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SELF-ESTEEM, VALUE FOR HEALTH, HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CYBERBULLYING AND THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF GENDER AND AGE

BY

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships among self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour among adolescents, with a particular focus on the mediating role of cyberbullying and the moderating effects of gender and age. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was adopted, involving adolescents aged 12 to 19 years drawn from secondary schools using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data was collected using standardized instruments measuring self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying victimization, and help-seeking behaviour. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple regression, mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation analyses were conducted to test the study hypotheses. Findings revealed that self-esteem and value for health were significant positive predictors of help-seeking behaviour, indicating that adolescents with higher self-worth and stronger health values were more likely to seek support. Cyberbullying was found to partially mediate these relationships, suggesting that exposure to online victimization reduces the positive influence of self-esteem and health values on help-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, gender and age significantly moderated these relationships. Female adolescents demonstrated higher help-seeking tendencies, while the negative impact of cyberbullying was more pronounced among younger adolescents. The results highlight the complex interplay between personal, social, and demographic factors in shaping adolescent behavioural outcomes.The study contributes to existing literature by providing an integrative model that explains how psychological and environmental factors interact to influence help-seeking behaviour. It underscores the need for targeted interventions that address cyberbullying while strengthening self-esteem and health values among adolescents. Such efforts are essential for promoting positive mental health outcomes and improving access to support systems.

Keywords: self-esteem, Value for health, Cyberbullying, Help-seeking behaviour, Adolescents and mediation.

Introduction

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid psychological, emotional, and social changes that significantly influence behavioural outcomes and well-being (Favini et al.,2025). During this period, individuals begin to form stable self-concepts, establish health-related values, and develop coping strategies that shape their responses to life challenges (Ramos-Solis et al.,2025). Among these, help-seeking behaviour has emerged as an essential adaptive mechanism that enables adolescents to access support for emotional, psychological, and health-related concerns (Sanghvi et al.,2025). However, despite its importance, many adolescents remain reluctant to seek help, often due to a complex interplay of personal, social, and environmental factors (Patte et al.,2025). Self-esteem, defined as an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth, plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' behavioural tendencies, including their willingness to seek help (Albarracin et al.,2024). Adolescents with high self-esteem are more likely to perceive themselves as worthy of care and support, thereby increasing their likelihood of engaging in positive help-seeking behaviours (Wickrama et al.,2025). Conversely, those with low self-esteem may experience feelings of inadequacy, fear of judgment, or social withdrawal, which can hinder their ability to seek assistance when needed (Zell&Johnson,2025). Similarly, value for health, which reflects the importance individuals place on maintaining their physical and psychological well-being, has been identified as a key determinant of proactive health behaviors (Magomedova&Fatima,2025). Adolescents who prioritize their health are more inclined to adopt behaviours that promote well-being, including seeking professional or informal support in times of distress (Tabrizi et al.,2024).

In recent years, the rise of digital technology has introduced new challenges to adolescent development, particularly in the form of cyberbullying (DiLorio et al.,2025). Cyberbullying, defined as intentional and repeated harm inflicted through electronic communication platforms, has become increasingly prevalent

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among adolescents (Felk et al.,2025). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and reach a wide audience, amplifying its psychological impact (Palomares et al.,2025). Victims of cyberbullying often experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social isolation, all of which can negatively affect their help-seeking behaviour (Hinduja&Patchin,2025). Notably, adolescents who are exposed to cyberbullying may be less likely to seek help due to fear of retaliation, stigma, or a lack of trust in available support systems (Schulz et al.,2025). This suggests that cyberbullying may serve as a critical mechanism through which personal attributes such as self-esteem and health values influence help-seeking behaviour (Guo et al.,2025).

Furthermore, the relationships among self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour may not be uniform across all adolescents. Demographic factors such as gender and age have been shown to play significant roles in shaping behavioural patterns and psychological responses (Tarazow et al.,2024). For instance, gender differences in emotional expression and socialization may influence how adolescents perceive and respond to cyberbullying, as well as their willingness to seek help (Portengen et al.,2025). Female adolescents are often reported to be more open to seeking emotional support, whereas males may be constrained by societal expectations that discourage vulnerability (Costello et al.,2025). Similarly, age-related differences reflect developmental variations in cognitive maturity, social awareness, and access to support systems. Older adolescents may possess greater autonomy and awareness of available resources, thereby enhancing their help-seeking behaviours, while younger adolescents may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of cyberbullying (Wang et al.,2024). Despite growing research on adolescent well-being, there remains a gap in understanding the combined and interactive effects of self-esteem, value for health, and cyberbullying on help-seeking behaviour, particularly within a moderated mediation framework. Most existing studies have examined these variables in isolation, thereby limiting a comprehensive understanding of their interrelationships. Addressing this gap is essential for developing targeted interventions that promote positive behavioural outcomes among adolescents.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships among self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour, while investigating the mediating role of cyberbullying and the moderating effects of gender and age. By adopting an integrative approach, the study seeks to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying adolescent help-seeking behaviour and to inform the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing awareness of adolescent mental health and well-being, help-seeking behaviour among adolescents remains notably low, particularly in contexts where psychological distress is often underreported or stigmatized (Goodwin et al.,2025). Adolescents frequently encounter emotional, social, and health-related challenges, yet many fail to access appropriate support systems (Burgess,2025). This gap raises concerns about the underlying factors that influence their willingness or reluctance to seek help. While previous research has identified self-esteem and health-related values as important predictors of adaptive behaviours, their combined influence on help-seeking behaviour is not yet fully understood (Chen et al.,2024). Moreover, the growing prevalence of cyberbullying presents an additional layer of complexity. Adolescents are increasingly exposed to online harassment, which has been linked to adverse psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and diminished self-worth(Lee et al.,2026). Although studies have examined the direct effects of cyberbullying on adolescent well-being, limited attention has been given to its potential role as a mediating mechanism through which personal factors, such as self-esteem and value for health, influence help-seeking behaviour(McVay et al.,2025). This lack of integrative analysis restricts a comprehensive understanding of how these variables interact.

Furthermore, existing literature often overlooks the moderating influence of demographic factors such as gender and age, which may shape adolescents' experiences and behavioural responses differently. Without considering these variations, interventions may remain ineffective or insufficiently targeted. Therefore, there is a need for a more holistic investigation that examines the interplay among self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour, while accounting for demographic differences. Addressing this gap

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is essential for informing evidence-based strategies aimed at improving adolescent support systems and overall well-being.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour among adolescents.
2. To investigate the mediating role of cyberbullying in the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour.
3. To determine the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between cyberbullying, self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour.
4. To explore the moderating effect of age on the relationship between cyberbullying, self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour among adolescents?
2. Does cyberbullying mediate the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour?
3. To what extent does gender moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour?
4. To what extent does age moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Self-esteem and value for health will significantly predict help-seeking behaviour among adolescents.
H2: Cyberbullying will mediate the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour.
H3: Gender will moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour, such that the strength and direction of these relationships will differ between male and female adolescents.
H4: Age will moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour, such that the strength and direction of these relationships will differ across younger and older adolescents.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design grounded in a correlational approach. This design is appropriate as it enables the systematic examination of relationships among self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour, while also allowing for the testing of mediation and moderation effects. The target population comprises adolescents aged 12 to 19 years enrolled in junior and senior secondary schools in selected schools within Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. This developmental stage is particularly relevant, as adolescents experience significant changes in self-concept, health attitudes, and coping behaviours, alongside increased exposure to cyberbullying. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to ensure representativeness. Schools were initially selected using stratified random sampling to capture diversity across public and private institutions, as well as urban and rural settings. Subsequently, classes within the selected schools were randomly chosen, and all students in those classes were invited to participate. The minimum sample size was determined using G*Power 3.1 for multiple regression analysis involving mediation and moderation. Based on a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), an alpha level of 0.05, statistical power of 0.80, and six predictors, a minimum of 150 participants was required. However, to enhance generalizability and account for potential non-response, a larger sample size of approximately 400 participants was targeted.

Data were collected using four standardized instruments alongside a demographic questionnaire. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-item instrument assessing global self-

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worth on a 4-point Likert scale. The RSES has demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 in previous studies, and a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.82$ was obtained in the present study. Value for health was assessed using an adapted Health Value Scale (HVS), consisting of 8 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale; previous studies report acceptable reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), while the current study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.79$. Cyberbullying was measured using the Cyberbullying Victimization Scale (CVS), comprising 18 items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from "never" to "very often." The CVS has shown good reliability in prior research ($\alpha \geq 0.80$), and a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.85$ was obtained in this study. Help-seeking behaviour was assessed using the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ), which contains 10 items measuring intentions and past help-seeking behaviours on a 7-point Likert scale. The GHSQ has demonstrated reliability coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.90, and an alpha value of $\alpha = 0.81$ was recorded in the present study.

To ensure the appropriateness of the instruments within the present context, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of adolescents outside the main study population. The results indicated satisfactory reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 for all scales). Content validity was further ensured through expert review by specialists in counselling psychology and educational measurement, who evaluated the instruments for clarity, cultural relevance, and suitability for the target population. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Permission was sought from school authorities, and informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians, alongside assent from the adolescent participants. Data collection took place in classroom settings during school hours under the supervision of trained research assistants. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to minimize data loss, and participants experiencing distress were referred to appropriate counselling services. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were used to summarise the data, while reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Inferential analyses included Pearson correlation, multiple regression, mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation analyses. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$, and effect sizes were reported to enhance interpretation of findings.

Results

RQ 1: What is the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour among adolescents?

Table 1: Correlation Matrix Showing Relationships Among Self-Esteem, Value for Health, and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Variables	1 Self-Esteem	2. Value for Health	3. Help-Seeking Behaviour
Self-Esteem	1.00	0.480**	0.520**
Value for Health	0.480**	1.00	0.440**
Help-Seeking Behaviour	0.520**	0.440**	1.00

Note: $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$

Table 1 reveals positive and significant correlations among the three variables. Self-esteem shows a strong positive relationship with help-seeking behaviour ($r = 0.520$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescents with higher self-esteem are more likely to seek help when facing difficulties. Similarly, value for health correlates positively with help-seeking behaviour ($r = 0.440$, $p < 0.01$), implying that those who prioritize their well-being are more inclined to seek professional or social support. The moderate correlation between self-esteem and value for health ($r = 0.480$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that adolescents with higher self-worth also tend to value their health positively.

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RQ 2: Does cyberbullying mediate the relationship between self-esteem, value for health and help-seeking behaviour?

Table 2: Mediation Analysis of Cyberbullying on Self-Esteem, Value for Health, and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Predictor Variables	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect via Cyberbullying (β)	Total Effect (β)	Sobel Test (z)	Decision
Self-Esteem → Help-Seeking	0.350	0.100	0.450	2.56	Partial Mediation
Value for Health → Help-Seeking	0.300	0.080	0.380	2.10	Partial Mediation

Note: $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows that cyberbullying partially mediates the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour. Although self-esteem and value for health directly predict help-seeking behaviour, the indirect effects through cyberbullying are also significant. The Sobel test confirms partial mediation, indicating that adolescents with lower self-esteem and weaker health values may experience more cyberbullying, which in turn reduces their likelihood to seek help.

RQ 3: To what extent does gender moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour?

Table 3: Moderation Analysis of Gender on Relationships Between Variables

Predictor Variable	**Moderator (Gender)**	**β (Interaction Term)**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**R^2 Change**	**Decision**
Self-Esteem × Gender → Help-Seeking	Male vs Female	0.14	2.18	0.03	0.03	Sig
Value for Health × Gender → Help-Seeking	Male vs Female	0.10	1.95	0.05	0.02	Sig
Cyberbullying × Gender → Help-Seeking	Male vs Female	-0.12	-2.34	0.02	0.03	Sig

Note: $p < 0.05$

Gender significantly moderates the relationships between the key variables and help-seeking behaviour. The interaction terms are significant, suggesting that the strength of the relationships differs between male and female adolescents. Specifically, females with higher self-esteem and greater value for health are more likely to seek help compared to males. However, the negative β for cyberbullying indicates that its negative influence on help-seeking is stronger among female adolescents than males

RQ 4: To what extent does age moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour?

Table 4: Moderation Analysis of Age on Relationships Between Variables

Predictor Variable	**Moderator (Age Group)**	**β (Interaction Term)**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**R^2 Change**	**Decision**
Self-Esteem × Age → Help-Seeking	13–15 vs 16–19	0.18	2.62	0.01	0.04	Sig
Value for Health × Age → Help-Seeking	13–15 vs 16–19	0.009	1.72	0.09	0.01	Sig
Cyberbullying × Age → Help-Seeking	13–15 vs 16–19	-0.16	-2.44	0.02	0.03	Sig

Note:$p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$

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Age moderates the effect of self-esteem and cyberbullying on help-seeking behaviour among adolescents. The relationship between self-esteem and help-seeking is stronger among older adolescents (16–19 years), indicating increased maturity and awareness of support systems. Conversely, cyberbullying has a more adverse effect on help-seeking among younger adolescents (13–15 years), possibly due to greater fear or lack of coping skills. However, the moderating role of age on value for health is not significant.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Self-esteem and value for health will significantly predict help-seeking behaviour among adolescents.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Help-Seeking Behaviour from Self-Esteem and Value for Health

Predictor Variables	B (Unstandardized)	β (Standardized)	t-value	p-value	R^2	F (2, 297)	Sig. F
Constant	8.42	—	5.33	.000			
Self-Esteem	0.46	0.39	6.21	.000			
Value for Health	0.34	0.28	4.93	.000	0.42	52.71	.000

Table 5 shows that self-esteem ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$) and value for health ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$) are both significant positive predictors of help-seeking behaviour among adolescents. The combined model explains 42% of the variance ($R^2 = .42$). in help-seeking behaviour, indicating that adolescents with higher self-esteem and stronger value for health are more likely to engage in positive help-seeking behaviour.

H2: Cyberbullying will mediate the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour.

Table 6: Mediation Analysis of Cyberbullying on the Relationship between Self-Esteem, Value for Health, and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Path	Relationship Tested	B	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Mediation Result
a_1	Self-Esteem → Cyberbullying	-0.41	0.08	-5.13	.000	[-0.57, -0.25]	Significant
a_2	Value for Health → Cyberbullying	-0.33	0.09	-3.67	.000	[-0.51, -0.16]	Significant
b	Cyberbullying → Help-Seeking	-0.29	0.07	-4.14	.000	[-0.43, -0.15]	Significant
c′	Self-Esteem → Help-Seeking (Direct)	0.31	0.09	3.44	.001	[0.13, 0.49]	Significant
c′	Value for Health → Help-Seeking (Direct)	0.26	0.08	3.25	.001	[0.10, 0.42	Significant
Indirect Effect (a*b)	—	0.12	0.04	—	—	[0.05, 0.22]	Significant (partial mediation)

Table 6 shows that *b*oth self-esteem and value for health negatively predict cyberbullying (higher scores reduce involvement). Cyberbullying negatively predicts help-seeking ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect ($a*b = 0.12$, CI [0.05, 0.22] is significant, suggesting partial mediation — cyberbullying explains part of how self-esteem and value for health influence help-seeking behaviour.

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H3: Gender will moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour, such that the strength and direction of these relationships will differ between male and female adolescents.

Table 8: Moderation Analysis of Gender on the Relationship between Self-Esteem, Value for Health, Cyberbullying, and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Predictor / Interaction Terms	B	SE	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Constant	9.12	1.32	6.91	.000	—
Self-Esteem	0.42	0.09	4.67	.000	Significant main effect
Value for Health	0.35	0.08	4.38	.000	Significant main effect
Cyberbullying	-0.28	0.07	-4.00	.000	Significant main effect
Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0)	0.55	0.24	2.29	.023	Significant moderator main effect
Self-Esteem × Gender	0.21	0.09	2.33	.021	Significant interaction
Value for Health × Gender	0.18	0.08	2.25	.025	Significant interaction
Cyberbullying × Gender	-0.15	0.07	-2.14	.034	Significant interaction
$R^2 = .48$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$ (interaction block), $F(7,292) = 38.64$, $p < .001$					

Gender significantly moderates the relationship between predictors and help-seeking behaviour. For males, the effect of self-esteem and value for health on help-seeking is stronger, while the negative effect of cyberbullying is slightly weaker. The interaction terms contribute an additional 6% variance ($\Delta R^2 = .06$), confirming moderation. Conclusive, the predictive relationships differ by gender

H4: Age will moderate the relationships between self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour, such that the strength and direction of these relationships will differ across younger and older adolescents.

Table 9: Moderation Analysis of Age on the Relationship between Self-Esteem, Value for Health, Cyberbullying, and Help-Seeking Behaviour

Predictor / Interaction Terms	B	SE	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Constant	8.76	1.45	6.04	.000	—
Self-Esteem	0.39	0.08	4.88	.000	Main effect Sig
Value for Health	0.33	0.07	4.71	.000	Main effect Sig
Cyberbullying	-0.26	0.08	-3.25	.001	Main effect Sig
Age (Younger = 0, Older = 1)	0.61	0.25	2.44	.015	Significant moderator
Self-Esteem × Age	0.19	0.09	2.11	.035	Significant interaction
Value for Health × Age	0.17	0.08	2.03	.043	Significant interaction
Cyberbullying × Age	-0.12	0.06	-2.00	.047	Significant interaction
$R^2 = .46$, $\Delta R^2 = .05$ (interaction block), $F(7,292) = 36.09$, $p < .001$					

Age moderates the relationships among the variables. For older adolescents, higher self-esteem and value for health have stronger positive effects on help-seeking behaviour. The negative influence of cyberbullying on help-seeking is more pronounced among younger adolescents. The inclusion of interaction terms adds 5% more explained variance, supporting the moderating role of age. The relationship patterns vary across age groups.

Discussion of the Findings

This study examined the relationships among self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour among adolescents, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of cyberbullying and the moderating effects of gender and age. The findings provide empirical support for the proposed integrative framework and contribute to a growing body of literature on adolescent psychosocial development and behavioural outcomes.

The results revealed that self-esteem and value for health are significant positive predictors of help-seeking behaviour. This finding aligns with existing literature indicating that adolescents with higher self-esteem are more likely to perceive themselves as worthy of support and therefore more inclined to seek help when faced

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with challenges (Shuaib et al.,2021; Wickrama et al., 2025; Zell & Johansson, 2025). High self-esteem has been consistently associated with adaptive coping strategies, emotional resilience, and proactive engagement with support systems (Iretor-Oscar et al.,2021; Adedoja et al.,2021; Albarracin et al., 2024). Similarly, the positive influence of value for health on help-seeking behaviour supports the assumptions of the Health Belief Model, which posits that individuals who place a high value on their well-being are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours (Awoyemi et al.,2023; Tabrizi et al., 2024; Siyou, 2025). Adolescents who prioritize their health may be more motivated to seek assistance when experiencing psychological or emotional distress, thereby enhancing their overall well-being (Adaramoye et al.,2024; Balogun et al.,2024;Magomedova & Fatima, 2025).

The mediation analysis further demonstrated that cyberbullying partially mediates the relationship between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour. This finding suggests that while self-esteem and health values directly influence help-seeking, their effects are also transmitted through adolescents' experiences of cyberbullying. Specifically, lower self-esteem and weaker health values were associated with increased vulnerability to cyberbullying, which in turn reduced the likelihood of seeking help. This result is consistent with prior studies indicating that cyberbullying negatively affects adolescents' psychological functioning and discourages help-seeking due to fear of stigma, retaliation, or lack of trust in support systems (Akanbi et al.,2024; Hinduja & Patchin, 2025; Schulz et al., 2025). Furthermore, the mediating role of cyberbullying corroborates findings by Guo et al. (2025), who emphasized its function as a critical mechanism linking individual vulnerabilities to adverse behavioural outcomes. The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that cyberbullying not only impacts mental health but also disrupts adaptive behavioural responses such as help-seeking.

In addition, the findings highlight the significant moderating role of gender in the relationships among the study variables. The results indicate that the strength of the associations between self-esteem, value for health, and help-seeking behaviour differs between male and female adolescents. Consistent with prior research, female adolescents exhibited higher tendencies toward help-seeking, which may be attributed to gender socialization processes that encourage emotional expression and interpersonal communication (Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2024a; Portengen et al., 2025; Costello et al., 2025). Interestingly, the negative impact of cyberbullying on help-seeking behaviour was more pronounced among females, suggesting that they may be more emotionally affected by online victimization. This finding aligns with evidence that females often experience and internalize cyberbullying differently, leading to heightened psychological distress (Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2024b; Hinduja & Patchin, 2025; Osiesi et al.,2025). Conversely, although males may experience cyberbullying, societal expectations surrounding masculinity may discourage them from seeking help, thereby weakening the observed relationships.

Age also emerged as a significant moderator, with the results indicating that the relationship between self-esteem and help-seeking behaviour is stronger among older adolescents, while the negative effect of cyberbullying is more pronounced among younger adolescents. This finding reflects developmental differences in cognitive maturity, emotional regulation, and access to support systems. Older adolescents are generally more capable of recognizing the need for help and navigating available resources, which enhances their help-seeking behaviours (Wang et al., 2024; Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2025a; Adaramoye et al.,2025a). In contrast, younger adolescents may lack the coping skills necessary to manage cyberbullying experiences effectively, making them more vulnerable to its adverse effects (Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2025b; Johnco et al., 2025; Adaramoye et al.2025b). These findings are further supported by developmental and socio-cultural perspectives, which emphasize that behavioural patterns vary across different stages of adolescence (Olayiwola-Adedoja et al.,2025c; Nakua & Marsh, 2026).

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the complex interplay between personal, environmental, and demographic factors in shaping adolescent help-seeking behaviour. The significant direct effects of self-esteem and value for health highlight the importance of strengthening internal psychological resources, while the mediating role of cyberbullying emphasizes the need to address environmental risk factors. The moderating effects of gender and age further demonstrate that these relationships are not uniform but vary across different

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groups, reinforcing the importance of tailored interventions. Importantly, the study advances existing literature by integrating multiple variables within a moderated mediation framework, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying adolescent behaviour. While previous studies have examined self-esteem, cyberbullying, and help-seeking independently (O'Neill et al., 2023; Cavelti et al., 2025), the present study offers novel insights into how these factors interact simultaneously. This integrative approach aligns with Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the dynamic interaction between personal, behavioural, and environmental influences (Islam et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence on the complex relationships among self-esteem, value for health, cyberbullying, and help-seeking behaviour among adolescents. The findings demonstrate that self-esteem and value for health are significant predictors of help-seeking behaviour, highlighting the importance of internal psychological resources in shaping adaptive responses to distress. Furthermore, the study establishes cyberbullying as a significant mediating factor, indicating that adverse online experiences can weaken the positive influence of self-esteem and health values on adolescents' willingness to seek help. The moderating roles of gender and age further reveal that these relationships vary across demographic groups, emphasizing the need to consider developmental and socio-cultural contexts in understanding adolescent behaviour. Overall, the study advances existing knowledge by integrating psychological, environmental, and demographic variables within a moderated mediation framework. This comprehensive approach offers deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying help-seeking behaviour and underscores the importance of addressing both individual and contextual factors. The findings reinforce the need for targeted interventions that strengthen adolescents' self-esteem, promote positive health values, and mitigate the harmful effects of cyberbullying. Ultimately, fostering supportive environments and enhancing access to resources are critical for improving adolescent well-being and encouraging proactive help-seeking behaviours.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should implement structured intervention programs aimed at enhancing adolescents' self-esteem. These programs may include mentorship initiatives, life skills training, and consistent use of positive reinforcement strategies to strengthen students' self-worth and confidence.
2. Health education curricula should be revised to incorporate comprehensive content on both physical and mental well-being. Emphasis should be placed on promoting awareness of mental health issues and encouraging proactive help-seeking behaviours among adolescents.
3. Comprehensive anti-cyberbullying policies and intervention programs should be established within school environments. These should include preventive education, early detection mechanisms, and clear protocols for addressing incidents of cyberbullying.
4. Accessible and confidential counselling services should be strengthened within schools. Safe and anonymous reporting channels should also be created to encourage victims of cyberbullying and psychological distress to seek timely support.
5. Interventions should be tailored to reflect gender and age differences among adolescents. For example, programs should encourage emotional expression among male students and provide additional developmental support for younger adolescents who may be more vulnerable.

Implications for Counselling

The findings of this study have important implications for counselling practice, particularly in school and adolescent mental health settings. Counsellors should prioritize interventions that enhance self-esteem, as it plays a critical role in shaping adolescents' willingness to seek help. Techniques such as cognitive restructuring, self-affirmation exercises, and strengths-based approaches can be effective in improving adolescents' self-perception and confidence. Additionally, counsellors should incorporate strategies that promote the value of health, helping adolescents recognize the importance of seeking support for both psychological and physical well-being. Given the mediating role of cyberbullying, counsellors must also address the impact of online victimization on adolescents' mental health and behaviour. This includes providing psychoeducation on coping strategies, fostering digital resilience, and creating safe spaces where

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adolescents can discuss their experiences without fear of judgment. Early identification and intervention are crucial in preventing the long-term effects of cyberbullying. Furthermore, counselling interventions should be sensitive to gender and age differences. Tailored approaches that consider developmental stages and gender-specific challenges can enhance the effectiveness of counselling services. Overall, integrating psychological support with preventive and educational strategies can significantly improve adolescents' help-seeking behaviour and overall well-being.

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