

*Understanding the Dynamics of Online Hatred and Mental Health Issues Among Adolescents: Exploring Factors, Impacts, and Alternative Strategies*

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**Abstract**

The phenomenon of hatred is a crucial problem in the digital era, particularly among adolescents. However, it remains unclear what motivates them to become more involved and how hatred impacts their mental health. This study aims to investigate phenomena associated with the causes and effects of online hatred among adolescents, as well as appropriate intervention strategies. In this research, 5 adolescents from Indonesia participated in a case study. Two sources of information were gathered: focus groups and open questionnaires. The results of a thematic analysis of the data revealed that: 1) External and internal causes of adolescent hatred, including cyberbullying as an example of an external factor, and the tendency towards differences such as ethnicity, religion, gender, and cultural heritage. Moreover, online conflicts with strangers and animosity are transmitted throughout the group. Again, internal factors are associated with anger, frustration, discomfort, dissatisfaction with oneself, a lack of impulse control inability to regulate emotions, and ignorance of the consequences. 2) The effects of hatred on mental health, including stress, anxiety, fear, worry, constant pressure, overthinking, low self-esteem, irritability, regret, maintaining emotional distance, exposure to individuals despised, experiencing appetite disorders, mood/mood, sleep disturbances, depression, and suicidal ideation, and aggressive behavior both online and offline. 3) Digital narrative-based bibliotherapy, Working Alliance (WA) in internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy (i-CBT), online reading such as TeenRead, use of chatbots, digital Empathy-based counterspeech, and digital literacy are alternative strategies for overcoming hatred.

Keywords: Hatred, Mental Health, Intervention Strategy, Adolescent, Bibliotherapy

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## Introduction

Online hatred among adolescents is becoming an increasingly urgent problem in today's digital context, especially in social media. A lot of hate speech is done on Twitter, and Facebook (Schoenebeck et al., 2023a), which are even carried out by strangers (Castellanos et al., 2023) and lead to intolerance (Abdallah Tani & Alrasheed, 2023a). Hatred is currently a study interest in educational counseling in Indonesia. There is still little research on the dynamics of online hatred and its impact on adolescent mental health. Even though a virtual police program has been formed to reprimand accounts deemed to have violated Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (Tuela et al., 2023), it turns out that there are still many people who commit detrimental actions on social media, even more massive. Since 2018 the ministry has handled more than three thousand hate cases in the digital space, especially those based on SARA. This problem is also essential in education, especially in schools (Mawarti, 2018).

Recently, researchers have shown increased interest in online hate cases such as online violence (Abdallah Tani & Alrasheed, 2023b), online harassment, trolling, cyberbullying, fake news, and hate speech (Saha et al., 2023). Online hate speech includes a range of acts, such as insults, threats, identity hatred (Vichare et al., 2021), and the dissemination of hateful content online (Castellanos et al., 2023). In Indonesia, hate speech can be seen in the comments column of celebgrams (S, 2021), abusive language on twitter (Aidil Fadilah, 2021), and the spread of fake news (Santi, 2024). Some social media where hate speech occurs include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Adhyasta Dirgantara, 2021). This research responds to phenomena that occur in Indonesia with many similar cases that are increasingly developing among adolescents.

The main disadvantage of online hate is that it has negative consequences for both the perpetrator and the victim. Hate can cause mental health problems, including stress (Keum et al., 2022), heavy anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depressive symptoms (Wypych & Bilewicz, 2022). In addition, online hate can also affect social interactions and relationships between peers, disrupt healthy social bonds and exacerbate the social climate in schools or youth communities. It can even increase societal polarization (Schäfer et al., 2022).

To understand this phenomenon comprehensively, it is crucial to explore the factors that influence the occurrence of online hatred among adolescents. Previous research has shown factors such as social pressure, feeling lonely or unwanted (Laufer, 2018), critical relationships with siblings (Campioni-Barr & Killoren, 2019), family violence (Herman Grobler & Karel FH Botha, n.d.), victimization from friends and negative experiences with parents (Xavier et al., 2016), and religious extremism (Saada, 2023). The factors that cause hatred remain speculative, so more profound studies are needed regarding this growing phenomenon.

In addition to understanding the factors and impacts of hate, it is also important to explore strategies to help youth prevent and overcome hate online. This strategy includes an educational approach (Collin, 2021a) based on the values of cohesion, social tolerance (Moorthy et al., 2021), counterspeech based on empathy (Hangartner et al., 2021a) and understanding, promoting healthy communication skills, and develop confidence and effective emotional handling. Subsequent approaches are technology-based, such as digital bibliotherapy (Franz et al., 2022a). Several digital-based strategy models can be used to

overcome hate and the impacts that arise; this becomes the basis for researchers to conduct further intervention studies.

This study aims to explore the dynamics of online hatred among adolescents by exploring the factors that cause hatred and the impact of hatred on adolescent mental health. This research will also provide in-depth insights into effective prevention or solution strategies to protect youth from the harmful effects of online hate. Currently, no research strategy uses digital interventions such as bibliotherapy with local cultural content such as folklore. So this study offers a strategic technique based on digital and local wisdom to overcome youth hatred. It will create a more positive, supportive, and safe online environment for youth and assist them in developing healthy social and emotional skills that are culturally based.

## **Method**

The use of qualitative phenomenological studies is a well-established approach to understanding the dynamics of online hatred among adolescents. The benefit of this approach is to understand in depth the phenomenon of youth who are involved in online hate, as well as explore the factors that influence the occurrence of online hate and the possible consequences. Furthermore, the researcher will explain alternative strategies to overcome the problem. This descriptive method is also used to understand the structure of individual experiences based on the normative questions asked (Cibotaru, 2023).

The subjects of this study were 5 adolescents, who had experienced online hatred either as perpetrators or victims. Data was collected through focus groups and open questionnaires (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Focus groups focus on discursive activities, not just structured or semi-structured interviews where there is a gap between the researcher and the participants; the aim is to explore phenomena related to the dynamics of online hatred more flexibly and profoundly. The open questionnaire contains open questions following the objectives of this study, which are distributed directly to the subject. The results of the two data are combined to answer the research problem.

Data analysis in this study uses thematic analysis. This analysis aims to understand the complexity of meaning in data rather than measuring its frequency. Researchers are directly involved in the data and analysis. The study contains a search for patterns of meaning that are further explored and describes the data based on predetermined themes. In addition, the research should be guided by openness. Thus, analysis involves a reflective process to illuminate meaning (Sundler et al., 2019). The analysis process is carried out by identifying meanings, organizing them into patterns, and writing down the resulting themes related to the research objectives and the actual context.

The validity of this research will be strengthened through the triangulation of data sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) by comparing findings from interviews and discussions with different participants. It will enable a more complete understanding of online hatred among adolescents.

Research ethics will be an essential concern in this research. Ethical approval will be obtained from the participant before the start of the interview, and applicable research ethical standards will strictly maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant. This study uses a phenomenological approach, and this research is expected to provide in-depth insight into online hatred in adolescents beyond just the superficial aspects.

## **Results**

This study explores the meaning of online hatred among adolescents, primarily related to the causal factors and their impact on mental health. In the discussion, future intervention strategies that might be carried out to overcome this issue will be described. There are three themes related to this topic: the causes of hatred, the impact of hatred on mental health, and appropriate intervention strategies for adolescents. The results of this study are described based on discussion studies in focus groups and answers to open questionnaires from respondents. It will then be discussed according to the following themes.

### ***Factors Causing Online Hatred in Adolescence***

The first theme to be explained is related to the factors that cause online hatred in adolescents, divided into external and internal factors. For external factors, the discussion results in the focus group show that the participants have explored their experiences of hating. The targets of online hate for teenagers depend on context and situation, but common targets usually include fellows, specific communities or groups, celebrities or public figures, and even strangers. Teenagers will hate others if it is triggered by an antecedent, such as cyberbullying, which usually manifests in intimidating, humiliating, or harassing behavior. For adolescence, this behavior is unacceptable, so hatred arises. Then in certain online groups or communities, it is usually caused by prejudice against their differences. Usually, this is related to their identity, such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or cultural background. This prejudice is typically transmitted to each group member, giving rise to verbal harassment and victimization behavior or online discrimination by individuals or groups with bigotry or hatred towards that group.

Furthermore, related to celebrities or public figures, teenagers are often involved in following accounts of celebrities or public figures they admire. However, sometimes teenagers redirect their hatred towards celebrities or other public figures they don't like. They may verbally attack and insult others on social media or other online platforms. According to them, the behavior of hating by venting it on social media will make them relieved. Conflicts with strangers may be experienced online; this is usually triggered by comments uploaded by celebrities / public figures and even viral news that appears. They sometimes attack each other verbally. Based on respondents' experience, most hate speech is experienced on the TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube platforms as frontal words that lead to humiliation and harassment. Meanwhile, satirical comments are often made on WhatsApp and Facebook media, usually done by those closest to them.

In this regard, anyone can become a target of online hate for teenagers, and no particular group or individual is specifically targeted. However, this depends on complex online dynamics and contexts and the personal preferences or animosities of the individuals involved.

The explanation above is supported by the results of an open questionnaire which shows data related to factors that cause online hatred, namely cyberbullying, bullying behavior, and prejudice against certain groups. Behavior that arises when they hate, among others, by giving direct satire on online platforms, transmitting hatred towards those closest to them and will, jointly carry out online attacks against hated individuals/groups, being silent or not commenting, limiting communication, and avoiding for example by

blocking hated person's account, doing satire. Of these options, some respondents chose to make satire and hate speech online.

Furthermore, we explain the internal factors of online hatred in adolescents. The discussion results in the focus group show that several things, including anger, frustration, and discomfort, cause adolescent hatred. Adolescents who have unresolved personal or emotional problems tend to express anger or frustration through hate online. They use online platforms as a channel to vent the negative emotions they feel. Next is self-dissatisfaction, which is related to feelings of inferiority, social anxiety, or feelings of not being accepted in a social environment, then online hatred can be a mechanism for releasing or diverting this self-dissatisfaction to others. Lack of impulse control is also a contributing factor; they have difficulty controlling sudden impulses or desires and are more prone to hateful online behavior. They often respond emotionally or impulsively without thinking about the possible consequences.

The results of an open questionnaire support this data, namely that teenagers hate because of their lack of ability to manage emotions; respondents admit that they have not fully developed practical skills to manage and deal with their feelings, including difficulties in identifying and expressing emotions healthily and constructively. As a result, they channel negative emotions through hateful behavior online. Lack of knowledge or understanding of consequences is also a cause of cruel online behavior. They express a lack of adequate knowledge of the impact this can have on the mental and emotional health of others or their own reputation and social relationships.

### ***The Impacts of Online Hatred on Adolescent Mental Health***

The second theme discussed is the effects of online hatred on adolescent mental health. The results of the focus group, the respondents experienced stress, anxiety, overthinking, low self-esteem, irritability, regret, keeping emotional distance, dreaming of people they hated, and experiencing appetite, mood, and sleep disturbances. What's worse is depression and suicidal ideation. Based on the respondents' confessions, these various disturbances arise as a result of previous events, namely online harassment, humiliation, or ostracism can make them feel sad and hopeless and even lose interest in daily activities. It can negatively affect their mood and interfere with daily functioning. In addition, teenagers who are the target of online hate can experience decreased self-esteem and low self-esteem. Harassment or humiliation directed at them can make them feel worthless, embarrassed, and even doubt their abilities. It can harm the self-confidence and identity development of adolescents. Online hate can also lead to social isolation in teens. They may feel afraid or reluctant to interact with other people in person because of the negative experiences they have had online. It can lead to social withdrawal, lack of social support, and loneliness.

The results of the open questionnaire revealed a similar thing. Constant exposure to hate online can lead to high stress and anxiety levels in teens. They experience constant fear, worry, and tension, which can interfere with their emotional and mental well-being. Adolescents who engage in online hate also tend to have a higher risk of exhibiting aggressive and offline behavior. They can imitate patterns of behavior they see or experience and then take them out on others verbally or physically. Additionally, online hate can affect teen sleep patterns. They have trouble sleeping, insomnia due to stress, anxiety, or negative thoughts about online hate.

From the explanation above, it is essential for teenagers who experience online hate to seek support and help so as not to exacerbate the disorder they are experiencing. The following sub-chapters explain the experiences of adolescents in reducing hate.

### ***How Does Adolescence Reduce Hatred?***

Theme three explains how adolescence reduces the hatred they experience. Based on respondents' reports in focus groups, adolescents do various ways, such as establishing communication while limiting themselves both online and offline to people they hate; this is usually done to people closest to them, such as friends. They also choose not to touch or keep their distance both in person and online to minimize conflict and the emergence of other negative influences. Furthermore, they are more careful in commenting on social media so as not to trigger hatred from individuals or other groups. They also try to understand the character of each well. Finally, they make spiritual efforts by praying to win themselves if they experience emotional pressure from the hatred they encounter online. It is effective for those with strict religious beliefs.

In line with the results of the focus group, the open questionnaire also reveals various ways for adolescents to reduce hatred, including trying to make peace with people they hate by establishing communication both in person and online. Staying away from the target is considered more able to neutralize their hatred than they choose to be silent to make themselves calmer, or sometimes express their hatred to others they trust. If they feel they have gone too far and have had a negative impact, they will talk directly to the target about what is the problem and try to find solutions to their problems. Some of which have been mentioned, most respondents choose to make peace and stay away from the target, this is interesting to discuss.

### **Discussion**

The initial aim of this study was to investigate the causes and effects of online hate in adolescents and assess appropriate intervention strategies. The findings above have shown that the factors causing hatred vary widely. The most prominent characteristics are the negative experiences, such as cyberbullying, social jealousy, jealousy, and negative prejudice against individuals or online groups. Hatred can occur due to experiences, for example, being betrayed by a friend. Hatred can also be shared. For example, negative feelings expressed by a crowd towards someone from an opposing group can increase and trigger a collective response against the opposing group (Navarro, 2013).

Hate can develop, several things that contribute to the development of hatred are prejudice (Allport, 1954, Oksanen et al., 2014a), frequent and repeated hate speech causes desensitization to forms of verbal violence and then lowers the evaluation of the victims so that it becomes more protective. distance, and increasing prejudice against out-groups (Oksanen et al., 2014a). Negative representation and the spread of fake news on social media which is published continuously and unfiltered also causes hatred to develop in society (Aldamen, 2023), as well as incitement from organized hate groups (Levin & McDevitt, 2022).

There are two meanings that consider hatred inappropriate, namely moral and non-moral. Morally appropriate hatred in the face of perpetrators of serious crime or wrongdoing

and shows that all such proposals are based on problematic assumptions, however, hatred remains inappropriate, because hatred has an affective focus that is too general and indefinable (Szanto, 2021) because the hater has logical reasons and is considered appropriate to hate. Another word for rational hatred is primordial hatred (Le Fourn & Laura, 2021), used to defend oneself from the ideal ego. This hatred is a key idea in psychoanalysis that must be considered in a way other than as a flip side of love. Hate can be an individual or a group problem. Violent manifestations and hate speech have taken root in social networks due to users' lack of awareness and reservations about using phrases or publishing images or content that offends individuals and institutions (Abdallah Tani & Alrasheed, 2023).

Online hate is mostly about close people like friends and family. However, the study's results also revealed that online hate speech mostly comes from strangers (Castellanos et al., 2023). Social pressures during adolescence, such as feeling lonely or socially unwanted, being rejected, feeling ugly or dissatisfied with their appearance, and hating their job, school, or parents, also cause teenagers to experience depression and even hate themselves, which results in self-harm and even suicide (Laufer, 2018). Prejudice plays an essential role in hatred; bias consists of antipathy towards other individuals or groups based on poor generalization and inflexibility (Katz, 1991); such prejudice is resistant to experience with people outside the group. It is felt but not necessarily expressed in actions towards other people. In addition, it can address entire groups of people or individuals believed to be members of that group. Furthermore, the prejudice factor is usually aimed at other groups; for example, in terms of beliefs, study results show that religious extremism can cause hatred or violence against followers of other religions (Saada, 2023). Not only religious differences but discrimination against racial groups (MacIntyre et al., 2023) and ethnicity (Marrun et al., 2023) is also a cause of hatred for certain groups online.

Hate is built on a complex mix of cognition and emotional roles (Garaigordobil, 2014). In the cognitive aspect, respondents have negative ideas regarding other people, this is related to cognitive distortions in automatic thought. The findings of the study show that two factors are the roots of hatred, namely the devaluation of victims and the ideology of haters, these two factors shape and expand hatred (Navarro, 2013) from a cognitive aspect. A person who hates tends to have less empathy because the hater is further away from the object of their hatred and has ideas of violent rejection and a desire to hurt others (Collin, 2021b). They also remove barriers that can limit our hatred of others by turning feelings into hatred. Negative experiences with parents, peer victimization, and the absence of positive memories with the family harm the notion of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (Xavier et al., 2016); these experiences are associated with depressive symptoms.

On the affective aspect, hatred is related to various feelings such as anger, sadness, shame, "melancholic social relations" (Le Fourn & Laura, 2021), fear, distress, and hostility (Garaigordobil, 2014). Hate develops progressively, an emotion with a complex formation that links feelings of guilt, empathy, and violent behavior. The combination of anger, contempt, and disgust (ANCODI) is an essential element of hatred (Matsumoto et al., 2017) and is a crucial emotion associated with intergroup aggression. Resentment leaves a lasting wrong impression on interpersonal relationships (Aumer et al., 2016). Adolescents are likelier to report less intimacy, satisfaction, and love with people they previously hated.

Affective intentionality of aversion differs in three interrelated ways: (1) overgeneralization and erratic affective focus, which usually leads to forms of target collectivization; (2) Short of a defined affective focus, haters derive extreme affective power from an attitude not as a reaction to a particular feature or action of the target or from some phenomenological trait of the attitude, but from a commitment to the attitude itself; (3) finally, in sharing the commitment to hate with others, hatred involves a particular negative social dialectic, firmly strengthening itself and taking root as a shared habitus (Szanto, 2021).

Hate overgeneralizes its target, has an affective focus formed jointly by outgroup/ingroup distinctions, and is accompanied by a subject's commitment to hostility. In its more straightforward form, hate targets another person as an individual, where the adverb "unpleasantly" expresses the subject's desire to destroy that target (Salice, 2021).

One of the other exciting things in the research findings is the setting and form of online hatred in adolescents. Social media such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are developing. According to respondents, hate Speech often occurs on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram; the results of other studies show that Twitter and Facebook also have negative consequences such as online harassment, trolling, cyberbullying, fake news, and hate speech (Schoenebeck et al., 2023b). For example, expressions of hatred, twitwars on Twitter, and excessive activity on other social media platforms can form a spiral of anxiety among netizens (Syahputra, 2019). This anxiety can affect active netizens on social media or even those who passively use it. The anxiety spiral begins when individuals experience anxiety due to overwhelming expressions of hatred on Twitter and other social media. This personal anxiety gradually develops into group anxiety, intergroup anxiety, and finally, communal anxiety.

Forms of adolescent hatred on social media are related to fake news, spam, and hate speech that trigger social anxiety (Makarova et al., 2022). The result of hate speech that is spread and aims to provoke or incite, encourage, or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, or other forms of intolerance-based hatred is based on negative attitudes toward others. It gives rise to mass violence (Tripathi & Natraj, 2021), so efforts are needed right to address this issue. Adolescents who support distal counseling or technical assistance are less likely to become victims, perpetrators, or victim abusers (Wachs et al., 2023). Thus digital-based interventions with customized content can be proposed as the right strategy to help youth minimize hatred and negative impacts that arise among them.

### ***Alternative Digital Intervention Strategies in Overcoming Hate***

The findings reported here indicate that adolescent online hate requires appropriate intervention strategies, so we propose several that allow for further in-depth study by future researchers. First, we suggest a digital narrative-based Bibliotherapy. Previous studies show that this strategy is effective for those at risk of suicide and can work by increasing feelings of shared experiences and optimism (Franz et al., 2022b). Thus, this strategy is also suitable for dealing with adolescent online hatred. Secondly, we suggest the use of the Working Alliance (WA) developed in Internet-delivered cognitive-behavioral therapy (i-CBT) (Barceló-Soler et al., 2023) is effective in treating depression in patients by using this strategy with a note for youth experiencing mental severe health impacts related to online hate. The third recommendation is to utilize online reading, such as TeenRead, which involves managing users and articles, analyzing users' dynamic



reading behavior, and making recommendations based on user stress categories, stress levels, and reading interest (Xin et al., 2017). With online reading that is packaged attractively and content according to the interests of youth, it is hoped that it will be more targeted in overcoming hate.

Another digital-based intervention is text-based chatbots (McAllister et al., 2020). Chatbots are becoming exciting nowadays because their use is more flexible, and teenagers can get responses quickly. Even though many are currently developing chatbot-based service systems, their use still needs to be adjusted to their respective goals. Another alternative is Empathy-based counterspeech (Hangartner et al., 2021b) which is packaged in digital form. This strategy is a tactic against hate speech or misinformation by presenting alternative narratives rather than censoring offensive Speech. The Digital Literacy Model can also be an alternative to digital literacy to fight hate speech (Widodo, 2017). The moral value added in digital literacy is expected to minimize hatred; this includes two indicators, namely ethical behavior and motivation skills. Hate speech does not only appear in hoaxes but also inaccurate information. Increasing youth digital literacy is an essential effort in overcoming hate online. Training on fake news recognition, online privacy, the consequences of online actions, and skills for sound online content judgment can help youth become intelligent and responsible users of the digital world.

These alternative strategies can be used to deal with online hate among teenagers. It is important to remember that these digital efforts must be supported by collaboration across sectors, including government, educational institutions, social media platforms, and society. We can move towards a safe, secure, and impactful online environment for young people by raising awareness, engaging users, and promoting positive attitudes and behaviors.

### **Limitation**

Although the study suggests prevention options and offers insightful information about the causes and consequences of teenage online hatred, there are a few important limitations to take into account. First off, the results can't be applied to a larger population due to the limited sample size of 5 Indonesian teenagers. Furthermore, biases like response bias and social desirability bias could be introduced by using focus groups and open surveys as the only data sources, which could affect the validity of the findings. Furthermore, the study mainly concentrates on the viewpoints of the teenagers themselves, possibly ignoring the viewpoints of other important stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, or mental health specialists, whose insights could offer a more thorough knowledge of the situation. Additionally, even while the suggested therapeutic techniques show promise, their efficacy has not.

Further research with diverse populations, robust methodologies, and controlled interventions is crucial to solidify understanding and develop effective countermeasures.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, it provides some first-hand insights into online hatred among Indonesian adolescents. The issue's importance is shown by its identified causes, which include internal elements like anger, frustration, and discomfort and external issues like negative experiences,

as well as potential outcomes like depression, anxiety, and aggressive behavior. Crucially, the study proposes several intervention options as viable means of reducing online hatred and encouraging positive online behaviors, including digital narrative-based bibliotherapy and digital literacy programs. Although the study suggests prevention options and offers insightful information about the causes and consequences of teenage online hatred, there are a few important limitations to take into account. First off, the results can't be applied to a larger population due to the limited sample size of 5 Indonesian teenagers. Furthermore, biases like response bias and social desirability bias could be introduced by using focus groups and open surveys as the only data sources, which could affect the validity of the findings. Furthermore, the study mainly concentrates on the viewpoints of the teenagers themselves, possibly ignoring the viewpoints of other important stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, or mental health specialists, whose insights could offer a more thorough knowledge of the situation. Additionally, even while the suggested therapeutic techniques show promise, their efficacy has not. Further research with diverse populations, robust methodologies, and controlled interventions is crucial to solidify understanding and develop effective countermeasures. The implication of this research offers a chance to tackle the issue at its root. By addressing underlying causes like frustration and promoting positive online behavior through interventions like digital literacy programs, the study suggests a path towards a safer online space. However, challenges like implementing these programs and addressing broader online negativity remain.

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