

Factors Affecting Depression in Teenagers During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This research will help teenagers to choose better alternative ways to overcome or reduce feelings of depression during the pandemic. This research also explores the signs of depression so that teenagers would be more aware and can reflect on the causes of their depression, thereby immediately working towards stopping them or to seek psychological help if necessary. It further aims to inform teenagers how concerning depression is, and that it can lead to many negative impacts, as well as to spread awareness regarding this matter. The signs include mood swings, increased or loss of an appetite, lack of sleep, hard getting out of bed and not looking to the future. The factors affecting depression in teenagers during the pandemic include loneliness and worrisome of getting infected or family getting infected. Child status can also be a risk factor. Some recommendations to reduce depression include doing exercise regularly, creating distractions and focusing on themselves, connecting with their friends and family ‘virtually’, and feeling your feelings.

Keywords: Covid-19, depression, mental health, mood swings, appetite, lifestyle, symptoms

Subject: Psychology

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed different authors and researchers’ studies to explore the factors causing depression in teenagers. According to UNICEF (2020), their rapid assessment amplified the voices of 8,444 teenagers and young people between the ages of 13 and 29 in nine countries and territories in the region. Among the participants, 15% were depressed in the last seven days. This study utilises factors causing depression in teenagers like school closures, disruptions of routines, social isolation, concerns about family illness and economic impacts. According to Timothy J. Legg (2019), common depressive symptoms, which include feelings of sadness, loss of interest and pleasure in activities, as well as disruption to regulatory functions such as sleep and appetite, could be elevated during the pandemic as a result of social isolation due to school closures and physical distancing requirements.

Depression can impact one’s mental and physical health. According to research done by University of Pelita Harapan, depression is also quite commonly found in Indonesian teenagers during COVID-19 pandemic. The reason behind depression that affects teenagers more was how younger age groups experienced an impactful lifestyle change due to Covid-19 pandemic. Socially distancing for instance, which resonates in the decreasing amount of going outdoors or how much the younger age groups spent time on social media, is closely related to the increasing amount of depression. Conclusively, sudden changes in lifestyle during the COVID-19 pandemic affected depression in teenagers.

Chen et al. (2020) stated that older teenagers reported more depressive symptoms and found that depressive teenagers appear to have lower quality relationships with their parents. It might also be the case that the isolation brought on by the pandemic has a differential effect on older children because their independence is more compromised (i.e., younger kids are developmentally more naturally dependent upon their parents).

Additionally, Chen et al. (2020) also observed that another interesting risk factor is the ‘only-child status’. The research showed that teenagers who are the only child at home are more likely to perceive their parents as overprotective toward them during the pandemic. This therefore relates to more depressive symptoms. Parents’ relationships to their children were impacted in the pandemic time period, and teenagers were isolated from their peers and other supportive adults. Thus, preservation of the sibling relationship appears to have become a protective factor for teenagers’ mental health, where they can feel less lonely and they can be more supportive of each other.

Finally, a family member’s compromised health condition is a risk factor that should not be ignored. When there is a family member who was infected with COVID-19, it not surprisingly positively predicts teenagers’ depressive symptoms (Chen et al., 2020). They discovered that, for those students who had relatives infected with COVID-19, there was an increase in their depressed levels.

Experts advise that one should invest in protecting their mental health. UNICEF listed 3 productive strategies to protect one’s mental health. First, teenagers can create distractions and focus on themselves. By this they meant, to read a list of books or watch their favorite shows on television to fill up their time during the pandemic. They can also learn something new like learning new languages.

Secondly, teenagers can find new ways to connect with their friends like through social media or through calling their friends. Online communication is not as effective as compared to face-to-face communication. However, that’s the best plausible solution in the pandemic.

The 3rd solution is teenagers need to learn to feel their feelings. Missing out on events is surely going to disappoint them. According to UNICEF, “When it comes to having a painful feeling, the only way out is through. Go ahead and be sad, and if you can let yourself be sad, you’ll start to feel better faster.” Teenagers will go through sorrowness in different kinds of ways, but the most important is to do what they feel is best for them.

METHODS

The research used primary research like a survey and secondary research as well like online websites articles and reports. The target response is teenagers from different schools. In August 2021, a questionnaire for a survey was prepared by the author. On 22 September 2021, the survey was released to the author’s friends and families (random sampling) who are 13-18 years old, resulting in 79 teenagers from different schools to answer our survey. Among 79 teenagers, 58.2% are girls and 41.8% are boys. The survey was taken by three age groups, which are 13-14 years old, 15-16 years old and 17-18 years old. The survey was taken by teenagers not only in Indonesia but also across the world, such as Malaysia, Singapore and the USA. Most of the respondents are healthy, this shows that the symptoms they are experiencing are only from depression and not their physical health problems. All respondents were required to go through our privacy policy and sign a confidentiality agreement form that protected their identities.

FINDINGS & DATA COLLECTION

Age

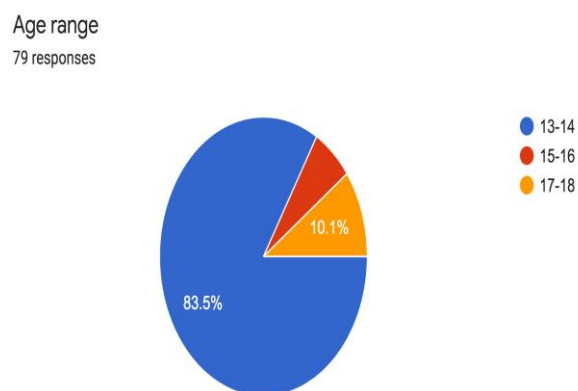


Figure 1: Age

Majority of the respondents were aged 13-14 yrs. old (83.5%). The next major age group was 17-18 yrs. (10.1%) and the least group of respondents are ages 15-16 years old.

Gender

Gender
79 responses

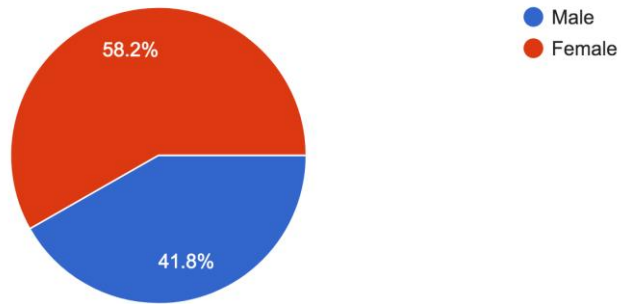


Figure 2: Gender

Majority (58.2%) of the respondents are girls, followed by boys (41.8%).

Year level/Grade

Year level
79 responses

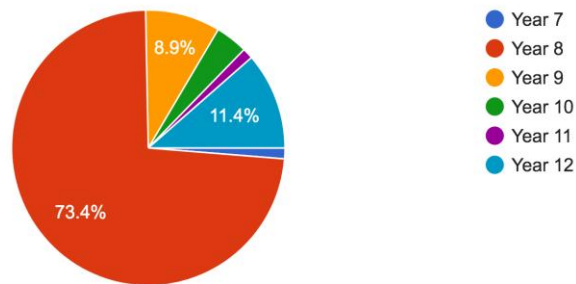


Figure 3: Year Level/Grade

Majority of the respondents (73.4%) studied in Year 8, followed by Year 12 (11.4%), Year 9 (8.9%) and Year 10 (3.8%). Not many respondents were from Year 7 and 11 (1.3%).

Location

Location
79 responses

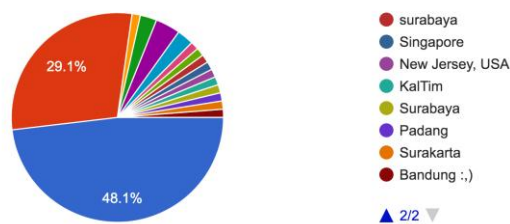


Figure 4: Location

Majority of the respondents are coming from Jakarta barat (48.1%). Followed by Jakarta selatan (29.1%), Jakarta Pusat (3.8%), Surabaya and Bandung (2.6%), Jakarta Timur and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2.5%). However, the least are

coming from Jakarta Utara, Tangerang, Kalimantan Timur, Padang, Surakarta, Singapore and New Jersey, USA (1.3%).

Current health condition

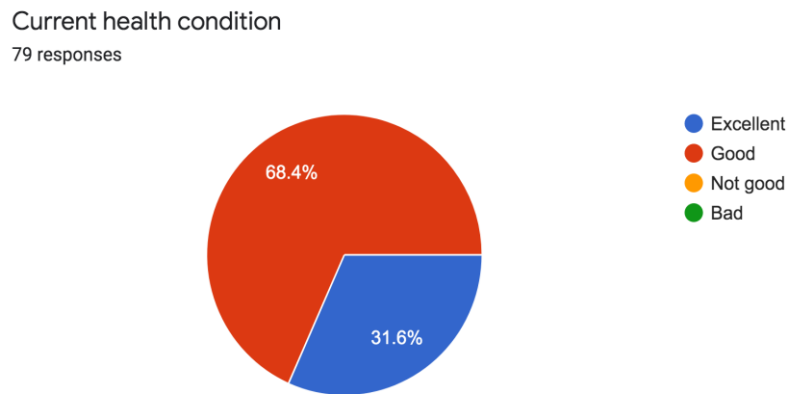


Figure 5: Current Health Condition

Majority of the respondents have a good health condition (68.5%). Next is excellent (31.4%). Interestingly, none of the respondents have not good and bad health conditions. All of the respondents answered excellent or good health conditions, this shows that the symptoms they are experiencing are not caused by their physical health problems but only due to depression.

Smoking cessation

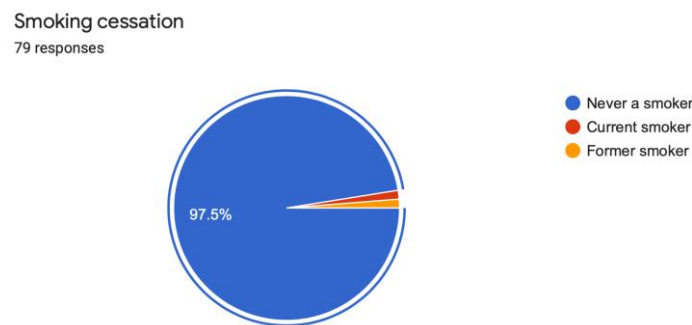


Figure 6:

Majority of the respondents never smoked (97.5%). The rest are current smokers and former smokers (1.3% each).

Percentage of family members experienced COVID-19

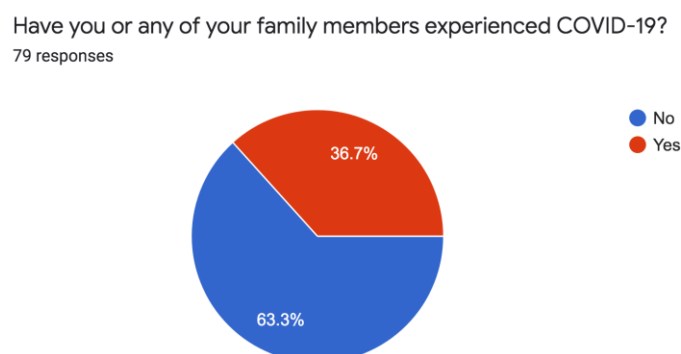


Figure 7: Percentage of Family Members who have Experienced COVID-19

Majority of the respondents had no family member that experienced COVID-19 (63.3%). Some respondents had a family member that experienced COVID-19 (36.7%).

Number of people they interact within a day

How many people do you interact with in a day?
 79 responses

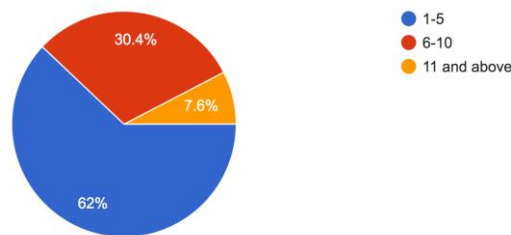


Figure 8: Number of People they Interact within a Day

Majority of the respondents interact with 1-5 people in a day (62%). Next is 6-10 people per day (30.4%). The rest of the respondents interact with 11 and above people per day (7.6%).

Number of times they go out during the pandemic

How many times did you go out during the pandemic?
 79 responses

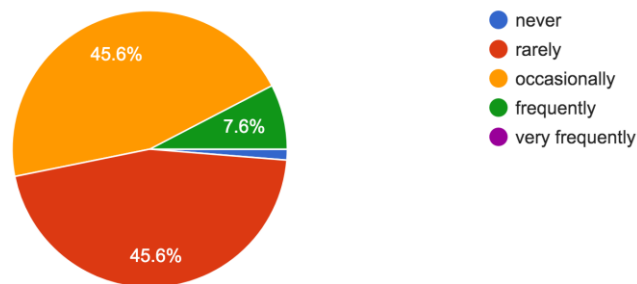


Figure 9: Number of times they go out during the Pandemic

Majority of the respondents occasionally and rarely go out during the pandemic (45.6%). Next is frequently (7.6%). The rest of the respondents never go out during the pandemic (1.2%). None of the respondents go to the mall very frequently.

Looking forward to the future

Do you look forward to the future?
 79 responses

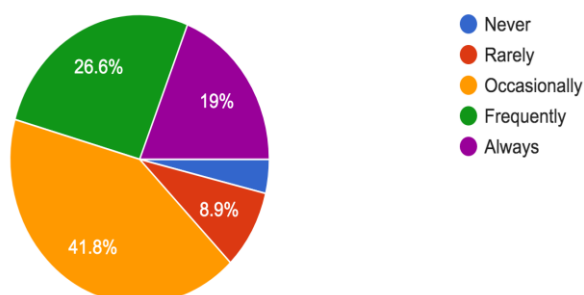


Figure 10: Looking Forward to the Future

Majority of the respondents occasionally look forward to the future (41.8%). Next is frequently (26.6%). Followed by always (19%), rarely (8.9%) and never (3.8%).

Keeping contact with friends

Do you still keep in contact with your friends?
79 responses

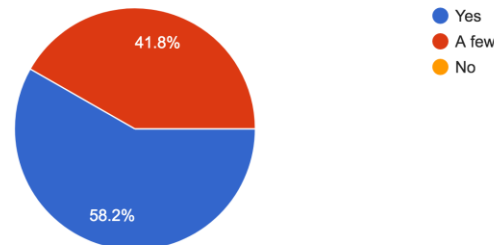


Figure 11: Keeping Contact with Friends

Majority of the respondents still keep contact with their friends (58.2%). Some of the respondents keep contact with a few friends (41.8%). No respondents never contact their friends/family. This is a follow-up question to the number of people the respondents interact per day.

Platforms Used

If so, what platform do you use and what do you usually do together with your friends?
79 responses

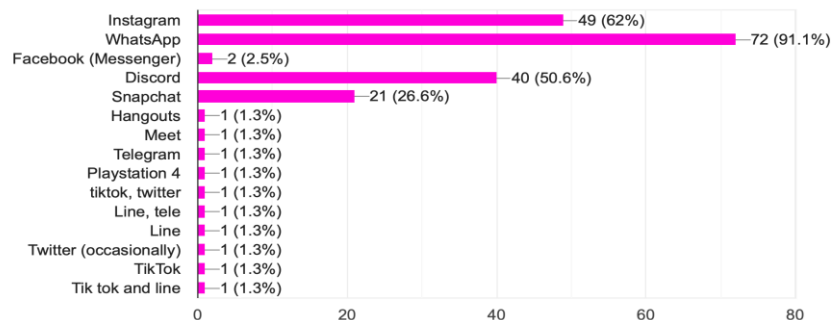


Figure 12: Platforms Used

Majority of the respondents use WhatsApp (91%). Followed by Instagram (62%), Discord (50.6%), Snapchat (26.6%), Facebook/Meta (2.5%) and Hangouts, Meet, Telegram, PlayStation 4, Tik Tok, Twitter, Line (1.3%) to communicate with their friends/family.

Number of Hours they Slept

What is the number of hours you sleep?
79 responses

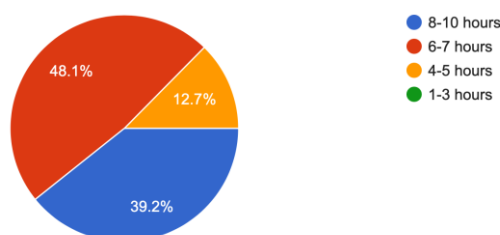


Figure 13: Number of Hours they Slept

Majority of the respondents sleep for 6-7 hours (48.1%). Followed by 8-10 hours (39.2%) and 4-5 hours (12.7%). None of the respondents sleep for 1-3 hours.

Number of Times they Exercise during the Pandemic

How often do you exercise during the pandemic?
 79 responses

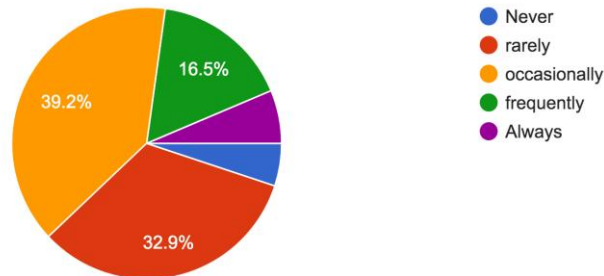


Figure 14: Number of Times they Exercise during the Pandemic

Majority of the respondents occasionally exercise during the pandemic (39.2%). Followed by rarely (32.9%), frequently (16.5%), always (6.3%) and never (5.1%).

How Easy or Hard it is to get up of Bed every Morning

Is it hard for you to get up of bed every morning?
 79 responses

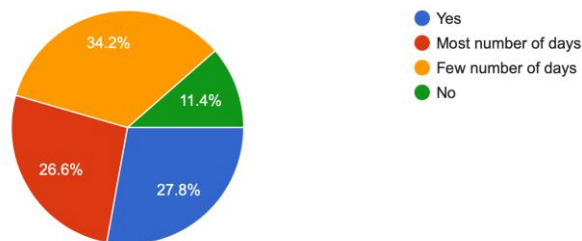


Figure 15: How Easy or Hard it is to get up of Bed every Morning

Majority of the respondents have a hard time getting up from bed every morning for a few days (34.2%). Followed by yes (27.8%), most days (26.6%) and no (11.4%).

How often they Experience Mood Swings

Do you experience mood swings?
 79 responses

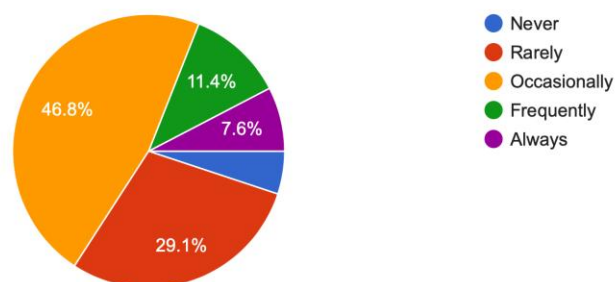


Figure 16: How often they Experience Mood Swings

Majority of the respondents occasionally experience mood swings (46.8%). Followed by rarely (29.1%), frequently (11.4%), always (7.6%) and never (5.1%).

Appetite

Do you experience an increased appetite or less of an appetite?

79 responses

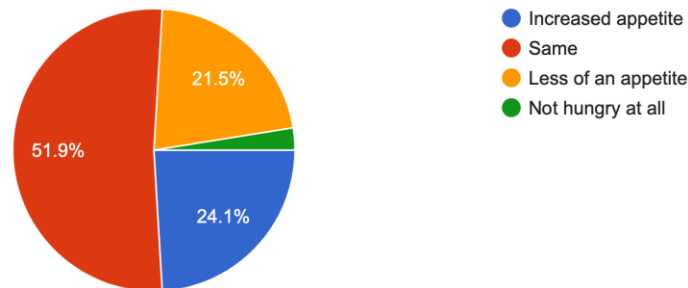


Figure 17: Appetite

Majority of the respondents' appetite remained the same (51.9%), followed by an increase of appetite (24.1%), less appetite (21.5%) and not hungry at all (2.5%).

DISCUSSION

As per the survey, 38% respondents rarely exercised which may lead to the depression they're experiencing. Exercising frequently can lower down your depression level. The study from Mayo Clinic (2017) confirms that it helps to improve mood, reduces anxiety, and improves / prevents health problems. When exercising, feel-good endorphins are released, your mind can erase all the worries, confidence gained, get more social interactions, and lastly cope in a healthy way.

According to a study done by Medicalnewstoday (2021), "At the University of Pristina, 14% of those who smoked had depression, whereas only 4% of their non-smoking peers had the condition. Among those who smoked at the University of Belgrade, 19% had depression, compared with 11% of those who did not smoke." From the pie chart, we can see that 1.3% of the respondents are currently smokers, this shows that they might be depressed. According to sciencedirect.com, the factor that is related to this condition is nicotine exposure. Long-term nicotine exposure during adolescence has been reported to accelerate the risk of mental health disorders.

Noticing that teenagers often encounter mood swings, 46.8 % out of 79 teenagers who answered our survey, faced mood swings occasionally. 7.6 % always face mood swings. 11.4% were facing mood swings frequently. All of these could be mild, moderate or severe. Mood swings occur due to the hormonal shift during puberty. According to Nancy Schimelpfening (2021), mood swings are the common symptoms of depression. Emotions from fear to happiness, happiness to anger, anger to sadness, etc. are able to change time-to-time; it is an emotional rollercoaster. So far, there are no specific cures. But there are several ways on how to maintain it. Some examples are exercising regularly, getting plenty (enough sleep for a certain age) of sleep, eating a healthy diet, and much more.

From the survey, we can see that 24.1% of respondents experienced increased appetite and 21.5% of respondents experienced less appetite. According to an article written by Chris Iades (2012), nausea may be a symptom of their depression and a cause for loss of appetite. "While loss of appetite is a common depression symptom, feelings of sadness or worthlessness can make some people overeat. "Depression can also result in emotional eating, a common event in which the need to eat is not associated with physical hunger," says Debra J. Johnston, RD, culinary services manager at Remuda Ranch, an eating disorder treatment center in Wickenburg, Ariz. "Instead, emotional eating is eating in response to emotional hunger."

When patients eat in response to their emotions, they are soothed by the food as it changes the chemical balance in the brain, produces a feeling of fullness that is more comfortable than an empty stomach, and improves mood through positive association with happier times."

Also, we can see that 36.7% of the respondents have or have families that experienced the Covid-19. According to research done by Globalization and Health (2020), when there is a family member who was infected with COVID-19, it

not surprisingly positively predicts adolescents' depressive symptoms. They discovered that, for those students who had relatives infected with COVID-19, there was an increase in their depressed levels, so it might be a factor of depression in teenagers nowadays.

We can also see that 46.9% of respondents never or rarely went outside during the pandemic. According to research done by University Pelita Harapan, socially distancing for instance, which resonates in the decreasing amount of going outdoors or how much the younger age groups spent time on social media is closely related to the increasing amount of depression.

A teenager needs 8-10 hours of sleep but from our survey, 12.7% of respondents only slept for 4-5 hours and 48.1% of respondents slept for 6-7 hours only. According to Rob Newsom and Alex Dimitriu, depression and sleep issues have a bidirectional relationship. This means that poor sleep can contribute to the development of depression and that having depression makes a person more likely to develop sleep issues. Sleep issues may contribute to the development of depression through changes in the function of the neurotransmitter serotonin. Sleep disruptions can affect the body's stress system, disrupting circadian rhythms and increasing vulnerability for depression.

Furthermore, we can see from the survey 88.6% of respondents have trouble getting out of bed and 12.7% of respondents do not or rarely look forward to the future. According to an article written by Timothy J. Legg, (2020), depression can cause severe symptoms, which can include difficulty getting out of bed in the morning. That is because depression is associated with alterations in serotonin and norepinephrine, the neurotransmitters that regulate mood, sleep, appetite, energy, memory, and your level of alertness. If your serotonin and norepinephrine levels are imbalanced, teenagers may feel fatigued for most of the day.

Lastly, no or little interaction can also lead to depression, as it leads to loneliness. 62% out of 79 teenagers (survey) interact with 1-5 people per day and 41.8% of teenagers keep in touch with only a few of their friends. According to Michael F. Steger and Todd B. Kashdan, "People with greater depressive symptoms report more frequent negative social interactions and react more strongly to them." Also, according to an article written by William A Haseltine (2021), loneliness can be a risk factor in a range of health issues, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and domestic abuse.

In a press release, Alan Teo, M.D., M.S., lead author and assistant professor of psychiatry at Oregon Health & Science University said, "Research has long-supported the idea that strong social bonds strengthen people's mental health. But this is the first look at the role that the type of communication with loved ones and friends plays in safeguarding people from depression. We found that all forms of socialization aren't equal. Phone calls and digital communication, with friends or family members, do not have the same power as face-to-face social interactions in helping to stave off depression." In conclusion, teenagers are highly encouraged to interact and communicate with a number of people per day.

CONCLUSION

According to our survey and the research articles we researched, we concluded that the main factors causing depression in teenagers during the pandemic are loneliness and the worry of getting infected or family getting infected by the Covid-19. According to Chen et al. (2020), child status can also be a risk factor. We have seen some signs of depression in our survey like mood swings, hard to get up in the morning, increased appetite and loss of appetite, not looking forward to the future and lack of night sleep. They can reduce it by doing exercise, connecting with their friends virtually, creating distractions and focusing on themselves, and by feeling their feelings. The strengths of our study are that there are also a lot of schools out there that are doing the same research as us and we can use some of their data to compare. The limitations include its limited sample size; our survey was answered by only 79 teenagers. Considering that the world population has around 1.2 billion teenagers, we clearly cannot generalize the results based on only 79 respondents. Future Research should focus on the effect of depression on teenager's education.

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