

## THE COUNSELOR'S ROLE IN IMPROVING GEN Z'S MENTAL HEALTH IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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### Abstract

Generation Z (Gen Z) faces unique and complex mental health challenges, often exacerbated by the digital landscape they live in. Constant exposure to social media, cyberbullying, pressure to be perfect online, and information overload can have a significant impact on their psychological well-being. In this context, the role of counselors becomes increasingly important and requires adaptation. This article analyzes the crucial role of counselors in supporting Gen Z's mental health in the digital age. The discussion includes identifying specific challenges faced by Gen Z online and the strategies and adaptations that counselors need to make. The analysis shows that counselors must have digital competence, understand Gen Z's digital culture, and be able to integrate digital tools and platforms into counseling practice ethically. A flexible, accessible, and sensitive approach to Gen Z's online experiences is needed, including the use of online counseling and digital literacy education. The conclusion of this article emphasizes that adaptation of methodology, increasing digital literacy, and a deep understanding of the impact of the digital era are essential for counselors to be able to effectively improve the mental health of the digital generation. The method in this research uses a literature review study method by utilizing various existing literature sources such as books, scientific journals and other reference sources. The literature review study research method is used to collect various knowledge and reasoning related to the topic that will be discussed in this journal article.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Gen Z, Counselor, Digital Era, Online Counseling.

### 1. Introduction

Mental health is an important foundation for individual and societal well-being. In the contemporary era, mental health issues are gaining widespread attention, especially among the younger generation. Generation Z (Gen Z), generally born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is the first generation to fully grow up in an environment dominated by digital technology and endless connectivity. This digital age, with its easy access to information and global interactions, has fundamentally shaped the way Gen Z communicates, learns, works, and even views themselves and the world around them (Livingstone, 2017).

However, alongside the benefits offered by the digital age, this environment also presents a unique set of challenges to Gen Z's mental health (Twenge, 2017). Constant exposure to social media can trigger intense social comparison, pressure to present a perfect self-image, and increase the risk of fear of missing out (FOMO). Cyberbullying, the spread of fake news or disinformation, and information overload are also significant stressors. In addition, the tendency to spend long hours in front of a

screen can negatively impact sleep quality, physical activity and the depth of face-to-face social interactions, potentially increasing feelings of loneliness.

In the mental health support system, counselors play a crucial role as providers of professional help, guidance, and emotional support (Corey, 2017). They help individuals overcome personal problems,

develop healthy coping mechanisms, and reach their full potential. However, the effectiveness of the counselor role in serving Gen Z in this digital age is faced with the need to adapt. Counselors need to deeply understand how digital experiences shape Gen Z's reality, what specific challenges they face online, and how technology itself can be integrated or even become a medium in the counseling process (ACA Telemental Health Training Standards, 2020).

Therefore, this article aims to comprehensively analyze and explore the role of counselors in improving Gen Z's mental health in the digital age. This article will identify the specific challenges Gen Z faces with regards to technology use, review how counselors can adapt their strategies and approaches, and discuss the importance of digital literacy for counselors themselves. By understanding the dynamics between Gen Z, mental health, and the digital age, it is hoped that this article can provide valuable insights for counseling practitioners in developing relevant and effective interventions to support the psychological well-being of this digital generation.

## 2. Methods

The method in this research uses the literature review study method by utilizing various existing literature sources such as books, scientific journals and other reference sources. The literature review study research method is used to collect various knowledge and reasoning related to the topics to be discussed in this journal article.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### a. Mental Health

Mental health comes from the English language, namely mental hygiene. Mental comes from the Latin words mens, mentis which means soul, life, spirit, and spirit. While hygiene comes from the Greek word hygiene which means the science of health. Mental health refers to a condition in which a person's physical, intellectual, and emotional growth grows, develops, and matures during his or her life, accepts responsibility, finds ways to adjust, and maintains social actions and rules in accordance with his or her culture (D. Ayumongtyas, 2018).

The following are definitions and meanings of mental health from several sources:

- 1) According to Pieper & Van Uden, mental health is when a person does not experience feelings of guilt towards himself, has a realistic estimate of himself, can accept his shortcomings or weaknesses, has the ability to deal with problems in his life, has satisfaction in his social life, and lives with happiness.
- 2) According to Notosoedirjo, mental health is defined as a person who continuously grows, develops, and matures in his life, accepts responsibility, finds adjustments, and participates in maintaining social rules and actions in his culture, without incurring too great a cost to himself or society.

- 3) According to Daradjat, mental health is when the functions of the soul function properly.
- 4) Hawari states that mental health is a condition that allows optimal physical, intellectual, and emotional development and that development is in harmony with the conditions of others (Zakiyah, 2023).

It can be concluded that, mental health is defined as a condition of a person's psychological, emotional and social well-being. This condition affects how a person thinks, feels, acts and interacts with others.

#### **b. Generation Z (Gen Z)**

The group of people known as Generation Z are those born after the millennial generation and before the alpha generation. Generation Z is the group of people born between 1997 and 2012, a time of more stable socio-economic progress and rapid advances in information technology, according to Dimock of the Pew Research Center. Because this generation is so accustomed to the digital world, they are also referred to as the iGeneration. The youngest is 11 years old and the oldest is 26. This suggests that they are in the teenage and early adult age range.

Generation Z is highly connected and dependent on technology. Their generation was born when personal computers, also known as PCs, have become an unavoidable necessity. This type of generation cannot They rely heavily on the internet at all times to unleash their offline and online worlds. According to Henderson, generation Z is identified as the original digital generation based on at least seven characteristics: they are interested in money and ambitious, adventurous, prone to anxiety, like to set boundaries, great online gamers, love nostalgia, and use social media in various ways (Kamil, 2023).

#### **c. Counselor**

The counselor in English terms is called a counselor or helper is a special officer who is qualified in the field of counseling (counseling). In the concept of counseling for all, there are guidance activities. The word counselor cannot be separated from the word helping. Counselor refers to the person, while helping refers to the profession or field of work. So a counselor is someone who has expertise in the field of counseling services, he is a professional (Hartono, 2013).

According to Winkel, a counselor is a professional who obtains special education in higher education and devotes all his time to Guidance and Counseling services. According to Dr. Namora Lumongga Lubis, M.Sc, the counselor is the party who assists the client in the counseling process. As the party who best understands the basis and techniques of counseling broadly, the counselor in carrying out his role acts as a facilitator for the client (Lubis, 2011).

From the description above, the author can conclude that counselors are professionals who obtain special education in universities who understand the basics and techniques of counseling broadly. The counselor acts as a facilitator in solving his client's problems.

Baruth and Robinson III define the counselor role as the role that inherently exists and is assumed by someone who functions as a counselor. The elements may differ. This depends on the setting or institution where the counselor works, but the roles and functions are the same. Furthermore, they added that counselors have five generic roles, namely the role of counselor as a counselor, as a consultant, as a change agent, as a prevention agent, and as a manager. The following describes some of the roles of counselors, namely:

- 1) As a Counselor
  - a) To achieve intrapersonal and interpersonal goals,
  - b) To overcome personal deficits and developmental difficulties,
  - c) Make decisions and think of action plans for change and growth.
  - d) To improve health and well-being
- 2) As a Consultant  
To be able to work with others who may affect the client's mental health.
- 3) As an Agent of Change  
To have an impact/influence on the environment to improve the functioning of the client (assuming the overall environment in which the client must function has an impact on mental health).
- 4) As a Prevention Agent  
Prevents difficulties in development and coping.
- 5) As Manager  
Managing a multifaceted service program that hopes to meet the various role expectations as described earlier in the administrative function (Lubis, 2011).

#### **d. The Digital Era**

An era is a period of time that has certain characteristics. However, the term “digital” comes from the Greek word “digitus”, meaning fingers. The term “digital” refers to anything related to numbers, especially binary numbers. Using the numbers 0 and 1, organized into different strings of codes to make information exchange easier, binary became the core of digital communication. The dawn of the digital age began in the 1980s, marked by the public emergence of the internet, which allowed technology to develop even faster than it does today. In the digital era, information is increasingly easy to find and share freely through digital media (Wiyanto, 2019).

In the digital era, people rely more on digital media than other media to communicate or get information. As a result, the near sometimes becomes farther and the far becomes closer (Andriani, 2019). Four things to consider when using digital media. message creators can easily create messages, have their own accounts, and connect with new people.

Messaging service providers want to make money from their efforts, so they design their media in an attractive way, sometimes even containing promoted content. Fourth, the message effect: digital media can be an infinite source of information if used properly. However, negative content that has a bad impact is also spread there, such as fake news,

pornography, hate speech, etc. Therefore, we must always be careful when using digital media by considering these four things so that we do not get caught up in things that can harm ourselves and others (B. Sadarman, 2020).

#### **e. E-Counseling**

E-counseling, or online counseling, has been defined by experts as follows:

1) Amani (2017)

E-counseling is counseling conducted through internet access which generally refers to professions related to mental health services through internet communication technology. Furthermore, Amani explains that e-counseling is not only the provision of counseling services, but is extended to the implementation of Guidance and Counseling as a whole with the help of technology, including the use of telephone and counseling management applications.

2) Ifdil (2011) in Situmorang (2020)

Online counseling is an alternative service that can be used by counseling teachers/education counselors supported by various media such as e-mail, websites, Zoom, Google Meet, and so on.

3) Haberstroh & Duffey (2011) in Situmorang (2020)

Online counseling is when clients and counselors communicate using streaming video and audio, with the computer as the main communication medium.

4) Fields (2011) in Situmorang (2020)

E-counseling is a relatively new therapeutic service developed using communication technology, ranging from telephone to internet.

5) Situmorang (2020)

E-counseling is the most appropriate option to use to help young people when facing mental well-being challenges.

6) Sharon (in IJAZUL QUR'AN Journal)

The Internet is a system for connecting small computer networks around the world. In line with advances in computer technology, counseling is not only done through face-to-face relationships, but also in the form of "cyber counseling" on the internet.

7) Yuhefizar (2012) in IJAZUL QUR'AN Journal

The Internet is a collection of computer network connections that transmit data in the form of data packets based on the Internet Protocol standard and is publicly available throughout the world.

In general, based on the definitions of the experts above, it can be concluded that e-counseling is a process of providing professional assistance in the field of mental health and well-being conducted between counselors and clients through electronic media and the internet. The media used can be email, text messages, chat, voice calls, video conferencing, or specialized e-counseling platforms. E-counseling allows counseling services to be more accessible, flexible, and overcome geographical boundaries.

#### **f. The Counselor's Role in Building Gen Z's Identity in the Digital Era**

Building a solid and authentic identity in the digital era is a complex journey for Gen Z. This is where the role of counselors becomes even more crucial. With a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the digital world, as well as with adaptive and relevant counseling strategies, counselors can be a valuable partner for Gen Z in navigating the digital maze, finding a true identity, and developing resilience to face a changing future. Counselors not only help Gen Z overcome problems, but also empower them to grow into whole, confident individuals with a strong identity in this digital age.

1) Supporting mental and emotional health

Counselors provide psychological support to help Gen Z deal with pressure and anxiety due to excessive social media use, cyberbullying, and unrealistic social expectations. Community and technology-based counseling allows for more flexible and convenient access, including anonymously, making it easier for teens to get mental help without geographical or social barriers. Counselors are also active in mental health campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining mental health in the digital age.

2) Education and literacy

Counselors help Gen Z understand the wise use of technology, teach digital literacy, and manage information and interactions online healthily. This is important to build mental resilience and avoid the negative impacts of technology such as digital stress and social media addiction.

3) Development of self-potential and social skills

Through guidance and counseling, counselors guide Gen Z to develop critical thinking skills, decision-making, and interpersonal skills. This helps them be ready for the competitive and dynamic world of work and maintain emotional balance in their daily lives.

4) Overcoming social isolation and building community support

Community counseling provides a space for Gen Z to receive social support and develop effective coping skills in dealing with psychological stress in the digital age. This approach reduces the sense of isolation and creates a mentally healthy environment for teens.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion presented, it can be concluded that the role of counselors is crucial and requires significant adaptation in order to improve the mental health of Generation Z in the digital era. The digital environment that includes social media, constant connectivity, and various online platforms presents specific challenges that uniquely affect Gen Z's psychological well-being, ranging from social pressure to the risk of cyberbullying and digital isolation.

To effectively reach and support this generation, counselors can no longer rely solely on traditional approaches. This article highlights that today's counselors need to develop strong digital competencies, deeply understand the digital landscape in which Gen Z interacts, and be able to integrate technology-based tools and methods, including telemental health, into their counseling practice ethically and effectively. Flexibility, adaptability and contextual understanding of Gen Z's online experiences are key to success in providing relevant and meaningful support.

While this article has outlined the need for these adaptations based on existing challenges and potential solutions, further empirical research is needed to gauge the specific effectiveness of various digital counseling interventions on the Gen Z population. The practical implications of these findings emphasize the urgency for counseling education institutions to update curricula, for professional organizations to establish clear ethical guidelines regarding digital practices, and for counselors to proactively improve their digital literacy and skills. By doing so, the counseling profession can continue to be relevant and a vital source of support in maintaining and improving Generation Z's mental health amidst the swift flow of the digital age.

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