

SELF-DIAGNOSIS AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH COMPREHENSION IN DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the phenomenon of self-diagnosis and its impact on mental health understanding within the context of the digital era. The discussion covers five key points: the rising trend of self-diagnosis driven by easy access to information, both positive and negative effects of this practice, contributing factors such as low mental health literacy, the importance of accurate mental health knowledge, and the role of guidance and counseling services in addressing this issue. The method used is a literature review, gathering insights from various academic sources. The findings reveal that while self diagnosis can raise awareness about mental health, it also carries risks of misinterpretation and may worsen individuals' psychological conditions. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for education and social support to foster better mental health understanding, highlighting the strategic role of guidance and counseling services in helping individuals accurately recognize their psychological state.

Keywords: Digital Era; Guidance and Counseling; Health Literacy; Mental Health; Self-Diagnosis.

1. Introduction

Mental health can no longer be viewed as an additional aspect of human life, but rather has become the primary foundation for developing a complete and meaningful quality of life. When a person is mentally healthy, they are able to feel emotional balance, think clearly, and interact positively with their social environment (Syamsu Yusuf, 2018). This condition reflects an individual's stability in facing life's pressures, managing stress, and fostering a spirit of personal and social development. Therefore, mental health is not simply about the absence of disorders, but also encompasses the ability to live in harmony with one's values, hopes, and life goals. Amidst the rapid pace of change, particularly in the field of information and communication technology, there has been a shift in people's behavior patterns in seeking health information. This development not only influences how people access information but also shapes individuals' perspectives on their health, including mental health. Today, people of all ages increasingly rely on the internet, social media, and various information-seeking applications as primary sources for understanding their own condition, including identifying the psychological symptoms they are experiencing.

This phenomenon has given rise to a trend known as self-diagnosis, which is the tendency for individuals to diagnose health conditions independently, without professional guidance. Research by Ayuningtyas and Muqsith (2023) on mental health communication on social media showed that users of the Instagram account @IbundaId tended to validate their psychological condition based on information obtained from digital content, rather than clinical diagnoses. In fact, individuals in the study demonstrated a pattern of self-identifying with disorder labels such

as depression or anxiety solely based on symptoms found in posts or testimonials from other users. This reinforces the view that social media, while providing a space for inclusive discussion, also shapes premature self-perceptions of certain mental conditions. Furthermore, research by Putri and Miftahuddin (2023) found that 61.3% of respondents admitted to having conducted independent research on the symptoms of mental disorders and felt quite confident in their self-diagnosis after reading articles or watching popular psychology videos on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. This demonstrates the high intensity of social media use for psychological needs, but also indicates the risk of misinformation and inappropriate treatment, which can ultimately worsen an individual's psychological condition.

Self-diagnosis, as explained by Grohol (2008), is the tendency of individuals to use information from the internet or other sources to assess their health condition, usually with limited knowledge and subjective interpretations. This practice, particularly in the context of mental health, carries a high risk because symptoms between disorders often overlap, ultimately leading to confusion and misdiagnosis (Thatcher in Julia Ditanti et al., 2023). This is reaffirmed by Ditanti et al. (2023), who showed that many individuals often rely on search engines to self-diagnose without considering the accuracy of the source and the complexity of mental health conditions. In a public service announcement designed by Ditanti, it was found that this trend can lead to misunderstandings about mental disorders that are not actually experienced, as well as worsen psychological conditions due to the lack of appropriate treatment. Tumada (2023) showed a significant correlation between self-diagnosis and high levels of anxiety or stress, particularly among Madrasah Aliyah students. On the other hand, Syara (2024) highlighted that the use of social media as a primary source of health information reinforces this self-diagnosis behavior. She stated that the more frequently individuals access mental health content online, the greater the likelihood of making invalid self-diagnoses. Ulfa (2024) added that high mental health literacy can actually trigger cyberchondria, which is excessive anxiety caused by searching for medical information online. In cases like this, someone who feels they understand their symptoms may misjudge themselves and believe they have a specific disorder without proper professional evaluation.

The practice of self-diagnosis in the context of mental health has become a rapidly growing global trend, as access to health information through digital media has become increasingly easy. A Sapien Labs report (2023) stated that approximately 27% of 500,000 respondents from 71 countries fell into the "Distressed" or "Struggling" category regarding mental health. This data is even more concerning when it is linked to younger age groups, who are more likely to self-diagnose based on information from social media or digital apps (WHO, 2022). In this context, Erikson's theory of psychosocial developmental stages, particularly the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage, becomes particularly relevant. Values and roles in society (Cherry, 2022). During this process, individuals, especially those in the process of discovering their identity, are susceptible to being influenced by digital content and tend to seek validation from online communities.

One factor thought to strengthen this tendency is low self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem are more sensitive to rejection, more easily influenced by the opinions of others, and have a strong desire to be accepted within certain online communities. Ironically, this desire can lead them to identify with certain disorder labels that are trending or normalized on social media, even though they may not actually experience them.

A lack of adequate understanding of mental health issues can also significantly impact how a person responds to their condition. According to Pheh (in Amalia, 2024), individuals with low mental health literacy have difficulty recognizing the early symptoms of mental disorders, making them less likely to seek professional help. This also opens up the possibility of false beliefs, such as the assumption that mental disorders are a sign of personal weakness or a lack of faith. In the long term, this limited understanding reinforces social stigma and worsens the conditions of individuals experiencing mental disorders.

Furthermore, the trend of self-diagnosis often stems not from a purely medical need, but from a desire to gain attention or social validation. Siti Aisyah (2018) states that this trend can lead to misdiagnosis, which actually hinders proper mental health treatment. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage individuals to develop healthy self-awareness, namely the ability to recognize and understand emotions, and to assess one's condition objectively. This self-awareness allows individuals to seek help from family, friends, and professionals when needed, rather than simply relying on an inaccurate self-diagnosis label. Hayati et al. (2024) stated that education and increased awareness of mental health are crucial in addressing the trend of self-diagnosis. Through outreach activities, such as those conducted in Kampung Pinang Sebatang Timur, it was found that direct education can instill a more accurate understanding of mental health symptoms and encourage people to seek help from competent providers. When someone self-diagnoses without proper understanding, it can reinforce misperceptions, worsen psychological conditions, and hinder the healing process, which should be handled professionally.

2. Methods

This research uses a descriptive analysis method with a literature review approach to deeply explore the phenomenon of self-diagnosis and its impact on understanding mental health in the current digital age. According to Snyder (2019), a literature review aims to provide in-depth conceptual understanding, identify research gaps, and build a strong theoretical foundation for further study. The steps in a literature review begin with formulating the problem, finding related literature, evaluating the data, analyzing and discussing it, and finally summarizing the literature (Muannif Ridwan et al., 2021). This research does not involve primary data collection through surveys or experiments, but rather relies on secondary data from various scientific sources, such as national and international journal articles, reference books, and relevant research reports. The implementation procedure begins with data collection.

Appropriate literature was searched using databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and other reputable journals. The selected literature was then analyzed thematically to identify patterns, trends, and key findings related to self-diagnosis practices and how they impact understandings of mental health. The analysis was conducted by organizing the data based on specific themes, such as the reasons adolescents self-diagnose, the information sources used, and the resulting psychological and cognitive effects. The results of this analysis were systematically compiled and linked to the social context of today's adolescents to obtain a comprehensive picture of the topic under study. This approach enabled researchers to draw theoretical conclusions that can serve as a basis for further research and the development of intervention programs in the field of adolescent education and counseling.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Phenomenon of Self-Diagnosis in the Digital Age

The phenomenon of self-diagnosis has seen a significant increase, especially among the younger generation. The ease of accessing information via the internet and social media is a major driver. This generation has grown up in a fast-paced and instant environment, where answers to personal questions about mental health can be found simply by typing a few words into a search engine. Ismed (2024) and Febriana & Amalia (2024) emphasize that this accessibility makes many individuals feel confident enough to diagnose themselves, even without adequate knowledge. This phenomenon reflects how the fundamentally human need for self-understanding is now being bridged by technology that does not necessarily provide accuracy.

In practice, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube play a significant role in shaping how teenagers understand their psychological conditions. Psychological content packaged popularly through short videos, engaging illustrations, or relatable language has become a daily consumption. However, Jayanti & Adim (2024) highlighted that despite the ease of access and emotional immediacy offered, this content is often not structured based on scientific methods. This indicates a gap between media-formed perceptions and clinical reality, where adolescents tend to immediately associate their subjective experiences, such as temporary anxiety or difficulty sleeping, with the label of a particular mental disorder. This process occurs quickly, without adequate space for reflection. Furthermore, Normansyah et al. (2024) highlighted how Gen Z utilizes mental health calculators and online quizzes as tools for self-discovery. This is not simply a matter of curiosity, but rather reflects a search for identity and a need to understand "what's going on inside me." In this context, online quizzes become a kind of self-validation tool. While seemingly simple, the use of these tools actually indicates a gap in adolescents' psychological lives that has not been filled by adequate support, either from social or professional environments. Meanwhile, Maskanah (2022) observed that this trend grew rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social interaction decreased and access to psychological services became severely limited. Amid these conditions, people, especially adolescents, faced uncertainty and anxiety that could not be channeled directly to professionals. Therefore, self-diagnosis emerged as a form of

Adapting to a crisis is not merely a form of negligence, but rather an effort to survive and understand oneself in a situation of limitations. Nurismawan et al. (2024) added that this phenomenon is also rooted in unequal access to formal mental health services. Especially among junior high school students, who often lack the autonomy to seek professional help independently, self-diagnosis becomes a shortcut to understanding their experiences. This indicates that the desire to understand one's true condition is high, but not matched by adequate systemic support. Furthermore, Nurdiana & Rubino (2024) explain that one trigger for seeking psychological information online is barriers to interpersonal communication, particularly with parents. When adolescents feel unheard, misunderstood, or even afraid to open up to their families, the internet becomes an escape. In this context, self-diagnosis is no longer simply an independent act, but rather a coping mechanism for unsupportive relationships within their immediate environment.

Finally, Komala et al. (2023) emphasized that low mental health literacy exacerbates the situation. Lack of knowledge about psychological disorders and how to treat them makes adolescents vulnerable to misinterpreting normal feelings as serious disorders. This low literacy not only creates fear but can also perpetuate stigma because the information obtained is often

inaccurate. Therefore, the trend of self-diagnosis needs to be interpreted not simply as a form of misinformation, but as a reflection of a deeper unmet need for recognition, understanding, and support

3.2. Impact of Self-Diagnosis

Social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have become new spaces for the younger generation to understand themselves. Many of them seek out information about mental health conditions through popular content presented in a light, relatable, and emotional manner. On the one hand, this indicates an increased awareness of mental health. However, on the other hand, this phenomenon has complex impacts and does not always lead to healthy understanding.

Table 1. Positive and Negative Impacts of Self-Diagnosis

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
a. Increased Self-Awareness of Mental Health	a. False psychological conclusions
b. Reduced Stigma Against Psychological Problems	b. Increased anxiety and stress
c. Increased Empathy for Others	c. Negative self-concept and decreased self-esteem
	d. Impaired social and academic functioning

(a)

(b)

3.2.1 Positive Impact

Several studies have shown that self-diagnosis is not entirely negative. For example, Ditanti & Nisa (2023) noted that this practice can be a starting point for raising awareness of the importance of mental health. When adolescents begin to recognize psychological symptoms through social media, They no longer feel alone or that what they're experiencing is taboo or foreign. This awareness opens up space for them to be more open in discussions and seek help, so that mental health is no longer marginalized. Furthermore, Febriana and Amalia (2024) added that popular psychology content circulating on platforms like TikTok also has a positive effect on fostering empathy. Teenagers become more sensitive and caring about the emotional issues experienced by others around them, thereby strengthening social relationships and mutual understanding between individuals. Therefore, self-diagnosis, despite its risks, also serves as a gateway for the younger generation to begin to understand the importance of mental health and develop a positive, empathetic attitude in their daily lives.

3.2.2 Negative Impacts

However, the negative impacts of self-diagnosis are even more striking and profound. Information spread on social media is often not medically validated. Farisandy et al. (2023) highlighted that many adolescents quickly associate their emotional state with a specific psychological disorder based solely on online content. This can lead to mismanagement, excessive anxiety, and even worsen mental conditions that are actually within normal limits. Gumara et al. (2023) found that college students who actively accessed psychological content on TikTok had higher levels of anxiety than those who did not. Exposure to inaccurate information creates an additional psychological burden, leaving individuals feeling helpless, isolated, and even misinformed. This phenomenon is also associated with decreased energy, emotional instability, unstable moods, and disruptions in daily activities (Febriana & Amalia, 2024). In addition to anxiety, self-diagnosis also impacts the formation of a negative self-concept. Jayanti and Adim

(2024) noted that students who believe they have an anxiety disorder tend to internalize the label incorrectly. They begin to see themselves as weak, prone to panic, and unable to control their emotions. As a result, self-esteem decreases and their motivation to recover or develop is hampered. Annury et al. (2022) added that self-diagnosis can disrupt students' overall mental well-being. Two participants in their study exhibited symptoms of chronic stress, depression, and excessive anxiety, leading to a significant decline in their quality of life. This impacts not only psychological aspects but also functional ones: daily activities are disrupted, social relationships are strained, and academic motivation decreases. Another study by Amrah et al. (2024) confirmed that individuals who are active on social media are not only at risk of developing anxiety disorders but also maladaptive behaviors. The information they consume is not processed neutrally, but rather through an emotional and cognitive lens shaped by traumatic experiences or negative thought patterns. As a result, interpretations of mental health content become biased and can lead to incorrect decisions regarding the psychological conditions they are actually experiencing. One of the most worrying aspects of this phenomenon is how social media algorithms work. Febriana & Amalia (2024) explain that viral psychological content often blurs the lines between education and entertainment. Teenagers searching for meaning in their feelings are continually exposed to similar content, reinforcing the belief that their self-diagnosis is correct. This demonstrates the importance of media literacy in equipping individuals to critically analyze information.

3.3. Factors Driving Self-Diagnosis

One of the factors that frequently emerges in various studies is low mental health literacy. Fatimah et al. (2024) and Komala et al. (2023) explain that individuals with limited understanding of mental disorders are more likely to interpret common symptoms such as stress, fatigue, or mild anxiety as indications of serious psychological disorders. This lack of knowledge makes it easier for individuals to jump to conclusions, which can ultimately lead to incorrect assumptions.

This tendency is further reinforced by exposure to social media. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are now filled with psychology-themed content packaged in a popular and easily digestible manner. However, Tumada (2023) emphasized that the more frequently a person accesses such content, the greater their tendency to self-diagnose. General or inaccurate information often leads individuals to feel "reflected" in the symptoms described. Normansyah et al. (2024) added that mental health calculators and online quizzes freely available on the internet give the illusion of validation for psychological conditions, even though they lack adequate scientific basis.

Cognitively, Amrah et al. (2024) showed that spontaneous association processes also play a significant role. When someone reads or watches information about mental disorders, their brain tends to look for similarities with personal experiences. This makes the individual feel as if they recognize the disorder in themselves, even though this may not be the case. This research underscores the importance of distinguishing between mental health awareness and a valid clinical diagnosis. In addition to internal factors such as low literacy, interpersonal and social factors also play a role. Lack of support from family or friends, as well as barriers to communication, encourage someone to seek answers independently. Nurdiana & Rubino (2024) stated that when someone does not have a safe place to talk, they will turn to digital media as an alternative. Amalia & Dearly (2024) also emphasize that the presence of friends or a supportive environment can reduce this tendency, as it provides a space for sharing before individuals make their own

judgments. Efendy (2024) observes that the tendency to avoid professional help is also a major driving factor. Individuals who feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or afraid to consult a psychologist ultimately choose to seek solutions independently. Meanwhile, Lestari et al. (2024) add that the pressures of life in the digital age, such as social demands, workload, academic expectations, and social comparison, contribute to people's need to seek instant answers to their emotional conditions.

3.4. The Importance of Understanding Mental Health

Amidst the rapid flow of information in the digital age, understanding mental health is becoming an increasingly urgent need. The phenomenon of self-diagnosis, where individuals attempt to interpret their own psychological condition without professional guidance, is one symptom of the increasing public curiosity about psychological issues. Unfortunately, this practice is often not accompanied by adequate understanding, thus risking erroneous conclusions. According to Farisandy et al. (2023), increasing awareness and education about mental health must be a top priority in society. While there is a wealth of information available, not all of it can be used as a reliable reference. Therefore, the public needs to be equipped with sufficient literacy to filter information and determine which is trustworthy. The younger generation, especially Generation Z, is the group most actively seeking information about mental health through social media. Fatimah et al. (2024) emphasize that an educational approach based on digital literacy is crucial for them. By developing a critical understanding of digital information, this generation is expected to be able to select accurate content and avoid misleading information. The problem is, many people get their information from unvalidated viral content, such as short videos on TikTok, infographics on Instagram, or online quizzes that claim to be able to assess a person's mental health. Ismed (2024) warns that such content can reinforce misperceptions about psychological diagnoses, potentially exacerbating a person's anxiety because they feel they have a disorder they don't actually have.

Self-diagnosis often arises in response to the uncertainty and psychological stress experienced by a person. In a global situation described as the VUCA era full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, society, especially the younger generation, becomes increasingly vulnerable. Saskia et al. (2023) note that in this context, many people seek self-understanding as a form of adaptation. However, without adequate mental health literacy, this search can actually lead to misinterpretations and create new problems. It's also important to remember that mental health literacy isn't just about knowing the names of disorders, but also about the ability to accurately recognize symptoms, understand the difference between disorders and normal emotional reactions, and know when and where to seek help. Komala et al. (2023) and Putri et al. (2023) found that college students and adolescents with high mental health literacy tend to be more accurate in assessing their psychological condition and are more open to seeking professional help.

Conversely, when mental health literacy is low and there is no strong social support, individuals are more likely to take shortcuts and conclude on their own about their condition. Amalia (2024) states that the combination of a lack of understanding and a limited support system are the main triggers for inaccurate self-diagnosis. In such circumstances, not only can errors in judgment occur, but there is also the risk of self-stigmatization and the use of misinformation as a basis for treatment or other important decisions. To address this situation, a comprehensive educational approach is necessary. Anggraeni & Suherman (2025) underscore the importance of

interventions that not only educate but also empower communities to be more aware and proactive in maintaining their mental health. This education must also be aimed at dismantling the myths and stigmas that have long been attached to psychological issues. Amalia (2024) emphasizes that as long as stigma remains strong, people will continue to feel ashamed or reluctant to seek the help they truly need. In addition to education from formal institutions, cross-sector collaboration is also key. Educational institutions, Communities, families, and digital platforms play a crucial role in creating an ecosystem that supports mental health literacy. This collaboration aims to create a safe space for people to express their feelings, while simultaneously building a culture that values the importance of mental health as part of overall well-being.

3.5 Implications of Guidance and Counseling in Addressing the Self-Diagnosis Phenomenon

The widespread phenomenon of self-diagnosis in the digital era is a serious challenge in education and mental health, particularly among adolescents and college students. Based on various research findings, guidance and counseling (BK) services have been shown to play a strategic role in addressing individual misunderstandings regarding their psychological conditions, which are often influenced by inaccurate information from the internet and social media. Research conducted by Alfani et al. (2023) shows that group counseling services can improve students' ability to self-knowledge and manage stress effectively. This ability is crucial because one of the main triggers for self-diagnosis is an individual's lack of understanding of their own mental state. When someone lacks a deep understanding of themselves, they tend to seek instant answers through online searches that may not be accurate, leaving them vulnerable to drawing misleading conclusions.

Consistently, research by Nurjanah et al. (2021) confirms that guidance and counseling services can equip students with the skills to filter information, objectively identify problems, and encourage them to refrain from hasty conclusions about psychological conditions without the involvement of professionals. This makes guidance and counseling an important intervention in fostering critical awareness of digital information and fostering a wise attitude in addressing psychological issues. The guidance provided by counselors not only helps resolve problems but also encourages individuals to engage in deeper self-reflection before labeling their mental health.

Furthermore, Ariska (2015) adds that group guidance services contribute to the formation of a healthy and realistic self-concept. A strong self-concept is a protective factor against the tendency to self-diagnose based on viral content. Much of this content simplifies the complexity of psychological disorders into attention-grabbing, but often inaccurate or even misleading, labels. With a mature self-concept, individuals are better able to distinguish between normal emotional states and symptoms of psychological disorders that require professional intervention. Therefore, it can be concluded that guidance and counseling have crucial implications in addressing the phenomenon of self-diagnosis. Not only does it serve as a means of problem-solving, but guidance and counseling services also play a role in strengthening psychological literacy, developing self-concept, and increasing individuals' mental resilience in the face of exposure to unverified information.

These services are becoming increasingly relevant amidst the rapid flow of digital information, where the presence of professional counselors can balance an individual's need to understand themselves and the accuracy of the information they receive. Therefore, the

integration of guidance and counseling services in education must continue to be strengthened to provide optimal preventive and curative impacts for students in this digital era.

4. Conclusions

The phenomenon of self-diagnosis in the digital era illustrates how people, especially the younger generation, are trying to independently understand their mental health conditions amidst abundant access to information. This practice emerged as an adaptive response to the need to recognize and manage psychological symptoms, especially when access to professional services is still limited or difficult to access. However, the reality is that without adequate mental health literacy, self-diagnosis often leads to misinterpretation of one's condition. Unvalidated information on social media and digital platforms can trigger excessive worry, misperceptions, and even stigma, which can worsen a person's psychological condition.

Various internal and external factors influence the tendency to self-diagnose, ranging from a lack of knowledge about mental health, exposure to inaccurate content on the internet, to a lack of social support from family and the surrounding community. The absence of a safe space to share feelings also leads individuals to seek answers on their own rather than consult with experts. This serves as an important reminder that self-diagnosis is not just a matter of information, but also about how a person feels heard and understood in their social environment. The impact of inaccurate self-diagnosis is quite widespread. In addition to the risk of mistreatment or inappropriate treatment, incorrect self-diagnosis can also reinforce negative stigmas about mental health, exacerbate anxiety, and make individuals feel isolated in dealing with psychological problems. Therefore, increasing understanding of mental health is crucial for enabling the public to critically evaluate information and seek professional help when needed. This requires a comprehensive and inclusive educational approach. This education must involve various parties, from families and schools to communities and digital platform managers, to create an ecosystem that supports openness and mental health literacy. This holistic approach must also be able to debunk the myths and stigmas that prevent people from seeking appropriate help. This way, self-diagnosis is no longer a risky shortcut, but rather becomes part of a healthy and purposeful process of self-awareness. Given the complexity of this phenomenon, future research can focus on developing and evaluating effective digital education interventions and the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of mental health. Further research is also crucial to explore how to build social support networks that provide a safe space for individuals to share and seek guidance. With the right understanding and strategies, we can help people navigate the process of self-awareness more wisely and responsibly in this digital age.

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