

The Dynamics of Therapeutic Relationships in Cyber Counselling in Modern Guidance and Counselling Services

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has driven the transformation of guidance and counseling services through the implementation of cyber counseling. This service offers flexibility, efficiency, and expanded access for clients, but also presents complex dynamics in the form of challenges, obstacles, and opportunities. Cyber counseling, as an innovation in guidance and counseling (BK) services in the digital era, presents a significant transformation in the therapeutic relationship between counselors and clients. This article aims to analyze the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship in cyber counseling by examining the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities that arise in the cultural, ethical, technical, and digital literacy contexts. The research used a desk study method by analyzing various literature related to digital counseling. The results of the study indicate that therapeutic relationships in virtual spaces face cultural challenges, data security risks, limitations in nonverbal communication, infrastructure barriers, and counselor competency readiness. However, cyber counseling also opens up significant opportunities for expanding service access, improving digital literacy, and innovating counseling intervention methods. With strengthened regulations, increased digital competence, and institutional support, cyber counseling has the potential to become a modern BK service model that is effective, ethical, and adaptive to current developments.

Keywords: *cyber counselling; therapeutic relationship*

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Introduction

Advances in information and communication technology have brought about major changes in various areas of life, including guidance and counselling services. Cyber counselling has emerged as an innovative service that enables the counselling process to be conducted through digital media such as chat, video calls, email, and various other online platforms (Rahmat, 2020; Rimayati, 2023). This transformation not only expands access to services but also changes the way counsellors and clients build professional interactions in virtual spaces.

Cyber counselling is not merely a transfer of face-to-face services to the digital space, but rather a transformation of the service paradigm that requires the adaptation of counsellor competencies, the updating of ethical systems, and the readiness of technological infrastructure (Rimayati, 2023). This view is in line with Prasasti and Irawan, who emphasise that online counselling, including digital-based peer counselling models, is an important strategy in addressing the demographic bonus and the characteristics of the digital generation, which is closely linked to technology (Irawan, 2023). Thus, the digitisation of Guidance and Counselling (BK) services cannot be understood as a passing trend, but rather as a structural necessity in the modern education system.

However, this dynamic cannot be separated from the issue of therapeutic relationships. In counselling theory, the counsellor-client relationship is a key factor in the success of intervention (Corey, 2012). Effective therapeutic relationships are built through empathy, trust, and deep communication. In virtual spaces, these elements undergo significant transformation. The limitations of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, and voice intonation can affect the accuracy of the counsellor's emotional understanding (Arifin et al., 2025).

However, several studies show that text-based communication can actually increase self-disclosure because counsees feel safer and more anonymous in revealing personal problems (Syifa, 2022). This confirms that the therapeutic relationship in cyber counselling is not weakened but rather reconfigured in a different form.

In addition to empathic challenges, ethical and digital literacy aspects are crucial issues in maintaining the quality of professional relationships in the online space. Data confidentiality, platform security, digital informed consent, and professional boundaries in virtual communication require clear standards and adequate technological competence (Kurniawan, 2025). Without strong digital literacy, the risk of ethical violations and distortion of therapeutic relationships can increase. Therefore, strengthening therapeutic relationships in the context of cyber counselling needs to be understood as the construction of professional relationships that are adaptive to technological developments and the characteristics of the digital generation. Challenges in the aspects of empathy, ethics, and the readiness of infrastructure and counsellor competencies are central issues that require serious attention. At the same time, virtual spaces present opportunities to expand access, increase service flexibility, and develop more innovative and responsive counselling approaches to the needs of students (Rimayati, 2023). Thus, strengthening the foundation of therapeutic relationships based on digital literacy and professional ethical standards becomes a strategic agenda in the development of modern counselling services.

Method

This study utilises a qualitative approach with a library research method. Library research was chosen because the focus of the study is on conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis regarding the dynamics of therapeutic relationships in cyber counselling, particularly in terms of challenges, implementation barriers, and opportunities for development in modern guidance and counselling services.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include books and scientific articles that directly discuss cyber counselling and therapeutic relationships. Secondary sources are reputable national and international journals relevant to issues of digital counselling ethics, counsellor digital literacy, therapeutic alliance in online counselling, the digital divide, and online counselling service regulations. Data was collected through documentation techniques by reviewing books, journal articles, and relevant academic documents.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a content analysis approach combined with thematic synthesis. The analysis process began with data reduction through the selection of literature relevant to the focus of the study, namely the dynamics of therapeutic relationships in cyber counselling. Next, the data was classified into three main themes, namely challenges (cultural, ethical, virtual relationships, technical, and competence), implementation barriers (access, regulation, psychological aspects, and institutional operations), and development opportunities (service access, method innovation, digital literacy, and expansion of reach). The next stage was conceptual synthesis by comparing and integrating various sources to find patterns and theoretical and practical implications for strengthening digital counselling services, which were then formulated into comprehensive conclusions. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation, the use of literature published in the last 5–6 years, and consistent analysis that refers to therapeutic relationship theory and professional counselling ethics standards.

Results and Discussion

The Challenges of Cyber Counselling in Therapeutic Relationships

Cultural Challenges

Cyber counselling cannot be separated from the socio-cultural dynamics of Indonesian society. Culturally, Indonesians tend to value face-to-face communication as a form of empathy and respect (Widjanarko et al., 2025). In this context, the physical presence of a counsellor is often seen as a symbol of seriousness and concern. Collectivistic culture also influences the openness of counselees (Maryam B. Gainau, 2012). Some counselees feel uncomfortable discussing personal issues through digital media (Kabata et al., 2025). Variations in digital literacy between regions also reinforce differences in acceptance of cyber counselling (Wulan, 2025).

As an illustration, the case of students who feel reluctant to discuss problems via chat shows that cultural barriers can affect the depth of therapeutic relationships (Maulana et al., 2024). This indicates that cultural adaptation is an important factor in the implementation of cyber counselling.

Ethical, Security, and Data Confidentiality Challenges

Data security is a central issue in digital services. Cyber counselling is vulnerable to breaches of confidentiality, either through hacking or the use of unencrypted platforms (Riza Amalia, Erma Pratiwi Nufi, 2024). Rimayati emphasises the importance of digital informed consent, electronic data protection, and professional boundaries in online communication. Without clear standard operating procedures, the therapeutic relationship can be disrupted because counselees lose their sense of security (Rimayati, 2023). Cases of leaked counselling conversations due to unprotected devices demonstrate the weakness of security systems. Therefore, cyber counselling ethical standards must be strengthened nationally (Santoso et al., 2025).

The Challenges of Counsellor–Client Relationships in Virtual Spaces

Therapeutic relationships in cyber counselling face limitations in nonverbal communication. Body language, facial expressions, and intonation play a major role in understanding the emotional state of the counselee (Zulhammi, 2015). In text-based platforms, counsellors must be able to interpret the meaning of written messages reflectively. Simpson and Reid show that therapeutic alliances in video conferencing can still be formed strongly, but require more explicit communication strategies.

Counsellors strive to create an environment conducive to clients' mental development by fostering an atmosphere that supports optimal psychological growth. Through an empathetic, reflective, and constructive approach, counsellors help clients achieve a more peaceful, balanced, and meaningful life (Nikmarijal et al., 2025). Cases of misinterpretation of emotional conditions due to visual limitations show that digital empathy is a new competency that counsellors must possess.

In addition, the challenges of therapeutic relationships in virtual spaces are also related to the process of trust building, which generally develops through repeated face-to-face interactions (Dewi et al., n.d.). In an online context, counsellors need to deliberately build therapeutic presence through consistent responses, warm language, and regular clarification of meaning to minimise miscommunication (Pransiska et al., 2025). International research on therapeutic alliances in online counselling shows that the quality of the relationship is not solely determined by the medium, but also by the counsellor's communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and digital competence in managing the dynamics of synchronous and asynchronous conversations. Therefore, strengthening professional competence not only covers the technical aspects of platform use, but also digital ethics literacy, the ability to read text-based emotional cues, and strategies for building psychological closeness without physical presence (Surahman et al., 2025). Thus, the success of cyber counselling is highly dependent on the holistic integration of clinical competence, cultural adaptation, and technological readiness.

Barriers to the Implementation of Cyber Counselling

Barriers to the implementation of cyber counselling can be classified as follows:

Technological Access Barriers – digital infrastructure gaps, device limitations, and internet quotas. 1. Counsellor Competency Barriers – lack of specialised training and technophobia (Adela et al., 2025). 2. Regulatory Barriers – absence of comprehensive SOPs and strong national regulations. 3. Psychological Barriers for Counselees – online awkwardness and an uncondusive home environment. 4. Institutional Operational Barriers – minimal budget, absence of an IT team, and increased administrative burden on counsellors (Zamroni, 2025).

These obstacles indicate that the implementation of cyber counselling requires a systemic approach, not merely the readiness of individual counsellors.

Opportunities for Cyber Counselling in Modern Guidance Counselling Services

Despite facing various challenges, cyber counselling has great opportunities, including: 1. Cultural Opportunities – counselees are freer to express themselves digitally. 2. Access Opportunities – reaching remote areas and counselees with limited mobility. 3. Time and Cost Efficiency – more flexible and economical. 4. Method Innovation – the use of online assessments, mood trackers, and interactive modules. 5. Increased Digital Literacy – forming a new culture that is more open to counselling (Bahtiar et al., 2025).

The cyber counselling model also supports the strengthening of digital-based peer counselling as a strategy to address the challenges faced by the younger generation (Irawan, 2023). With regulatory support, improved competencies, and secure platform readiness, cyber counselling can become an inclusive and adaptive model for future guidance counselling services. More than just a technical alternative, cyber counselling offers new hope in modern counselling services. Amidst high mobility, distance limitations, and the increasingly complex dynamics of students' lives, this service provides a safe space for counselees to stay connected with counsellors. Many counselees actually feel more comfortable and courageous in expressing their deepest feelings through digital media, as the psychological distance makes them feel less judged (Arikita, 2025). This aligns with findings from e-mental health research indicating that internet-based interventions can enhance access while maintaining the quality of therapeutic relationships (Ratih Sekar Wulan & Kurniawan, 2025).

In practice, cyber counselling also allows for a more flexible and sustainable approach. Counsellors can combine face-to-face and online sessions (blended counselling) to maintain close relationships while adapting to the needs of the counselee. For example, the initial session is conducted in person to build trust, then continued online for monitoring progress or further support. This approach makes the service feel more adaptive, less rigid, and still focused on the comfort of counselling.

On the other hand, the use of technology such as online assessments, mood trackers, and digital reflection journals helps counselees recognise their emotional patterns and personal development more consciously. These features not only support the effectiveness of interventions but also encourage counselees to become more reflective and independent. Online counselling experiences can remain warm and meaningful when counsellors are able to convey authentic empathy through digital media (Kabata et al., 2025).

With strong regulatory support, adequate data protection, and improved counsellor competence in digital literacy and ethics, cyber counselling has the potential to become the new face of more inclusive and responsive counselling services (Rimayati, 2023). It is not a replacement for human relationships, but rather a bridge—connecting counsellors and clients in different spaces, yet still with the same goal: to provide warm, safe, and humanising psychological support.

Conclusion

The dynamics of therapeutic relationships in cyber counselling show significant transformations in terms of empathy, ethics, access, and digital literacy. Cultural challenges, data security risks, technical barriers, and counsellor competency readiness are key issues in its implementation. However, cyber counselling also opens up great opportunities to expand service access, enhance methodological innovation, and strengthen public digital literacy. With the strengthening of ethical standards, national regulations, and continuous professional training, cyber counselling can develop into an effective, safe, and humanistic modern counselling service.

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