

## **THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY (MBCT) IN ENHANCING SELF-ESTEEM AMONG MINORITY ETHNIC ADOLESCENTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by increased vulnerability to psychological challenges, particularly among individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds. Experiences of discrimination and social exclusion may negatively affect adolescents' self-esteem and identity development. Therefore, identifying effective interventions to support their psychological well-being is essential. This study aims to explore the role of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in enhancing self-esteem among adolescents with minority ethnic identities. This study employed a narrative literature review design, analyzing 10 selected articles published between 2012 and 2024. The literature search was conducted using academic databases, including Google Scholar and Sage Journals, with keywords related to MBCT, self-esteem, adolescents, and ethnic minority. The selected studies were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify key patterns and relationships. The findings reveal that self-esteem among minority adolescents is influenced by a complex interaction of developmental factors, ethnic identity, and experiences of discrimination. Discrimination consistently emerges as a significant risk factor, while ethnic identity and supportive environments function as protective factors. MBCT demonstrates potential as an effective intervention by enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies, thereby helping adolescents manage the psychological impact of discrimination. In conclusion, MBCT offers a promising approach to improving self-esteem among adolescents with minority ethnic identities. However, its effectiveness depends on the presence of inclusive and culturally sensitive environments. Future research should focus on context-specific applications, particularly in non-Western settings.

**Keywords:** adolescence, self-esteem, ethnic identity, discrimination, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

### **Abstrak**

*Masa remaja merupakan tahap perkembangan yang krusial yang ditandai dengan meningkatnya kerentanan terhadap berbagai tantangan psikologis, khususnya pada individu dengan latar belakang etnis minoritas. Pengalaman diskriminasi dan eksklusivitas sosial dapat berdampak negatif terhadap harga diri dan perkembangan identitas remaja. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan identifikasi intervensi yang efektif untuk mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) dalam meningkatkan harga diri pada*

remaja dengan identitas etnis minoritas. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain *narrative literature review* dengan menganalisis 10 artikel terpilih yang dipublikasikan antara tahun 2012 hingga 2024. Penelusuran literatur dilakukan melalui basis data akademik, termasuk Google Scholar dan Sage Journals, dengan menggunakan kata kunci yang berkaitan dengan MBCT, harga diri, remaja, dan etnis minoritas. Artikel yang terpilih dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan hubungan utama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa harga diri pada remaja etnis minoritas dipengaruhi oleh interaksi kompleks antara faktor perkembangan, identitas etnis, dan pengalaman diskriminasi. Diskriminasi secara konsisten muncul sebagai faktor risiko yang signifikan, sementara identitas etnis dan lingkungan yang suportif berperan sebagai faktor protektif. MBCT menunjukkan potensi sebagai intervensi yang efektif melalui peningkatan kesadaran diri, regulasi emosi, dan strategi koping adaptif, sehingga membantu remaja dalam mengelola dampak psikologis dari diskriminasi.

**Kata kunci:** remaja, harga diri, identitas etnis, diskriminasi, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing body of research on adolescence, self-esteem, and discrimination, several important gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly been conducted in western context (Benner et al., 2018; Yip et al., 2008), which may limit the applicability of findings to adolescents in non-western societies. Although recent studies have begun to explore these issues, they still largely reflect cultural settings and do not fully capture broader socio-cultural variations (Del Toro et al., 2024; McDonald et al., 2025).

Second, prior research has largely relied on quantitative approaches that examine the relationship between discrimination and psychological outcomes (Benner et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019). While these studies provide important empirical associations, they often do not fully capture the subjective and nuanced ways in which adolescents interpret and respond to discriminatory experience in their daily lives. Recent findings indicate that discrimination operates through complex psychological mechanisms, such as self-esteem and social belonging, which are not always adequately explored through quantitative designs alone (Hosseini & LaFromboise, 2024; Li et al., 2024).

Third, although studies have acknowledged the importance of ethnic identity (Erikson, 1968; Phoenix, 2021; Yip et al., 2008), contemporary research suggests that the interaction between ethnic identity, discrimination, and self-esteem is more dynamic context dependent than previously assumed. For instance, ethnic identity may function both as a protective factor and as a domain affected by discrimination, depending on contextual and social influences (Bare et al., 2024; Osman et al., 2024). However, many studies examine the construct in isolation, thereby overlooking the processes through which adolescents actively construct meaning from discriminatory experiences.

Recent theoretical developments in adolescent identity formation have increasingly emphasized that conventional developmental models are often insufficient to explain the complex realities experienced by adolescents from minority ethnic backgrounds. Traditional identity development theories, such as Erikson's psychosocial theory and

Marcia's identity status framework, generally conceptualize identity formation as an internal psychological process shaped by exploration and commitment during adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966). While these frameworks have provided foundational insights into adolescent development, they have been criticized for their limited attention to structural inequalities, systemic discrimination, and sociopolitical contexts that significantly influence the lives of marginalized youth. Contemporary scholars argue that identity formation cannot be separated from broader systems of power, race, ethnicity, and social exclusion that shape adolescents' experiences in everyday life (Park & Johnson, 2024). As a result, there is a growing recognition that adolescent identity development must be understood through more integrative, culturally responsive, and context-sensitive approaches.

In multicultural societies, adolescents from minority ethnic groups frequently encounter forms of discrimination that affect not only their psychological well-being but also their sense of belonging and self-concept. Discrimination may occur in schools, peer interactions, community environments, and digital spaces, often manifesting in subtle forms such as stereotyping, exclusion, microaggressions, and unequal treatment (Benner et al., 2018). These experiences can create chronic stress and emotional insecurity, which subsequently influence how adolescents perceive their ethnic identity and social position. According to García Coll et al. (1996), minority children and adolescents develop within stratified social systems where racism, prejudice, and discrimination function as central developmental influences. Their integrative model highlights that developmental outcomes among minority youth cannot be adequately understood without considering the effects of social positioning, segregation, and institutional inequality. Therefore, adolescent development is not solely an individual psychological process but also a sociocultural and political experience.

Furthermore, contemporary research demonstrates that systemic discrimination often shapes adolescents' identity negotiation processes in contradictory ways. On one hand, experiences of exclusion may weaken self-esteem and increase feelings of alienation from dominant social institutions, including schools and public spaces (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Adolescents who repeatedly experience prejudice may internalize negative societal stereotypes, leading to identity confusion, social withdrawal, and psychological distress. On the other hand, some adolescents respond to discrimination by strengthening their ethnic identity and developing collective resilience rooted in cultural pride and community solidarity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Ethnic identity can thus function as a protective factor that helps minority adolescents cope with adversity and maintain psychological well-being. This duality indicates that discrimination does not produce uniform developmental outcomes; rather, its effects vary depending on family support, peer relationships, cultural socialization, and access to inclusive educational environments.

Educational institutions play a particularly significant role in shaping adolescents' experiences of identity and belonging. Schools are not neutral spaces but social arenas

where cultural norms, power relations, and dominant ideologies are reproduced (Banks, 2015). Minority adolescents often face curricular exclusion, cultural invisibility, and implicit bias within educational systems that prioritize dominant cultural narratives. Such conditions may limit opportunities for minority students to express their cultural identities openly and confidently. Research by Ladson-Billings (2021) emphasizes that culturally unresponsive educational practices can contribute to educational inequities and identity marginalization among minority youth. Conversely, inclusive and multicultural educational approaches that recognize students' cultural backgrounds can foster stronger self-esteem, academic engagement, and social integration. Intercultural education therefore becomes essential not only for promoting tolerance but also for supporting healthy identity development among adolescents from diverse backgrounds.

In addition, globalization and digital communication have further complicated the process of adolescent identity formation. Social media platforms expose adolescents to diverse cultural influences, global discourses, and transnational interactions that continuously shape their understanding of identity and belonging (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Minority adolescents may use online spaces to seek representation, build supportive communities, and resist discriminatory narratives. However, digital environments can also amplify experiences of cyber racism, online harassment, and identity-based discrimination. The interaction between offline discrimination and online experiences creates increasingly complex developmental contexts that traditional identity theories often fail to address comprehensively. Consequently, scholars advocate for intersectional frameworks that consider the interaction between ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, migration background, and digital culture in shaping adolescent experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

Moreover, recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes the importance of contextualizing adolescent development within local cultural realities. Many dominant theories of identity development were originally constructed based on Western individualistic assumptions that may not fully align with collectivist cultural contexts in Asia, Africa, or Indigenous communities (Arnett, 2015). In collectivist societies, identity formation is often deeply connected to family expectations, communal relationships, religious values, and cultural traditions. Minority adolescents may therefore navigate multiple layers of identity simultaneously, balancing personal aspirations with collective cultural obligations. This dynamic becomes even more challenging when minority cultural identities are devalued or stigmatized within broader national discourses. Understanding these experiences requires culturally grounded research that prioritizes adolescents' lived realities rather than imposing universalized developmental assumptions.

Taken together, these limitations indicate a critical need for in-depth and contextually grounded research that explores how adolescents from minority ethnic backgrounds experience, interpret, and respond to discrimination in their everyday lives. Existing quantitative studies have contributed valuable statistical insights regarding the prevalence and psychological impacts of discrimination; however, they often fail to capture the

nuanced meanings adolescents attach to these experiences. Qualitative and interpretive approaches are therefore necessary to understand how adolescents negotiate identity, resilience, belonging, and resistance within unequal social structures. Such approaches can illuminate the voices, perspectives, and coping strategies of minority youth that are frequently overlooked in mainstream developmental research. By integrating sociocultural contexts, systemic inequalities, and adolescents' subjective experiences, future research can contribute to more inclusive theories of identity development and more equitable educational and social policies for minority adolescents.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a literature review design to examine the impact of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) on the self-esteem of adolescents from minority ethnic background. Specifically, the study adopted a narrative literature review approach aimed at synthesizing and critically analyzing existing research to identify patterns, themes, and gaps in the literature. The literature search was conducted across several academic databases, including Google Scholar and Sage Journals, covering publication from 2012 to 2024. The search process utilized a combination of keywords such as "Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy," "self-esteem," "adolescent," and "ethnic minority," which were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine the search results. To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Articles were included if they: (1) focus on adolescent populations, (2) examined MBCT or mindfulness-based intervention, (3) addressed self-esteem or related psychological constructs, and (4) involved participants from minority ethnic or culturally diverse background. Articles were excluded if they: (1) did not focus on target population, (2) lacked empirical data, or (3) were not published in peer review journals.

The study selection process followed a structured screening procedure adapted from the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta Analyses) guidelines developed by (Moher et al., 2009) and further updated by (Page et al., 2021). Titles and abstracts were initially screened to assess relevance, followed by full text review based on the predefined criteria. After the screening process, a total of 10 articles were selected for inclusion in the final analysis. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. The selected articles were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns related to adolescence, self-esteem, ethnic identity, discrimination, and the role of MBCT. Key findings were extracted, compared, and synthesized to generate thematic insights aligned with the research objective.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis of the selected studies, six major themes were identified, reflecting the developmental trajectory of adolescents and the factors influencing self-esteem among those with minority ethnic identities.

### **1. Adolescence as a vulnerable development stage**

Adolescence is widely recognized as a critical development period characterized by significant psychological and social changes. The reviewed studies indicate that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to external influences, including social evaluation, peer acceptance, and environmental stressors. This vulnerability is further intensified among adolescents from minority ethnic backgrounds, who often face additional challenges related to social marginalization and cultural differences (Jia et al., 2020).

### **2. The Role of Self Esteem in Adolescent Development**

Self-esteem emerges as a central psychological construct influencing adolescents' emotional well-being and behavioral outcomes. The findings suggest that adolescents with higher self-esteem tend to demonstrate better emotional regulation, resilience, and social adjustment. Conversely, low self-esteem is associated with increased psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and maladaptive behavior (Niveau et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Recent studies further highlight that self-esteem functions as a mediating factor between environmental stressors and behavioral outcomes, reinforcing its importance in adolescent development (Li et al., 2024).

### **3. Ethnic identity and its role in self-esteem**

Ethnic identity plays a crucial role in shaping self-esteem among adolescents in multicultural contexts. A strong and positive ethnic identity contributes to a sense of belonging and psychological well-being, acting as a protective factor against stress and adversity (Göbel & Preusche, 2023; Umaña-Taylor, 2004).

However, ethnic identity is not a static construct; it is continuously shaped by social interaction and experiences. Recent findings suggest that the strength and meaning of ethnic identity depend on contextual factors, including social support and exposure to discrimination (Bare et al., 2024).

### **4. Discrimination as developmental risk factor**

Discrimination emerges as a consistent and significant risk factor affecting adolescents with minority ethnic identities. Across different cultural contexts, adolescents experience various forms of discrimination, including social exclusion, stereotyping, and racial bias (Bhambhani & Gallo, 2022; Tynes et al., 2012).

Recent research confirms that discrimination is strongly associated with psychological distress and reduced self-esteem (Del Toro et al., 2024). Furthermore, self-esteem often mediates the relationship between discrimination and negative behavioral outcomes (Yang et al., 2019).

### **5. Psychological Impact and Long-Term Consequences**

The cumulative effect of discrimination and identity-related challenges has significant implications for adolescents' psychological development. The reviewed studies indicate that prolonged exposure to discrimination may lead to long-term consequences, including chronic stress, depression, and decreased academic performance (Langford et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

These findings highlight the importance of early intervention, as the impact of discrimination during adolescent may persist into adulthood, affecting overall well-being and life outcomes.

## **6. The role of MBCT as an Intervention**

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) emerges as a promising intervention for addressing self-esteem issues among adolescents from minority ethnic backgrounds. The reviewed studies indicate that MBCT enhances self-awareness, emotional regulation, and self-acceptance, which are essential for improving self-esteem (Chang et al., 2023; Oyler et al., 2022).

MBCT also helps adolescents respond more adaptively to discriminatory experiences by reducing emotional reactivity and promoting non-judgmental awareness. In Educational settings, MBCT can be implemented through group counseling programs to support adolescents psychological well-being (Jokar et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2020; Schanche et al., 2021)

## **Integrative Discussion**

Overall, the findings suggest that self-esteem among adolescents with minority ethnic identities is shaped by a complex interaction between developmental factors, social context, and lived experiences. Adolescence represents a period of heightened vulnerability, during which self-esteem and identity are actively constructed. Ethnic identity serves as both a protective and contextual factor, while discrimination consistently emerges as a significant developmental risk. MBCT offers a valuable intervention by addressing underlying psychological processes, particularly emotional regulation and self-awareness. However, the dominance of Western-based studies and the limited exploration of contextual and cultural factors highlight the need for more research in diverse settings. This aligns with the research gap identified in the introduction and underscores the importance of culturally responsive approaches.

## **CONCLUSION**

This literature review demonstrates that self-esteem among adolescents with minority ethnic identities is influenced by a complex interplay of developmental, social, and cultural factors. Discrimination emerges as a significant risk factor that negatively affects psychological well-being, while ethnic identity and supportive environments function as protective mechanisms. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) offers a promising approach to enhancing self-esteem by promoting self-awareness, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies. However, its effectiveness depends on the broader social context, including the presence of inclusive and culturally sensitive environments. Therefore, interventions aimed at improving self-esteem among minority adolescents should adopt a holistic approach that integrates individual-level strategies, such as MBCT, with systemic efforts to reduce discrimination and promote inclusivity. Future research should focus on context-specific and culturally grounded approaches, particularly in non-Western settings, to better understand how MBCT can be effectively adapted to diverse populations.

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