in depression across age groups,  $F(5,394) = 4.27$ ,  $p = .001$ . Students aged 17–18 years reported higher levels of depression compared to younger students. Significant differences were also observed across grade levels,  $F(5,394) = 3.91$ ,  $p = .002$ , with students in Mathayom 5 and Mathayom 6 exhibiting higher depression scores than those in lower grades. No significant differences in depression were found across districts,  $F(12,387) = 1.27$ ,  $p = .226$ , suggesting that depressive symptoms were relatively similar across Narathiwat Province.

When comparing the relationships Between Psychosocial Factors and Depression, Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between all study variables and depression. Social media usage demonstrated a positive relationship with depression ( $r = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that students who reported greater social media use tended to experience higher levels of depressive symptoms. Cyberbullying showed the strongest positive relationship with depression ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Students who experienced more frequent cyberbullying reported significantly higher levels of depression. Academic stress was also positively associated with depression ( $r = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ ), representing the strongest correlation among the predictor variables. Conversely, family support demonstrated a significant negative relationship with depression ( $r = -.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Students who perceived greater support from their families tended to report lower levels of depressive symptoms. Similarly, self-esteem was negatively associated with depression ( $r = -.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that students with stronger self-esteem experienced substantially lower levels of depression.

As predictors of Depression Among High School Students, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which social media usage, cyberbullying, academic stress, family support, and self-esteem predicted depression among high school students. The overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(5,394) = 72.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 48.2% of the variance in depression scores ( $R^2 = .482$ ). Among the predictors, self-esteem emerged as the strongest predictor of depression ( $\beta = -.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by academic stress ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ), cyberbullying ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ), family support ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and social media usage ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The findings indicate that students with lower self-esteem, higher academic stress, greater exposure to cyberbullying, lower family support, and higher social media usage were significantly more likely to report depressive symptoms.

Overall, the results suggest that both risk factors and protective factors play important roles in adolescent mental health. While academic stress and cyberbullying increase vulnerability to depression, family support and self-esteem appear to serve as important protective mechanisms among high school students in Narathiwat Province.

### 3. DISCUSSION

The present study examined psychosocial factors related to depression among high school students in Narathiwat Province. The findings revealed that approximately one-third of participants exhibited elevated depressive symptoms, suggesting that adolescent depression is a significant mental health concern in the province. This finding is consistent with global and national trends indicating increasing rates of depression among adolescents (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023; Patel et al., 2018; Department of Mental Health, 2024). The prevalence observed in this study may be influenced by the unique social and cultural environment of Narathiwat, where adolescents face multiple challenges associated with academic expectations, rapid technological changes, socioeconomic limitations, and the ongoing effects of social unrest in the southern border region.

#### **Depression and Demographic Characteristics**

The study found that female students reported significantly higher levels of depression than male students. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that adolescent girls are generally more vulnerable to depressive symptoms due to biological, psychological, and social factors (Salk et al., 2017; Shorey et al., 2022; WHO, 2023). Female adolescents may experience greater emotional sensitivity, social pressures, and concerns related to self-image and interpersonal relationships. Additionally, older students and those in upper secondary grades reported higher levels of depression than younger students. This may be explained by increasing academic demands, concerns regarding university admission, career planning, and family expectations as students approach graduation (Pascoe et al., 2020; Suldo et al., 2008; Deb et al., 2015). Interestingly, no significant differences were found across districts, suggesting that depression is a province-wide concern affecting adolescents regardless of geographic location.

#### **Social Media Usage and Depression**

The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between social media usage and depression. Students who reported higher levels of social media engagement tended to experience greater depressive symptoms. This result supports previous studies indicating that excessive social media use may contribute to social comparison, sleep disruption, emotional distress, and reduced psychological well-being (Keles et al., 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2019; Boer et al., 2021). In the context of Narathiwat, social media may expose adolescents to lifestyles, values, and social expectations that differ from traditional cultural norms, potentially creating internal conflict and feelings of inadequacy. While social media serves as an important communication tool, excessive use may increase vulnerability to emotional difficulties among adolescents.

#### **Cyberbullying and Depression**

Cyberbullying was found to have a strong positive relationship with depression and emerged as a significant predictor of depressive symptoms. This finding is consistent with a substantial body of literature demonstrating that victims of cyberbullying are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and psychological distress (Kowalski et al., 2019; Hinduja & Patchin, 2018; Marciano et al., 2020). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur continuously through digital platforms and may reach a large audience, intensifying emotional harm. Given the increasing use of smartphones and social media among adolescents in Narathiwat, cyberbullying represents a growing mental health concern that warrants attention from schools, families, and policymakers.

#### **Academic Stress and Depression**

Academic stress demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with depression and was one of the most influential predictors in the regression model. This finding supports previous studies indicating that academic pressure is a major contributor to emotional distress among adolescents (Pascoe et al., 2020; Deb et al., 2015; Ang & Huan, 2006). High school students often experience pressure related to examinations, academic achievement, future educational opportunities, and family expectations. In Narathiwat, where many families view education as a pathway toward social mobility and economic stability, academic success may carry additional significance. Consequently, students who struggle to meet academic expectations may be at greater risk of experiencing depressive symptoms.

#### **Family Support and Depression**

Family support was negatively associated with depression and served as an important protective factor. Students who perceived higher levels of support from their families reported lower levels of depressive symptoms. This finding is consistent with Social Support Theory, which suggests that supportive family relationships help individuals cope with stress and adversity (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Previous studies have similarly found that family support reduces the likelihood of depression and promotes psychological well-being among adolescents

(Rueger et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2022; Chu et al., 2010). In the predominantly Muslim communities of Narathiwat, family relationships often play a central role in adolescents' lives. Strong family bonds, parental involvement, and religious values may provide emotional security and resilience that protect against mental health difficulties.

### **Self-Esteem and Depression**

Among all predictors examined, self-esteem emerged as the strongest protective factor against depression. Adolescents with higher self-esteem were significantly less likely to experience depressive symptoms. This finding is consistent with previous research identifying self-esteem as a critical determinant of adolescent mental health (Mann et al., 2004; Orth et al., 2008; Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Adolescents with positive self-perceptions are generally more capable of managing stress, coping with challenges, and maintaining emotional stability. In contrast, low self-esteem may increase vulnerability to negative emotions, self-criticism, and depression. The prominence of self-esteem in the present study suggests that interventions aimed at strengthening adolescents' self-worth may be particularly effective in promoting mental well-being.

### **Predictors of Depression**

The regression model explained 48.2% of the variance in depression, indicating that psychosocial factors play a substantial role in adolescent mental health. Self-esteem, academic stress, cyberbullying, family support, and social media usage all emerged as significant predictors of depression. These findings align with ecological and psychosocial models of adolescent development, which emphasize the interaction between individual, family, school, and social environments in shaping mental health outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Patel et al., 2018; WHO, 2023). The results suggest that depression among adolescents in Narathiwat cannot be attributed to a single cause but rather reflects the combined influence of multiple risk and protective factors.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Depression among adolescents is no longer an emerging concern, it is a pressing reality that demands immediate attention. The findings of this study indicate that depressive symptoms affect a substantial proportion of high school students in Narathiwat Province, with nearly one-third of participants reporting levels of distress that may warrant further assessment and support. The results demonstrate that a complex interaction of risk and protective factors shapes adolescent depression. Social media usage, cyberbullying, and academic stress were associated with higher levels of depression, whereas family support and self-esteem played important protective roles. Among all factors examined, self-esteem emerged as the strongest predictor of depression, underscoring the critical importance of helping adolescents develop a positive sense of self-worth and resilience.

These findings carry implications that extend beyond individual students. Adolescents represent the next generation of citizens, leaders, professionals, educators, and parents. Their mental health influences not only their current quality of life but also the future social, educational, and economic development of their communities and nations. When young people struggle with depression, the consequences can affect academic achievement, personal relationships, workforce readiness, and long-term well-being. Conversely, when adolescents are supported emotionally and psychologically, they are better positioned to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

The results suggest that addressing adolescent depression requires a coordinated and sustained effort. Schools must move beyond an exclusive focus on academic performance and recognize student well-being as an essential component of educational success. Programs that strengthen self-esteem, promote healthy digital habits, reduce cyberbullying, and help students manage academic pressure should become integral parts of school life. Families, community leaders, healthcare professionals, and policymakers also have important roles to play in creating environments where adolescents feel supported, valued, and understood.

In the context of Narathiwat Province, where cultural traditions, religious values, socioeconomic challenges, and social instability intersect, mental health initiatives must be both evidence-based and culturally responsive. Investing in adolescent mental health is not merely a health priority; it is an investment in the future of the region and the nation. By understanding the factors that place young people at risk and those that protect them, stakeholders can work together to build stronger support systems and create conditions that allow adolescents not only to overcome psychological challenges but also to thrive.

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