

## NARCOTICS ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH STATUS AMONG ADOLESCENTS LIVING IN BOARDING HOUSES: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY IN KELURAHAN SUKABANGUN PALEMBANG

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Narcotic abuse among adolescents living in boarding houses is often closely linked to their psychological conditions and the lack of parental supervision. This study aims to investigate the use of narcotics based on mental health status. **Methods:** Using a cross-sectional descriptive design, urine samples for testing were collected from 20 adolescents selected through purposive sampling. The instruments used were the SRQ-20 questionnaire for mental health screening and a Rapid Test Multi-Drug (6 parameters) for urine examination.

**Results:** Out of 20 respondents, 2 (10%) were positive for narcotics, and 18 (90%) were negative. Mental health screening results showed that 2 respondents (10%) indicated poor mental health, while 18 (90%) reported good mental health. Crosstab analysis showed that 100% of respondents who tested positive for narcotics were those with poor mental health status, while 100% of respondents with good mental health showed negative narcotic results.

**Conclusion:** The abuse of drugs in this population occurs in individuals experiencing mental health problems, supporting the self-medication hypothesis. Therefore, the integration of mental health screening services in adolescent living environments is needed as a preventive measure.

**Keywords:** Boarding house, adolescents, mental health, narcotics, SRQ-20

### INTRODUCTION

The abuse of narcotics, psychotropics, and other addictive substances remains a serious global health issue, particularly among adolescents. Adolescence is a critical transitional phase characterized by identity seeking and a desire for novelty, which often predisposes individuals to destructive behaviors. In its latest report, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlights this vulnerability, stating that young people are the most vulnerable group to drug use and are also the

most severely affected by substance use disorders in several regions. In 2021, it was estimated that 5.3 percent of 15–16-year-olds worldwide (13.5 million individuals) had used cannabis in the past year (UNODC, 2023).

In Indonesia, the rising prevalence of drug abuse among adolescents, particularly those in high school and university, continues to be a major concern. Data from the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) indicates a fluctuating yet alarming trend. Those living away from parents, specifically in boarding

houses, are very vulnerable to this concern due to the lack of direct parental supervision. Uncontrolled freedom within boarding house environments often serves as an entry point for negative influences. As explained in a national study by Pratiwi & Widayastuti (2021) regarding adolescent environments, living arrangements far from parental supervision, such as boarding houses, provide adolescents with greater freedom. This is often correlated with increased risky behaviors, including substance abuse, as a form of peer conformity.

Beyond environmental factors, mental health status is a strong internal predictor of narcotics abuse. Many adolescents use narcotics not merely for recreation, but as an escape from psychological pressures such as academic stress, anxiety, or depression. This comorbid relationship is often overlooked. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2020), mental health conditions and substance use disorders frequently co-occur. Individuals with mental health issues may use drugs and alcohol as a form of self-medication.

In Kelurahan Sukabangun, Palembang, the high density of boarding houses raises specific concerns regarding the mental well-being and behavior of adolescent residents. However, there is limited data directly linking the mental condition of boarding house

residents with their drug use status. Therefore, early detection through simultaneous mental health screening and urine testing is crucial, considering that "emotional mental disorders are the main entry point for addictive behaviors in adolescents" (Santoso et al., 2022).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used a descriptive observational design with a cross-sectional approach. The research was conducted in the boarding houses in Kelurahan Sukabangun, Palembang, from February to March 2024. The sample comprised 20 individuals selected using a purposive sampling technique based on inclusion criteria and respondent agreement (informed consent). Spot urine samples were collected from respondents as specimens for narcotics screening. Mental health was measured using the Self-Reporting Questionnaire-20 (SRQ-20). Narcotics examination was performed using a 6-parameter multi-drug rapid test method to detect amphetamine (AMP), morphine (MOP), marijuana (THC), methamphetamine (MET), benzodiazepine (BZO), and cocaine (COC). Data were analyzed using univariate analysis for frequency distribution and bivariate analysis (crosstabulation) to describe the results of narcotics tests based on mental health categories.

## RESULTS

The study results are presented in the form of frequency distribution tables and crosstabulations. Univariate analysis was

conducted to describe the frequency distribution of narcotics test results and the respondents' mental health status independently.

**Table 1.** The Results of Narcotics Screening Tests among Adolescents Living in Boarding Houses

Test Results	Frequency	Percentage
Positive (+)	2	10%
Negative (-)	18	90%
Total	20	100%

Based on Table 1, it is observed that out of the 20 respondents involved, the majority had negative urine narcotics test results, totaling 18 individuals (90%). Meanwhile, 2 respondents (10%) were identified as positive for narcotics use.

**Table 2.** Mental Health Status among Adolescents Living in Boarding Houses

Mental Health Status	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	2	10%
Good	18	90%
Total	20	100%

Based on Table 2, the mental health screening results indicate that the majority of respondents were in good mental health condition, totaling 18 individuals (90%). Conversely, 2 individuals (10%) were indicated to have poor mental health or emotional or mental disorders (SRQ-20 score  $\geq 6$ ).

Bivariate analysis using crosstabulation was performed to observe the narcotics examination results stratified by the respondents' mental health status groups.

**Table 3.** Crosstabulation of Narcotics Screening Test Results by Mental Health Status

Mental Health Status	Narcotics Test Results	
	Positive	Negative
Poor	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Good	0 (0%)	18 (100%)
Total	2 (10%)	18 (90%)

Based on Table 3, the crosstabulation results reveal specific findings. Of the 2 respondents with poor mental health status, 100% showed positive urine narcotics test results. In contrast, among the 18 respondents with good mental health status, 100% showed negative urine narcotics test results. These data illustrate that within this sample group, positive narcotics cases were exclusively found among adolescents who also indicated signs of mental health disorders.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate an association between mental health status and narcotics examination results. The finding that all respondents testing positive for narcotics were also indicated to suffer from mental health disorders (100%) reinforces the hypothesis that substance abuse among adolescents in boarding houses is closely linked to their psychological condition.

These findings align with the self-medication hypothesis. Adolescents with high SRQ-20 scores (poor mental health) tend to use narcotics as a coping mechanism to manage their emotional distress. Individuals use narcotics to cope with painful affects or specific symptoms of psychiatric disorders; they are seeking not only euphoria but also relief from suffering (Turner et al., 2018). In the context of adolescents living in boarding

houses in Sukabangun, Palembang, the pressures of independent living and unresolved personal issues can trigger mental disorders. Narcotics use becomes a misguided instant solution to alleviate such anxiety.

Living conditions in boarding houses, far from family, increase the risk of loneliness and stress. A study in Indonesia confirms that the mental health quality of migrant adolescents is significantly influenced by social support. University students or adolescents living in boarding houses experience higher stress levels compared to those living with their parents. Loneliness serves as a significant predictor of the desire to experiment with addictive substances (Putri & Wardani, 2022). The finding of two positive samples within the group with poor mental health indicates that the boarding house environment in Kelurahan Sukabangun, Palembang, requires greater attention regarding social supervision. Besides being a cause, mental disorders can also be a consequence of narcotics use. Psychoactive substances damage the brain's neurotransmitter systems, which ultimately exacerbates the user's mental condition. Chronic drug use alters the brain in ways that can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and paranoia. This creates a vicious cycle where users consume more drugs to feel normal,

further damaging their mental health (Volkow et al., 2019).

The fact that 18 respondents with good mental health tested negative for narcotics suggests that sound mental health acts as a protective factor. Therefore, prevention strategies cannot rely solely on legal aspects. Effective prevention requires addressing the root causes of drug use, including mental health issues. Screening for mental health problems in schools and communities is a vital component of drug prevention strategies (WHO, 2021). This is supported by research from Hidayat & Nugraha (2023), which recommends service integration; specifically, health services at the primary health center (*Puskesmas*) level should integrate psychological counseling services with mandatory reporting programs for narcotics users to break the cycle of relapse (Hidayat & Nugraha, 2023). The observation that positive cases were found exclusively among those with mental health issues underscores that psychological intervention must be a priority in the Kelurahan Sukabangun, Palembang area.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that there is a link between mental health status and narcotics use within

this sample group. This indicates that mental health disorders constitute a significant vulnerability factor regarding narcotics abuse in this setting. It is recommended that local administration authorities and boarding house owners extend their supervision beyond physical order to include the mental health aspects of residents, by collaborating with the local Community Health Center (*Puskesmas*). Furthermore, adolescent residents are encouraged to heighten their awareness regarding the importance of healthy stress management (coping mechanisms).

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