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Client's Satisfaction in Face-To-Face Counselling and Cyber Counseling Approaches: A Comparison

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Abstract

This research is an attempt to explore the effectiveness of Cybercounseling services. In this research, the success of the Cybercounseling service is measured in terms of the capability of this method to provide client satisfaction (Client Satisfaction). This quasi-experimental study uses Non-equivalent Control Group Pretest/Posttest Design. Quantitative data obtained using the Client's Satisfaction Inventory Short-Form (CSI-SF) questionnaire. A total of 60 research subjects were involved and conducted in two study groups, control group using Face-to-Counseling approach and experimental group using Cybercounseling approach. The findings show that Client Satisfaction in Cybercounseling approach is higher than Client Satisfaction in Face-to-face Counseling approach.

Keywords: Cybercounseling, Face-To-Face Counseling, Client's Satisfaction, Online Counselling.

Background

Counseling is a process to provide assistance based on psychological principles by professional counselors. This helpful relationship is to help clients move towards for a better change in their life. (Sharf, 2000). In this 22nd century, on the advanced of technology, changes in counseling services is no exception. In the cyberspace world, there is a new services offered in counselling services. Counseling services can now be carried out without having to meet face-to-face. The role of the counselor has changed due to the influence of this sophisticated communication and intimate setting can be created virtually (Amla et al, 2014; Skinner & Latchford, 2006; Oravec, 2000).

The cyberspace creates an infrastructure to build relationships, so the counseling practitioners has taken the initiative to maximize their services. An alternative service helps through this virtual interaction is created and practised. This virtual counselling service is known as cybercounseling. This service is also known as web-counseling, cyber-counseling, cyber-therapy and e-therapy (Manhal-Baugus, 2001).

This cybercounseling service has risen rapidly as many qualified counselors began offering cybercounseling services (Amla et al, 2014; Bengtsson et al, 2015). International Society for Mental Health Online (ISMHO) counted 5000 websites offered cybercounseling services. (Dawn,

2004). Some other studies also show a drastic improvement in cybercounseling services (Griffith, 2005). This increase is expected because counselors no longer place modernity as an obstacle but instead see the Internet as a potential and convenience (Dawn, 2004; Lunt, 2004).

The practises of the Cybercounseling services and the recognition of Cybercounseling services is uncertain in its effectiveness. High curiosity among counseling practitioners led them to conduct a survey to measure the effectiveness of this service compared to conventional methods of Face-to-Counseling (Bengtsson et al, 2015). Many studies show the effectiveness of cybercounseling services as opposed to Face-to-Counseling in various aspects. There are comparative studies in counselor-client relationships (Cook & Doyle, 2002; Yager, 2000), counseling session impact studies (Reynolds, Stiles and Grohol, 2006), bulimia problem programs (Robinson & Serfaty, 2001), client satisfaction (Chester & Glass, 2006; Leibert, Archer, Munson and York, 2006), and grief (Barak & Bloch, 2006). Studies have also shown the effectiveness of service on adolescents (Barak & Dolev-Cohen, 2006; King et al., 2006; Lekic, 2006; Skinner & Latchford, 2006). The findings also show that Cybercounseling can reduce stress levels (Menon & Rubin, 2011), and provide emotional relief (Barak & Dolev-Cohen, 2006; Lekic, 2006; King et al, 2006). All studies have shown positive results on the effectiveness of Cybercounseling services to adolescents associated with anonymous elements (Lekic, 2006), time flexibility (King et al., 2006; Skinner & Latchford, 2006), anonymity (Lekic, 2006), simple access (Skinner & Latchford, 2006) and client engagement (Barak & Dolev-Cohen, 2006).

Problem Statement

The e-counseling and the recognition of e-counseling services to the e-counseling service is uncertain to ensure its effectiveness. High curiosity among counseling practitioners led them to conduct a survey to measure the effectiveness of this service compared to conventional methods of face-to-face counseling (Barnett, 2005). Many articles display the results of the study that have been conducted to see the effectiveness of cybercounseling services versus face-to-face counseling. The comparison is done using a variety of research instruments to measure the results of different studies. Research findings show cybercounseling is better than face-to-face counseling (Barak & Bloch, 2006; Cook & Doyle, 2002; Reynolds, Stiles and Grohol, 2006 and Yager, 2000). There are also research findings that show face-to-face counseling and cyber counseling have the same effectiveness (Barak & Dolev-Cohen, 2006; Chester & Glass, 2006; Leibert, Archer, Munson and York, 2006; Mallen, Day & Green, 2003; Robinson & Serfaty, 2001). So there is a need to see the empirical data to prove these findings, as well as to enrich the pool of data on cybercounseling services. The findings also can be an empirical data of comparison on how cybercounseling is perceived and accepted in Malaysia.

Methodology

A quantitative study was carried out on 60 respondents in two study groups; the group in face-to-face approach and the Cybercounseling approach. Respondents are students of a school in Putrajaya, Malaysia. The research method is Quasi-Experimental Non-equivalent Control Group Pretest/Posttest Design.

The dependent variable in this study is Client Satisfaction. To measure Client Satisfaction, the Client Satisfaction Instrument (CSI-SF) is used to measure client's satisfaction after obtaining

counseling services. Data is then analyzed using Independent T-test to see the difference in client satisfaction that exists in both counseling methods.

A counseling session conducted through a complete counseling process and adheres to all the ethics of counseling. For a face-to-face counseling approach, the session is held at the School's Counseling Room, while Cybercounseling approach is carried out using 'Instant Messenger' modality. All respondents had a complete counseling session between 4 to 8 sessions. After the respondent completed the counseling process, they were given the CSI-SF instrument.

Findings

For control groups using face-to-face counseling approach, there were four male respondents (13.3%) and 26 females (86.7%). For the experimental group using the cybercounseling approach, three respondents were male (10%) and 27 respondents were female (90%). The total number of respondents was seven males and 53 females. Gender balance can not be controlled to adhere to the counseling ethics as well as the walk-in principle in the study procedure.

Respondents are in the age group of 13-18 years old which is the age range of students in high school in Malaysia. Respondents according to age in the control group were 22 respondents (73.3%) ranging from 13 to 15 years old, and 8 respondents (26.7%) in the range of 16 to 18 years. Experimental groups showed that 21 respondents (70%) were aged between 13 and 15 years and 9 respondents (30%) were in the range of 16 to 18 years.

Table 1: Respondents' profile

DEMOGRAPHY	GROUP	
	CONTROL (Face-to-face) n=30	EXPERIMENT (Cybercounseling) n=30
GENDER		
Male	4 (13.3%)	3 (10.0%)
Female	26 (86.7%)	27 (90.0%)
AGE		
13 to 15 years	22 (73.3%)	21 (70.0%)
16 to 18 years	8 (26.7%)	9 (30.0%)

Client Satisfaction Stage is measured using the Client Satisfaction Instrument-Short Form by Mc Murtry & Hudson, 2004. It has four levels; Very High (Score 80-100), High (score 60-79), Moderate (score 40-59) and Low I (score 1-39).

The analysis was conducted on both groups of studies. The research findings show that in the face-to-face counseling approach, 14 (47%) of the respondents showed very high satisfaction level, 11 (37%) were in the high level, four (13%) were moderate and one (3%) was at low satisfaction level. However, the findings of the Cybercounseling approach, 27 respondents (90%) were in Very High satisfaction level, and three (10%) were in High level. Analysis is described in Table 2 for both groups.

Table 2: Client's satisfaction between groups

SATISFACTION LEVEL	CONTROL	EXPERIMENT
	(face-to-face) n=30	(cybercounseling) n=30
Low	1 (3%)	0
Moderate	4 (13%)	0
High	11 (37%)	3 (10%)
Very high	14 (47%)	27 (90%)

Next, means for each items in Client Satisfaction Instrument is compared between these two groups. From Table 3, the means show that Cybercounseling clients are higher on their satisfaction in all items compared to Face-to-Face Counseling clients. The items that showed the highest mean difference between the two groups were item 3 with mean difference of 1.1666 and item 8 with mean difference 1.0667. This means that clients of the Cybercounseling group feel they will recommend this service to their friends. Item 8 also means that clients of the group of Cybercounseling approach has more comfortable in communicating and expressing their problems to counselor.

Table 3: Mean Difference of client's satisfaction

Item	Approach	Mean	Mean difference
1. People here really seem to care about me.	Cybercounseling	6.7000	.4667
	Face-to-face	6.2333	
2. I would come back here if I need help again	Cybercounseling	6.6000	.3333
	Face-to-face	6.2667	
3. I would recommend this place to people I care about.	Cybercounseling	6.3333	1.1666
	Face-to-face	5.1667	
4. People here really know what they are doing.	Cybercounseling	6.6333	.7000
	Face-to-face	5.9333	
5. I get the kind of help here that I really need.	Cybercounseling	6.5333	.7666
	Face-to-face	5.7667	
6. People here accept me for who I am	Cybercounseling	6.7333	.5000
	Face-to-face	6.2333	
7. People here seem to understand how I feel.	Cybercounseling	6.3667	.7000
	Face-to-face	5.6667	

	Face-to-face	5.6667	
8. I feel I can really talk to people here.	Cybercounseling	6.6000	1.0666
		5.5333	
	Face-to-face		
9. The help I get here is better than I expected.	Cybercounseling	6.5667	.8666
		5.7000	
	Face-to-face		

To measure the difference of Client Satisfaction in these two counseling approaches, independent t-test was run to test. The t-test analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the Face-to-Counseling and Cybercounseling approaches with t-value = 4.009, $p < .05$. Client satisfaction in the Cybercounseling approach (mean = 1.9000) was higher than the face-to-face approach (mean = 1.4667) with mean difference of .4333. This finding clarifies that clients in the Cybercounseling approach show higher satisfaction compared to face-to-face approach.

Table 4: Mean difference of client's satisfaction

Approach	n	mean	mean diff.	sd	df	t	sig. p
Face-to-face	30	1.4667		.5074			
			.4333		58	4.009	.000*
Cybercounseling	30	1.9000		.3051			

- $p < .05$

Discussions

The study looked at the comparison of client satisfaction in both counseling methods and the findings showed significant differences in client satisfaction in face-to-face counseling and cybercounseling. Through advanced analysis, client satisfaction in cybercounseling was higher than the face-to-face Counseling method. This finding is consistent with Cook & Doyle findings (2002) which shows that E-Counseling services receive higher satisfaction scores when compared to face-to-face counseling. It is parallel with the findings of Barak & Bloch, 2006; Reynolds, Stiles and Grohol, 2006 and also and Yager, 2000.

Among the other factors stated to contribute to client satisfaction is the client's willingness to share the grief as stated by Reynolds et al. (2006), positive attitude of clients (Robinson & Serfaty, 2001) and the therapeutic environment created by cybercounselor (King et al., 2006). Skinner & Latchford (2006) proved that cybercounseling services are as effective as face-to-face Counseling for the easy access factors that enable them to get immediate answers and insights compared to scheduled Face-to-face Counseling.

Another factor is the internet as a medium. King et al (2006) and Lekic (2006) mentioned that the Internet is the most strategic medium to help teens because they are not worried about the counselor's reaction when discussing an issue, and also they can get online help

instantaneously. This situation is very different from the face-to-face counseling sessions that require them to meet on a scheduled basis and sometimes the help is needed beyond the scheduled counseling sessions.

Conclusions

The findings of the present study enhance current knowledge in cybercounseling effectiveness with more understanding of the client's satisfactions. While new understanding of cyber counseling relationship is highlighted, these studies also support evidences, indicating the level of clients satisfactions in both approaches. However, due to small sample size, it limits the generalizability of our findings. It is especially important to replicate this study with a larger sample and more diverse groups to be able to attain more evidence of the effectiveness of cybercounseling services.

The mean differences compared in each items also showed significant differences in cybercounseling compared to face-to-face counseling. The cybercounseling clients post their satisfactions in the term of services, therapeutic environment as well as the counselor. The mean differences as a whole client's satisfaction also significant as the cybercounseling approach score higher compared to face-to-face counseling.

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