

COUNSELORS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: STRATEGIES FOR FACING SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES TO COLLEGE STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

In today's digital era, social media has become an inseparable part of students' lives, providing various benefits as well as challenges related to mental health. Intensive use of social media often causes psychological pressure, such as anxiety, stress, depression, and self-image disorders due to the phenomena of social comparison, cyberbullying, and digital addiction. In this context, the role of counselors becomes very important as the front line in helping students deal with the negative impacts of social media and build healthy mental resilience. Counselors in the digital era adopt various innovative strategies, including digital literacy education to increase students' awareness of healthy and responsible use of social media. In addition, counselors provide emotional support through face-to-face and online services (cyber counseling), helping students manage stress and anxiety that arise due to digital pressure. Counselors are also actively developing online and offline mental health campaigns, as well as providing special interventions for victims of cyberbullying with effective coping strategies. The complex challenges in the digital era require counselors to continue to improve their technological competence, collaborate with other professionals, and utilize creative media such as educational videos and digital platforms to expand the reach of services. Thus, counselors are not only providers of psychological services, but also educators and advocates of mental health who are adaptive to digital dynamics. This study confirms that the integration of technology and a humanistic approach in counseling practice is the key to success in maintaining students' mental health amidst the increasingly strong influence of social media.

Keywords: counselors, digital era, social media, mental health, students

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology and social media has brought about major changes in the patterns of interaction and communication among students. Social media has become the main platform for students to network, express themselves, and access information quickly and widely. However, behind these benefits, social media also poses serious challenges to students' mental health. Pressure to always appear perfect, unrealistic social comparisons, cyberbullying, and social media addiction are some of the factors that can trigger stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. In this context, counselors in the digital era face an increasingly complex task to help students manage the negative impacts of social media while utilizing technology in a healthy and productive way. Counselors play an important role in providing digital education and literacy to students so that they are able to use social media wisely and critically. This education includes an understanding of the risks that may arise, managing the time spent on social media, and coping strategies to overcome stress and psychological disorders related to the virtual world. In addition, counselors provide emotional support and guidance through face-to-face and online services (cyber counseling), which allows students to access counseling more flexibly and comfortably, especially for those who are reluctant or have difficulty accessing services directly. In dealing with the phenomenon of cyberbullying, counselors also provide special interventions by teaching effective coping strategies and helping victims in the psychological recovery process.

Counselors actively initiate mental health campaigns, both online and offline, to raise student awareness of the importance of maintaining mental health amid the dynamics of social media. The challenges of the digital era require counselors to continue to improve their technological competence and collaborate with various parties, such as psychologists, technology experts, and campus communities, in order to create a holistic support ecosystem. (Arsyad, A. 2019)

The transformation of counseling services In the digital era also involves the use of various creative media such as educational videos, e-learning platforms, and digital communication applications that enrich the counseling experience and expand the reach of services. Counselors are required to be adaptive and innovative in integrating technology into their practices to remain relevant and effective. However, even though technology offers many conveniences, the role of counselors as human companions who provide empathy and emotional support remains irreplaceable, especially in dealing with cases of psychological crisis that require direct interaction. Overall, counselors in the digital era have a strategic role in building students' mental resilience in facing the challenges of social media. Through digital literacy education, emotional support, special interventions, and cross-professional collaboration, counselors help students develop healthy self-management skills and build sustainable psychological well-being. This effort is very important to create a young generation that is not only technologically literate, but also has a strong and resilient mentality in facing social pressures in cyberspace. (Al Hajri, I., Mahdum, & Khadijah, K. 2024).

2. Methods

The method in this article uses library research, which is a method of collecting data by understanding and studying theories from various literatures related to the research. There are four stages of library research in research, namely preparing the necessary equipment, preparing a working bibliography, organizing time and reading or recording research materials. The data collection uses a method of finding sources and constructing from various sources, for example books, journals and research that has been done. Library materials obtained from various references are analyzed critically and must be in-depth in order to support their propositions and ideas. The data analysis technique in this work uses the content analysis method, which can be used to draw correct conclusions and can be reviewed. In the analysis, selection, comparison, combination and sorting are carried out in such a way that the relevant ones are found. Inter-library checks and consideration of supervisor comments are carried out to maintain consistency in the evaluation, prevention, and elimination of incorrect information, namely human misunderstandings that can be caused by a lack of bibliographic author factors. (Mei Tang. 2019)

3. Results and Discussion

The development of information technology has brought significant changes in the practice of counseling services, especially among students. Research at the University of Lampung shows that asynchronous chat-based cybercounseling is an effective innovation in improving access and quality of student counseling services. This model allows students to consult flexibly without having to meet in person, overcoming time and distance constraints that have been the main obstacles. The media used vary, from chat, WhatsApp, email, to blogs, providing ease and comfort for students to convey their psychological problems. The advantage of asynchronous chat is its ability to adjust the time between the

counselor and the client, so that the counseling process can take place more comfortably and effectively. This is very relevant considering that 56% of students have difficulty adjusting their schedules for real-time counseling. Thus, digital technology not only expands the reach of services, but also increases the effectiveness of psychological interventions among students. Social media has a double influence on student mental health. Excessive and uncontrolled use of social media can trigger various psychological disorders such as anxiety, stress, depression, and self-image disorders. The phenomenon of social comparison and the pressure to appear perfect on social media is a significant source of stress for students. In addition, cyberbullying that is rampant on digital platforms worsens mental health conditions, causing trauma and social isolation. However, if used healthily, social media can also function as a means of positive social support and education. Therefore, counselors need to educate students about digital literacy and responsible use of social media in order to minimize negative impacts while maximizing its benefits. (Badrujaman, Imawati, & Fadhillah. 2019)

The strategies implemented by counselors in facing the challenges of social media on students' mental health include several important aspects: **Development of Digital Counseling Services:** Counselors adopt various digital platforms such as asynchronous chat, video calls, and instant messaging applications to provide more flexible and easily accessible services. This service allows students who are reluctant or have difficulty coming to face-to-face services to still receive psychological support. **Digital Literacy and Mental Health Education:** Counselors provide education to students about healthy use of social media, recognizing signs of digital stress, and effective coping strategies. This education also involves teachers and parents to create a holistic supportive environment. **Specific Interventions for Cyberbullying and Social Media Addiction:** Counselors apply cognitive-behavioral approaches and group counseling to help students overcome social media addiction and the impact of cyberbullying. This approach is effective in reducing dependency and improving psychological well-being. **Collaboration Across Professions and Institutions:** The success of digital counseling services is highly dependent on collaboration between counselors, psychologists, mental health workers, and educational institutions and families. This synergy creates a supportive ecosystem that strengthens students' mental resilience. (Dewi, L. P. 2020)

The implementation of online counseling services faces various supporting factors and barriers. The main supporting factors are the availability of technological facilities such as computers, smartphones, stable internet connections, and the readiness of counselors and clients to use technology. However, barriers such as limited nonverbal interaction, the risk of technical disruptions, and concerns about data privacy and security are challenges that must be overcome. In addition, the social stigma against mental health problems is still a barrier for some students to seek help, even though counseling services are available online. Therefore, counselors need to build a conducive and friendly atmosphere so that students feel comfortable and safe in the counseling process. Research shows that asynchronous chat-based cybercounseling is effective in improving the quality of student counseling services. Students find it easier to access services, can arrange consultation times according to their needs, and feel emotionally supported by counselors. Several participants reported that this service helped them gain better insight into personal problems and improved overall mental well-being. However, social media also acts as a source of social support and educational media that can strengthen mental well-being if used healthily. Therefore, it is important for counselors to help students develop digital literacy and self-management skills so that they can use social media wisely. (Hasan Basri. 2019).

Counselors in the digital era apply various strategies to deal with the impact of social media on students' mental health, including: **Development of Digital Counseling Services:** Utilizing digital

platforms such as asynchronous chat, video calls, and instant messaging applications to provide easily accessible and flexible services. This service allows students who are reluctant to come in person to still receive psychological support. Digital Literacy and Mental Health Education: Counselors provide education to students about the risks of excessive social media use and how to manage the psychological stress that arises. This program also involves parents and campuses to create a comprehensive supportive environment. Specific Interventions for Cyberbullying and Social Media Addiction: Cognitive-behavioral approaches and group counseling are applied to help students overcome the negative impacts of cyberbullying and social media addiction, improve coping skills and mental well-being. Cross-Professional and Institutional Collaboration: Synergy between counselors, psychologists, mental health workers, and educational institutions and families is essential to create a holistic support ecosystem for students. (Lestari, N., & Asmadi, A. 2020)

The implementation of online counseling services faces various supporting factors such as the availability of technological devices, internet connections, and the readiness of counselors and students in using digital media. However, obstacles such as limited nonverbal interaction, the risk of technical disruptions, and concerns about privacy and data security are challenges that must be overcome. In addition, the social stigma against mental health problems is still a barrier for some students to seek help, even though services are available online. Research shows that asynchronous chat-based cybercounseling is effective in improving the quality of student counseling services. Students find it easier to access services, can arrange consultation times according to their needs, and feel emotionally supported. This service helps students gain better insight into personal problems and improve overall mental well-being. However, the success of this service also depends on the counselor's competence in managing digital communication and maintaining the confidentiality of client data. Counseling services in the digital era provide great opportunities for counselors to reach students more widely and effectively, especially in dealing with mental health challenges triggered by the use of social media. Digital service development strategies, digital literacy education, specific interventions against the negative impacts of social media, and cross-professional collaboration are the keys to success in maintaining students' psychological well-being. Despite technical and social barriers, counselor innovation and adaptation to digital technology are essential to meeting the needs of students in this era of digital transformation. (Muhammad Yusuf. 2020)

4. Conclusions

The digital transformation that has occurred in the last decade has brought about major changes in the world of higher education, especially in patterns of interaction, communication, and seeking psychological help among students. Social media, as an inseparable part of modern student life, offers various benefits such as easy access to information, expanding social networks, and space for self-expression. However, behind this convenience, social media also poses serious challenges to students' mental health, ranging from social pressure, unrealistic self-comparison, digital addiction, to the rise in cyberbullying cases. All of these phenomena have the potential to trigger stress, anxiety, depression, self-image disorders, and a decrease in the quality of life of students. In facing these challenges, the role of counselors in the digital era is becoming increasingly crucial and strategic. Counselors not only function as listeners and solution providers, but also as digital literacy facilitators, emotional companions, and mental health advocates who are adaptive to technological developments. Through the use of digital counseling services such as asynchronous chat-based cybercounseling, counselors are able to reach

students who previously had difficulty accessing services conventionally. This service provides flexibility in time, maintains privacy, and creates a safe space for students to share problems without fear of stigma. (Maharani, I., Fridani, L., & Akbar, Z. 2019).

Counselor strategies in dealing with social media challenges include digital literacy education, developing coping skills, special interventions for victims of cyberbullying, and cross-professional and institutional collaboration. Counselors are also actively developing online and offline mental health campaigns, and utilizing creative media to expand the reach of services. All of these efforts aim to equip students with the ability to manage digital stress, develop healthy mindsets, and build strong mental resilience amidst the dynamics of cyberspace. However, the implementation of digital counseling services is not free from various obstacles, such as limited nonverbal interaction, the risk of technical disruptions, and concerns about data privacy. In addition, the social stigma against mental health issues is still a challenge for students in seeking help. Therefore, counselors must continue to improve digital competence, strengthen professional ethics, and build an inclusive and friendly counseling atmosphere. Overall, counselors in the digital era have a very vital role in maintaining and improving students' mental health. Through service innovation, digital literacy education, adaptive psychological interventions, and solid collaboration with various parties, counselors can help students face social media challenges in a healthy and productive manner. In this way, students are not only able to survive digital pressure, but can also develop into individuals who are resilient, critical, and ready to face the challenges of life in an era of ever-changing technology. (Pratiwi, A., & Nurwahidin, M. 2021).

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