

THE IMPACT OF UNSPOKEN FEELINGS: HOW COMMUNICATION AVOIDANCE LEADS TO MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUTH

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Abstract

Mental health issues are rising among youth, and one of the underlying but often overlooked causes is communication avoidance. Youth tend to struggle expressing emotions but fail to realize that avoiding communication causes persistent psychological problems. Communication avoidance is a silent killer which eventually leads to emotional suppression and subsequently increases stress, anxiety and depression. Young people typically fail to understand that their mental health progressively deteriorates because of communication avoidance. This study explores how past life experiences and excessive overthinking causes communication avoidance, which will affect mental well-being. The research utilized in-depth interviews as a qualitative method to analyze communication avoidance behaviors in youth between 15 and 30 years old. As a pilot study, this research provides preliminary insights into the link between communication avoidance and mental health, serving as a guide for future studies. The pilot study functions as a foundation to enable real data collection for conducting an organized investigation of this topic. The identification of themes from the pilot study helps in revising research questions and produces more precise data while enhancing the validity of the entire study. Detecting communication avoidance problems represents a critical need because most people are not conscious of its mental health effects on youth. Research addressing communication avoidance problems now will allow investigators to establish specific interventions that promote emotional openness and create conducive environments to enhance mental health.

Keywords: Communication Avoidance, Overthinking, Life Experiences, Mental Health, Youth

Kesan Perasaan yang Tidak Dilafazkan: Bagaimana Penghindaran Komunikasi Menyebabkan Masalah Kesihatan Mental dalam Kalangan Belia

Abstrak

Isu kesihatan mental semakin meningkat dalam kalangan belia, dan salah satu punca yang sering diabaikan adalah penghindaran komunikasi. Golongan belia sering menghadapi kesukaran dalam meluahkan emosi tetapi gagal menyedari bahawa mengelakkan komunikasi boleh menyebabkan masalah psikologi yang berpanjangan. Penghindaran komunikasi adalah ancaman senyap yang akhirnya membawa kepada penindasan emosi, sekaligus meningkatkan tekanan, kebimbangan dan kemurungan. Belia lazimnya tidak menyedari bahawa kesihatan mental mereka semakin merosot akibat emosi yang diabaikan. Kajian ini meneroka bagaimana pengalaman hidup masa lalu dan pemikiran berlebihan menyebabkan penghindaran komunikasi, yang seterusnya memberi kesan kepada kesejahteraan mental. Kajian ini menggunakan temu bual mendalam sebagai kaedah kualitatif untuk menganalisis tingkah laku penghindaran komunikasi dalam kalangan belia berusia 15 hingga 30 tahun. Sebagai satu kajian perintis, penyelidikan ini memberikan gambaran awal mengenai hubungan antara penghindaran komunikasi dan kesihatan mental serta menjadi rujukan untuk kajian masa hadapan. Kajian ini berfungsi sebagai asas untuk pengumpulan data sebenar bagi membolehkan penyelidikan dijalankan dengan lebih sistematik. Pengenalpastian tema daripada kajian perintis membantu menyemak semula soalan kajian, menghasilkan data yang lebih tepat dan meningkatkan kesahihan keseluruhan kajian. Mengesan masalah penghindaran komunikasi adalah satu keperluan penting kerana kebanyakan individu tidak menyedari kesannya terhadap kesihatan mental belia. Penyelidikan mengenai isu ini membolehkan pembangunan intervensi khusus untuk menggalakkan keterbukaan emosi serta mewujudkan persekitaran yang kondusif bagi meningkatkan kesejahteraan mental.

Kata Kunci: *Penghindaran Komunikasi, Pemikiran Berlebihan, Pengalaman, Kesihatan Mental, Belia*

Introduction

Among young people the occurrence of mental health issues such as anxiety alongside depression shows an increasing trend. One reason for this is that many students avoid talking about their feelings and choose

to keep their emotions bottled up (Gould, 2024). This communication avoidance can make their mental health worse and create more problems in their academic and social lives. Many studies have looked at the causes of anxiety and depression, but not enough focus has been given to how avoiding communication affects mental health. Some youth avoid talking about their feelings because they are scared of being judged, think their problems are too small, or don't have enough support (Zarpentine, 2021). This is an important issue that has not been fully studied, especially for youth in Malaysia. If this problem is not solved, it can have serious effects.

Student with poor mental health often struggle with their studies, leading to lower grades, skipping classes, and losing interest in learning. Communication avoidance can also cause feelings of loneliness and social isolation, making their emotional struggles even worse. Over time, these issues could harm their future, including their careers, relationships, and overall happiness (Joseph, 2023). The rate of mental health issues among Malaysian youth has surged from 7.9% in 2019 to 16.5% in 2023, affecting nearly million children under 18 due to factors such as academic pressure, social media, and family conflicts with alarming levels of depression ranging from major to psychotic disorders (Omar, 2024).

Different mental health challenges like stress and anxiety and depression create major problems for workplace productivity levels. More than 50% of Malaysian employees struggle with stress stemming from employment that leads to performance decline and potentially fatal suicide outcomes. Workers' decreasing productivity creates a negative economic impact on the economy according to Razak (2019). Malaysian societal taboos regarding mental health cause individuals to experience social isolation and marginalization which enlarges existing economic inequalities. Marginalization functionally restricts people from participating within economic activities producing diminished economic value (Crabtree & Chong, 2000).

Negative life experiences, such as emotional neglect or poor communication, will impact how youth interact with others while they are growing up, leading to communication avoidance. This can result in isolation, self-doubt, and poor mental health, affecting their ability to build healthy relationships. Negative communication causes various psychological and social problems for both children and parents (Ambhore et al., 2022).

Brain activity that produces excessive thought patterns is detrimental to developing self-esteem which structures mental health conditions. The risk value for sadness and anxiety increases in groups who demonstrate low self-esteem, particularly in cases of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (McCauley et al., 2019). People who overthink typically worry about future uncertainties that transform into fears regarding their tomorrow. The fear increases as insecurity grows along with expected future breakdowns (Aldi et al., 2024,). The failure to understand and address communication avoidance will lead youth to suffer highly from mental health issues which block their paths toward obtaining support together with emotional management

Literature Review

The Role of Life Experiences in Shaping Communication Avoidance Behaviour

Life experience refers to the entire collection of personal interactions, successes, problems, and lessons learnt during one's lifetime. It encompasses a wide range of experiences, including education, relationships, travel, cultural exposure, personal development, and overcoming obstacles (Gupta, 2024). Life experiences have a considerable impact on human behaviour, but they are not the only factor. Intrinsic motivation, social influences, personality qualities, and cultural conventions all play important roles.

Individuals' subjective experiences with life events have a substantial influence on personality development. People frequently view life experiences as altering their personality, and these perceptions correlate with real changes in personality features throughout time (Schwaba et al., 2023). Both significant life events (e.g., marriage, divorce) and modest, recurring experiences (e.g., daily interaction) can influence personality development. Major experiences can cause large transformations, although little ones can cumulatively impact personality development (Dugan et al., 2023).

The perception of life experiences, whether favourable or unpleasant, as well as an individual's perspective, can minimise their influence on personality traits. For example, a favourable view of a life experience might boost qualities like extraversion, whereas a negative perception

may reduce emotional stability and cause communication avoidance (Spengler et al., 2021). Individuals' responses to life events vary significantly, indicating that personality formation is highly individualised. Some people may undergo personality growth, whilst others may not exhibit substantial changes (Bleidorn, 2019).

From this, we can see that life experiences significantly impact an individual's behaviour, particularly toward communication avoidance. Individuals who experience negative events generate a fear of open self-expression after enduring past traumas or persisted conflicts or repetitive rejections. Errors in communication lead to developing negative associations with vulnerability and emotional discomfort so people learn to avoid these situations to guard themselves from potential pain.

Overthinking Mindset Causes Communication Avoidance

Students face negative consequences to their mental health from avoiding candid communication about their emotional state. Shame about their emotions causes students to bottle thoughts while avoidance leads to increased depression and anxiety. Since students often struggle to communicate effectively they find it more challenging to both express their feelings and create connections with others. The subsequent parts provide expanded insight about these components (Weber, 2022).

The relationship between overthinking leads to ruminative thoughts that create intrusive worry and these patterns result in many perceived problems which can worsen into medical illnesses such as depression and anxiety (Kaiser et al., 2015). The presence of these thoughts disrupts natural interactions because they require live involvement but excessive thinking often disrupts this process (Talbert, 2017). The social view of "thinking too much" represents both individual cognitive disorders along with broader cultural and societal beliefs whose interpretations vary between different cultural groups (Kaiser et al., 2015).

People who overthink tend to stay silent because they worry about how others will respond negatively or avoid contact from others. The impact of language anxiety becomes visible in particular circumstances particularly affecting ESL students who decide against using their new language following perceived incompetence and concerns about social rejection (Lou & Noels, 2020). The resulting increase of anxiety because of excessive thinking leads to social withdrawal and decreased adaptation between academics and social circles (Lou & Noels, 2020).

Modern communication patterns suffer due to thinking too much since cognitive contemplation exceeds helpful boundaries of immediate exchange (Talbert, 2017). People avoid communication because they seek to prevent negative outcomes which leads to an ongoing cycle of complete avoidance. Experiences of groupthink provide an example of the way fear about speaking against prevailing views combined with social risks encourages people to stay silent rather than communicate (Packer, 2009).

Exploring the Link Between Communication Avoidance and Mental Health Challenges Among Youth

Cultural traditions and fear of criticism prevent young adults from discussing their mental wellness problems. The practice of axing dialog causes advanced social severance which uses up depression and anxiety (Yeo, 2020). The development of mental health diseases including avoidant personality disorder and autism spectrum disorder depend heavily on social avoidance behaviors. When present it can be the earliest sign leading to later development of major mental illnesses including schizophrenia. Identifying the fundamental reasons behind social avoidance remains essential to reach correct diagnoses along with successful treatment outcomes (Simon et al., 2021).

This type of communication avoidance mediates the association between maladaptive coping mechanisms and mental health problems. Research findings correlate this defensive approach with elevated feelings of anxiety and sadness and diminished emotional and psychological function (Fledderus et al., 2010). Cancer family communication avoidance leads to lower life quality and poorer mental health for patients alongside their carer relatives. The resulting difficulty in communication combined with heightened psychological distress marks the outcome of avoidance behaviors (Shin et al., 2015).

Depending on cultural norms and psychiatric stigma youth frequently find it hard to communicate their distress feelings effectively. Social media offers unnamed visibility which enables young people to release their narrative expressions while defending their emotional struggle (Yeo, 2020). Interpersonal communication excellence serves as an essential foundation to build and maintain mental as well as emotional welfare. The communication problems of youth often lead to feelings of suffocation while creating relationship difficulties that propel mental health problems (Shahi & Sharma, 2024).

Communication avoidance stands as a major contributor to mental health problems that affect adolescent populations. Sociocognitive ability problems frequently indicate potential mental health incidents but skill development can help prevent such conditions. You should promote free communication alongside creating online platforms which help teens handle their mental well-being.

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is predicated on the premise that psychopathology is significantly influenced by dysfunctional automatic thoughts that are inflated, distorted, incorrect, or unrealistic in other respect (Chand et al., 2023).

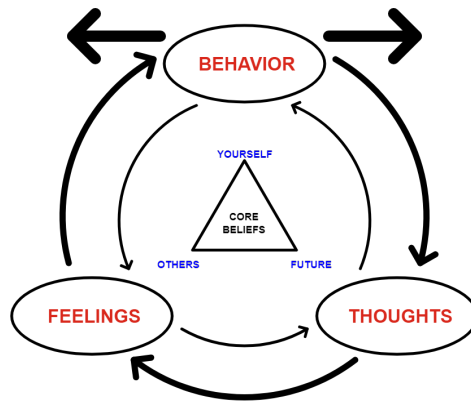


Figure 1: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) framework

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is essential in understanding communication avoidance because it explains how negative thought patterns influence emotions and behaviors. Youth who avoid expressing their feelings often have underlying cognitive distortions, such as believing they will be judged, misunderstood, or rejected. These thoughts create anxiety and emotional distress, leading them to withdraw or suppress their emotions rather than communicate. Over time, this avoidance reinforces their negative beliefs, making it even harder for them to open up. This cycle aligns with CBT's concept that unhelpful thoughts and behaviors contribute to mental health issues like depression and anxiety.

CBT also highlights that avoiding communication is a maladaptive coping mechanism (Curtiss et al., 2021). It may temporarily reduce discomfort

but ultimately worsens emotional struggles. Without expressing their feelings, youth miss out on emotional validation and support, increasing loneliness and stress. Since CBT is widely used to treat cognitive distortions and emotional dysregulation in young individuals, applying it to this research helps explain why youth develop avoidance tendencies and how it affects their mental well-being. Understanding this connection allows us to explore interventions that encourage open communication, emotional awareness, and healthier coping strategies, addressing the mental health challenges caused by unspoken feelings.

Context and Background of Study

The hidden nature of youth mental health requires increased attention because the condition often gets worse when unaddressed medical treatment efforts. Youth faces different expectations across different age groups. This research explores communication avoidance along with how suppressed emotions contribute to negative changes in mental health.

The National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023 shows that the number of persons suffering from depression has doubled in the last four years (Murugesan, 2024). Individuals aged 16 to 19 had the highest incidence of depression, followed by those aged 20 to 29, and then 30-39. These age groups are critical components of Malaysia's future and existing workforce, and their mental health difficulties must be handled to avoid more serious illnesses (World Health Organization, 2024).

The 2024 JobStreet Hiring Compensation Benefits Report revealed that 18% of Malaysian workplaces are intensely stressful because retail and consumer service workers identify both long hours and demanding management expectations as their biggest stressors (Tan, 2024). Results from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2023 found that depression affects one million Malaysians aged 15 and above making up 4.6% of the population. Recent research shows depression rates have increased by two times from 2019 to 2023 while half of the sufferers developed suicidal thoughts. Survey results indicated that youths between 16 to 19 years and those older between 20 to 29 show the highest levels of depression as 7.9% and 7.6% respectively. Vital statistics reveal depression rates at 3.1% among both the 40 to 49 and 60 and above age groups and 4.1% for those aged 30 to 39 yet 2.4% for individuals within 50 to 59 years (CodeBlue, 2024).

Since many health behaviours and habits formed during adolescence tend to persist into adulthood, fostering good mental health in youth is crucial for their overall well-being and future development (CDC, 2024). Based on the Malaysian Youth Mental Health Index (MyMHI'23), it was stated that the amount of youth that tend to commit suicide increased from 953 people in 2019 to 2119 people in 2020. It was also stated that 71.91% of Malaysian youth have a modest risk of mental health disorders (Institute for Youth Research Malaysia & United Nations Children's Fund, 2024).

Communication anxiety refers to physiological responses triggered by social situations perceived as threats by the nervous system. Individuals experiencing this may have a racing heartbeat, digestive issues, difficulty sleeping, or headaches. Communication avoidance, on the other hand, involves both psychological and physical coping mechanisms to manage communication anxiety, often leading individuals to unconsciously avoid certain people or social situations that cause distress (Isaacs, 2021).

The behavioral pattern known as avoidance coping has received a negative rating because it intensifies stress instead of solving the underlying causes of stress (Scott, 2024). The increased frequency of poor communication in personal or professional setting presents risks for mental health problems to develop (clearfocus, 2020).

Previous research by (Moore, 2023) stated that avoidant communication can negatively impact various aspects of life. Difficulty in expressing needs and expectations can lead to unmet needs in personal and professional relationships, causing anxiety, insecurity, and loneliness. Poor communication may result in misunderstandings, conflicts, and distancing from others, ultimately affecting relationship stability and job performance. In the workplace, unclear communication from managers can hinder employee growth, lower morale, and reduce productivity. These communication challenges highlight the importance of constructive dialogue in maintaining healthy relationships and achieving success.

This research aims to decode the relationship between unprocessed emotions and communication avoidance that creates mental health issues while creating communication strategies designed to enhance students' emotional strength. Medical science recognizes mental disorders with psychosocial disabilities alongside various mental conditions that manifest into severe distress which causes functional impairment and self-harm risks as mental health conditions. However the

connection does not have to exist, those with mental health conditions tend to encounter decreased mental well-being levels. (World Health Organization (WHO), 2022).

Effective communication with partners can minimise stress, especially in difficult situations such as reproduction issues. Poor communication with partners is associated with increased stress levels, whereas active communication tactics can help manage stress more successfully (Schmidt et al., 2005). Avoiding difficult conversations can exacerbate stress and strain in relationships. Approaching these interactions with self-awareness and preparation can help manage tension and enhance results (Hooper, 2017).

Methodology

Under this study, the researcher employed a qualitative approach to investigate youth mental health in relation to their patterns of avoiding communication. The study employed scoping review analysis which involved literature review and interview procedures as its research methodology. Systematic keyword searches including “communication avoidance” and “overthinking” together with “youth mental health” and “life experiences” were applied to databases including Google Scholar and university-subscribed resources for the research framework. This study included research focusing on communication avoidance, overthinking, and their impact on youth mental health, specifically targeting individuals aged 15 to 30. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and credible reports in psychology, communication, and youth mental health were considered. Articles had to be in English or Malay and accessible through Google Scholar, university-subscribed resources, or open-access platforms.

Studies unrelated to communication avoidance or overthinking were excluded, along with research on individuals outside the 15–30 age range. Non-peer-reviewed sources, opinion pieces, and articles in languages other than English or Malay were also omitted. Duplicate studies or those with redundant findings were removed to maintain a focused analysis.

This research is conducted as a pilot test to evaluate its feasibility before a full study. To support its approval and refine the methodology, the pilot test involved interviews with two participants between 15 and 30 years old through purposeful sampling. Monitored by semi-structured questions

researcher sought to measure participants' interaction with communication avoidance together with their tendency to overthink and the effects on their wellness. The researcher used thematic analysis to examine interview data then identified patterns that emerged regularly. The researcher respected ethical standards after participants provided consent while all interviews remained anonymous.

The researcher performed this pilot study to both validate that the presented concepts sufficiently addressed the research targets and recognize new communication avoidance patterns within youth populations. The objective of this pilot examination worked to improve research methodology prior to complete data gathering while verifying the guidebook's capacity to find relevant themes.

The research study uses two participants as informants. A semester four student from the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) in Instructional Communication and Training serves as the first informant. 3 January 2025 marked the occasion when the interview took place at The Coffee Bean in Shah Alam. The interview took place in a café since this environment encouraged natural discussions that let the informant feel unwound to describe their experiences (Lohr et al., 2020). Valuable responses concerning the research emerged from the interview where there were no disruptions throughout its entire duration. The interview went beyond its scheduled time to uncover more details hence reaching a duration of one and a half hours.

A fourth-semester student from Bachelor of Communication (Hons) in Communication Management and Policy major is my second informant. The interview at Zus Coffee in Setia Alam lasted for a duration of one and a half hours. Like the initial interview, the second one happened in a cafe environment to create a soothing and relaxed environment which allowed free sharing of personal experiences. The conversation advanced without interruption into a prolonged dialogue beyond what was planned. The interview lasted for one hundred fifty minutes altogether.

The primary step in coding for thematic analysis requires the researcher to read interview transcripts multiple times for understanding the data content. The first step in coding involves highlighting relevant phrases and sentences based on the research questions. The analyst applies various codes including "Life experience," "overthinking," "communication avoidance," and "mental health" during the coding

process. The researcher use Microsoft Word or Google Docs as their manual tools to perform their text highlighting and annotations.

The codebook functions as a base that enables researcher to categorize data while improving communication avoidance research. The established themes from this analysis will direct researcher to design specific intervention approaches which fight avoidance behaviors while studying mental health effects.

Findings and Discussion

RO1: To explore how life experiences cause communication avoidance

Life Experiences

The researcher conducted multiple analyses of interview transcripts during thematic evaluation to detect frequent patterns about communication avoidance behaviors. The preliminary coding process involved marking the statements “emotional neglect” together with “strained sibling relationships” and “lack of validation.” Multiple levels of categorization took place with these codes before combining them into major themes. Research data indicates that past life experiences particularly those experienced at home foster individual communication patterns. Individuals who endure emotional neglect or encounter strained family relationships or feel their feelings get invalidated will often develop emotional suppression resulting in their avoidance of communication with others in personal and social environments.

Theme 1: Emotional Neglect from Family

A child's communication development comes under strong influence from emotional neglect shown towards them by their parents. A child who experiences parental disregard of their emotional needs will usually feel dismissed or overlooked. They develop reluctance toward emotional expression because they think their feelings matter little and will not get an appropriate response from others.

“I tried telling my mom, but she did not reply. Since then, I’ve felt less like sharing things with her. ”

(Informant 1)

“My mom replied,” it’s okay Allah is there.” That make me feel like it wasn’t worth sharing. “

(Informant 2)

The repeated experience of being dismissed discourages individuals from sharing their struggles, reinforcing avoidance behaviors over time.

Theme 2: Strained Sibling Relationships

The emotional development of people heavily depends on sibling relationships and strained sibling bonds can create communication problems. Significant age differences together with personality disparities between siblings commonly create such emotional detachment between family members. People look for emotional help elsewhere after such situations or they end up holding their emotions inside themselves.

"I'm not close with my younger siblings because the age gap is too big, so we don't communicate much."

(Informant 1)

"I'm closer to my older sister and younger sister because the men in my house don't really understand me."

(Informant 2)

The absence of strong sibling bonds reduces opportunities for emotional expression, making it harder for individuals to share their feelings openly.

Theme 3: Lack of Validation from Parents

The foundation for open dialogue depends on validation because children need their parents to accept their emotions yet parents who lack this skill make their children doubt themselves. Participants reported that their parents did not understand their feelings especially as they shared information about their mental health condition. People who go unrecognized face isolation together with a reluctance to communicate because of this deficiency in recognition.

"I feel like my mom doesn't really understand who I am as an individual."

(Informant 1)

"I feel like my mom doesn't understand the concept of depression. She just thinks that I'm overthinking."

(Informant 2)

The invalidation of emotions can lead individuals to internalize their struggles rather than seek support.

Theme 4: Receiving Hurtful Words

When family members express negative comments it leads to feelings of rejection which makes people doubtful about communicating. People

tend to withdraw expressive communication when they face criticism because the power of words brings emotional harm.

"The most painful words are, 'You're always sharing your problems. I have problems too, but I don't share them.'"

(Informant 1)

"My dad always judges my clothing, even though my style is actually pretty normal."

(Informant 2)

The negative encounters form a protective shield which stops people from participating in honest discussions.

Theme 5: Other People's Behavior

People's responses toward emotional confession develop communication behaviors that last beyond family involvement. Frightened reactions from others including judgment and dismissal and unpredictable responses force people to silence their emotional expression.

"Sometimes I feel like if I share, they'll judge me or not take it seriously. So, I just rather keep it to myself."

(Informant 1)

"Sometimes he gets angry, but it's not like he hits or anything. He just has a temper."

(Informant 2)

The uncertain reactions from others cause anxiety which drives people to limit their open self-expression.

RO2: To discover how overthinking causes communication avoidance

Overthinking

Communication avoidance emerges mainly from the habit of overthinking. Most people engage in unnecessary analysis about their experiences which causes them to hold back when sharing ideas with others. The habit of excessive thinking brings about self-doubt which makes people doubt both their speech and choices. The outcome is communication avoidance between people because they fear bad responses to their thoughts. Existing data analysis showed the presence of four key coding elements which include "fear of judgment" together with "negative assumptions" and "worst-case scenarios" along with

“rumination.” The investigators organized different terminology categories into meaningful subjects. People who habitually overthink tend to delay their speaking and repeatedly review conversations mentally as well as abstain from talking because they fear making mistakes. overthinking patterns establish a form of self-made communication obstacle which reinforces emotional detachment from others.

Theme 1: Fear of Judgment and Rejection

Judgmental perceptions from others remain the main factor that drives people to avoid approaching others with words. Most individuals refrain from sharing their ideas because they fear how others will see them. People avoid communication because they have learned how their misinterpretation or dismissal in the past caused them to develop increased self-consciousness.

“I’m afraid they won’t understand or they’ll think it’s not important.”

(Informant 1)

“I’m always afraid people will judge me, like wondering why I think the way I do.”

(Informant 2)

When individuals anticipate criticism or rejection, they may choose to remain silent rather than risk feeling embarrassed or invalidated.

Theme 2: Assumptions About Others’ Perceptions

People who constantly over analyze predict negative reactions from others so they withhold statements from their conversations. The assumptions force people to stay silent even when open communication should take place. When people fear their statements might face misinterpretation or perceived as troublesome they tend to avoid communication.

“Sometimes we overthink, wondering if we can share something we’re afraid others might feel burdened .”

(Informant 1)

“I always assume people’s reactions might be negative, so I just don’t want to talk at all.”

(Informant 2)

The inner dialogue formed from these assumptions strengthens doubt which causes people to avoid communication thus blocking their opportunity to express concerns.

Theme 3: Imagining Worst-Case Scenarios

People who overthink tend to create negative end results in their minds before entering into discussions. People who fear communication backfire expect that their words will face misinterpretation or find unintended disclosure which could result in harm to themselves. Such anxiety drives individuals to take extreme measures when communicating because they want to avoid speaking their minds freely.

"Afraid of what? Afraid that what we share gets twisted, and then people start telling others, passing it around."

(Informant 1)

"Sometimes I think about asking for permission or something. But then I already imagine how they'll react, so I decide not to bother."

(Informant 2)

Coping with negative expectations forces people to eliminate all communication which worsens their social isolation from possible support networks.

Theme 4: Ruminating

People who ruminate spend excessive time thinking back about previous exchanges while repeatedly interpreting their behaviors. Overthinking induces people to review past dialogues because they repetitively analyze their words for proper delivery as well as worry about possible offenses. Stress increases through this pattern which causes individuals to hesitate more during their future interactions.

"Then we feel guilty, like, 'Oh, I shouldn't have said that.'" But it already slipped out.

(Informant 1)

"Sometimes I feel like I could have said things better than the way I actually did."

(Informant 2)

An intense preoccupation with reviewing previous discussions causes people to become less communicative so they avoid further communication with others.

Theme 5: Fear of Hurting Others

The fear of causing unintentional harm to others makes numerous people avoid communicating with others. Being scared to activate

negative emotions in others leads people to suppress their own thoughts even though they require support. An analytical thinking style makes people excessively study the potential impact of their words on others thus forcing them to hide their emotions rather than sharing them.

"So sometimes, we end up hurting someone's feelings with our own words."

(Informant 1)

"Sometimes, I'm afraid I might trigger someone."

(Informant 2)

People become unwilling to talk because of their increased emotional sensitivity which results in prolonged communication avoidance.

RO3: To understand how communication avoidance impacts mental health

Mental Health

People who do not communicate important issues develop serious mental consequences leading to emotional exhaustion alongside stress and comprehensive psychological pain. Repeated emotional suppression in people builds unresolved feelings that later cause various mental health conditions. This research shows that people who avoid communication develop greater anxiety symptoms and experience depression and altered behaviors in their population.

Theme 1: Emotional Exhaustion and Stress

People who suppress emotions throughout time develop overwhelming stress levels that cause exhaustion. People who regularly avoid communication struggle to handle everyday struggles which leads them toward sustained physical and emotional exhaustion. People exhaust their mental energy through emotional suppression since they lack appropriate ways to express their feelings.

"If I don't express myself, I feel suffocated, can't sleep and lose my appetite."

(Informant 1)

"When I keep it inside, I feel like it's eating me out."

(Informant 2)

Without proper attention to emotional challenges people become unable to perform tasks effectively thus making ordinary activities feel completely overwhelming.

Theme 2: Anxiety

Unexpressed thoughts and emotions produce anxiety when a person avoids communication interactions. People experience psychological entrapment in their own thoughts when they cannot express accumulated emotions because their anxiety levels become elevated. People who deliberately stay away from communication tend to experience anxiety because they worry about poor interpretation and modest reception along with possible disagreements which leads to their reluctance to participate in future conversations.

"When I don't express it, I feel like there are bubbles building in my head, and it just makes me feel anxious."

(Informant 1)

"When I keep it inside, and I feel anxious and it's hard to focus on anything else."

(Informant 2)

The repetitive pattern between anxiety and avoidance creation forms a cycle which causes people to feel distant and withdrawn from their environment.

Theme 3: Long-Term Impacts of Bottled-Up Feelings

Consistently avoiding communication results in long-term psychological distress, including burnout, emotional numbness, and loss of motivation. Over time, individuals who suppress their emotions may lose interest in daily activities and experience a decline in their overall well-being.

"The things I keep inside for too long make me feel lazy and completely unproductive."

(Informant 1)

"After a while, when I keep things bottled up, I feel like it just leads to burnout."

(Informant 2)

The longer individuals suppress their emotions, the more it negatively affects their mental and emotional stability, potentially leading to depression or extreme withdrawal from social interactions.

Theme 4: Behavioral Changes

Avoiding communication not only affects mental health but also influences behavioral patterns. Individuals who suppress their emotions may exhibit changes such as withdrawal from social interactions,

difficulty maintaining relationships, or adopting unhealthy coping mechanisms.

"It's like the clock stops ticking, like I just don't want to get out of bed."

(Informant 1)

"Even when I try to sleep, it's hard because I'm still thinking about it."

(Informant 2)

These behavioral changes indicate the deep psychological impact of communication avoidance, affecting daily life and overall mental well-being.

Theme 5: Suicidal Thoughts or Intent

Severe emotional suppression can lead to extreme psychological distress, sometimes resulting in suicidal thoughts or intent. When individuals feel unheard or isolated for prolonged periods, they may begin to view their struggles as unbearable.

"Sometimes I feel like I just want to die. I mean, I'm not going to kill myself, but it's just the feelings that come through my mind."

(Informant 1)

"All that pressure just builds up. I feel like I just want to disappear from work at that moment."

(Informant 2)

These statements highlight the devastating effects of prolonged emotional suppression and the urgent need for intervention and support systems.

Theme 6: Feeling Tired

A common consequence of communication avoidance is persistent fatigue, both mentally and physically. When individuals continuously suppress their emotions, their mental load increases, leading to exhaustion. This fatigue can affect their concentration, mood, and overall ability to function.

"Your body is tired, but your mind just won't stop, and you can't sleep that's really real, like people say."

(Informant 1)

"I feel like I have no appetite, can't sleep, and just feel exhausted."

(Informant 2)

These experiences suggest that emotional burden directly affects physical health, reinforcing the cycle of avoidance and distress.

Theme 7: No Appetite

Communication avoidance and unexpressed emotions can lead to physical symptoms, such as loss of appetite. Emotional distress often manifests physically, and when individuals suppress their emotions, they may lose interest in eating or maintaining their health.

"I have no appetite and I just feel too lazy to do anything."

(Informant 1)

"I feel like I have no appetite, can't sleep, and I'm really exhausted."

(Informant 2)

This lack of appetite is a common symptom of emotional distress and indicates the need for emotional support and healthier coping mechanisms.

Theme 8: Overwhelmed

Individuals who avoid communication often feel overwhelmed due to the accumulation of unexpressed emotions. This emotional overload can lead to feelings of helplessness and an inability to cope with life's challenges.

"Cause I cannot keep what's in my mind and it's overwhelming."

(Informant 1)

"But if I leave it for too long, I feel like it's slowly eating me up"

(Informant 2)

When emotions are continuously suppressed, individuals may struggle to manage their stress, leading to more severe mental health issues.

Recommendations

Multiple modifications must be implemented from the results of this initial study to achieve better outcomes for actual data gathering which will produce more precise findings. The approach refinement will boost both the research authenticity and its depth which will result in stronger findings.

The first necessary improvement includes raising sample size to promote participant diversity. The present pilot research included minor informant participation which potentially omitted valuable diverse insights. Strengthening generalization power and understanding the relationship between mental health and avoidant communication practices will result

from broadening the research sample across multiple university types, demographic backgrounds, and personal life experiences. A bigger participant group will enable researcher to discover different experience patterns while achieving balanced research findings.

This study validity improves when mixed methods include quantifiable elements such as participant-reported data points regarding their communication anxiety and mental health status observations. Through qualitative interviews, the researcher develop thorough knowledge yet quantitative data lets them determine the intensity of communication avoidance and its mental health connections to understand the wider picture. Using both qualitative and quantitative research approaches will produce well-rounded conclusions about the studied issue because they balance each other.

The study can move from its pilot stage to an established real data collection process by adding these improvements which will create more reliable results about communication avoidance effects on mental health. Research findings and foundation building in this field will benefit from enhanced aspects which will result in more significant outcomes.

Conclusion

This pilot study serves as an initial exploration of communication avoidance and its impact on youth mental health. While the findings provide valuable insights, the study lacks extensive data due to its limited scope. To gain a deeper understanding, further research with larger-scale data collection is necessary. The interviews conducted suggest that communication avoidance significantly affects mental health, particularly in youth, as they navigate crucial developmental phases. However, limited research exists on how communication avoidance contributes to mental health struggles, making it essential to expand this study into a full-scale investigation.

Findings indicate that key life experiences, such as emotional neglect, strained relationships, and a lack of validation, contribute to communication avoidance. These experiences shape communication patterns from an early age, leading to overthinking, fear of judgment, and ruminative thought processes that hinder open interactions. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) provides a framework to understand this cycle, as it highlights how negative thought patterns influence emotions and behaviors. Many youth who avoid communication do so due to underlying cognitive distortions—believing they will be judged,

misunderstood, or rejected. These unhelpful thoughts create anxiety, reinforcing avoidance as a coping mechanism. However, as CBT suggests, avoiding communication only worsens emotional distress over time, increasing loneliness and stress.

By avoiding communication, many serious issues may remain hidden, unnoticed by the world, leading to prolonged mental health struggles that could have been addressed earlier. This research highlights communication avoidance as a silent killer that quietly affects mental well-being, making it crucial to raise awareness. Without intervention, individuals may suffer in silence, unable to express their struggles until it becomes overwhelming. Expanding this research is necessary to bring attention to the dangers of unspoken feelings, promote open conversations, and develop effective strategies to address communication-related mental health challenges. Future studies should build on these findings to refine methodologies, enhance data collection, and explore interventions that encourage healthier communication habits. Addressing communication avoidance is essential to preventing mental health crises, making it a topic that demands further academic and social discussions.

Author's Declaration

This article has not been published previously and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This publication has been approved by all authors for publication and shall not be published elsewhere in printed or electronic form in the same format or any other language without the written consent of the copyright-holder, which is Forum Komunikasi. As this research is a pilot study, the findings serve as preliminary insights and a foundation for future research on the impact of communication avoidance on youth mental health.

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