



The Professionalism of Counselors in Cybercounseling Versus Face-to-Face Counseling

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ABSTRACT

Professionalism is a crucial aspect underpinning the success of therapeutic interactions between counsellors and clients. Research indicates that competent and ethical counsellors can provide higher quality and more effective services. This study is a comparative research type. A mixed methods approach is employed to view counsellors' work professionalism comprehensively. Comparing cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling reveals that each has its strengths and weaknesses. Although both aim to deliver quality counselling services, there are differences in approach, the technology used, and the advantages offered. The findings of this study are that both cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling have their respective roles and benefits in providing quality counselling services. Counsellors must be able to choose the method that best suits the needs and preferences of the client while ensuring that professionalism and ethics in counselling practice are consistently upheld.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Professionalism is a fundamental foundation every counsellor must possess in cyber or face-to-face counselling. A Professional counsellor is expected to provide high-quality, ethical, and effective services to their clients. Cybercounseling or online counselling methods have become increasingly popular and relevant in the digital era. However, this also raises questions about how counsellors can maintain and apply professionalism effectively in this context. Professionalism is a crucial aspect underpinning the success of therapeutic interactions between counsellors and clients. A professional counsellor can build trust and establish an effective therapeutic relationship, which is critical to achieving counselling goals. Research shows that competent and ethical counsellors provide higher quality and more effective services (McCrickard & Butler, 2005).

When discussing counsellors' professionalism, several important aspects need to be considered. Firstly, a professional counsellor must have adequate competence in psychology and counselling. They should possess in-depth knowledge of counselling theories, appropriate intervention techniques, and a good understanding of professional ethics (Association, 2014). Understanding and responding to clients' various psychological and emotional issues accurately is a hallmark of a professional counsellor. In the context of cybercounseling, ethical and information security challenges become more complex. Counsellors must ensure the platforms are secure and comply with data protection regulations. This includes data encryption and strict user authentication to protect client privacy. Data confidentiality, cross-jurisdictional counselling validity, and system security require special attention (Murphy & Mitchell, 2008).

Another aspect of counsellors' professionalism is their ability to maintain client confidentiality. This becomes more challenging in cyber counselling, where data and information can be quickly disseminated online (Devi et al., 2022). Counsellors must ensure that clients' personal and confidential information remains well protected in face-to-face and online sessions. This involves using secure platforms and adhering to applicable data protection regulations.

In cyber counselling services, professionalism is also reflected in counsellors' ability to adapt to the technology and digital platforms used. Counsellors must ensure they have sufficient technical skills to use online communication tools effectively and efficiently. Moreover, they must be able to manage counselling sessions professionally, even without direct face-to-face interaction with clients.

While cybercounseling offers greater flexibility and accessibility for clients, maintaining counsellors' professionalism presents challenges. One challenge is the difficulty of reading clients' nonverbal expressions and body language directly. Face-to-face interactions allow counsellors to quickly identify clients' emotional reactions and psychological states, which is more difficult in cybercounseling sessions.

In this regard, counsellors must develop the ability to interpret verbal expressions and nonverbal cues through digital media. This will help them effectively respond to clients' needs and feelings. Additionally, counsellors must adhere to professional, ethical codes and practice standards while providing cybercounseling services (Corey, 2017).

As technology and digitalization trends advance across various aspects of life, including mental health fields such as counselling, practitioners must stay updated while maintaining ethical principles and professionalism (Olmstead & Emery, 2004). Thus, preserving professional integrity and providing high-quality services remain the primary focus for every counsellor, whether in cyber counselling or face-to-face interactions.

In navigating the dynamics between cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling, a professional counsellor must be able to adjust their approach according to the needs and preferences of the client. While cybercounseling offers convenient access for individuals who face barriers to conventional services due to reasons such as distance or mobility, it is undeniable that face-to-face interactions still hold distinct value in the psychological healing process.

Therefore, counsellors must consider the advantages and challenges of both methods and consistently uphold professional, ethical standards and integrity in every context of service they provide. Professionalism is the foundational element that helps counsellors deliver quality services and supports the psychological recovery of individuals needing assistance.

In conclusion, professionalism is a critical aspect that every psychologist and counsellor must uphold, including those engaged in cybercounseling or face-to-face meetings with clients. By maintaining professional integrity, prioritizing client needs, and adhering to applicable ethical standards, counsellors can provide optimal services and better support individuals' psychological recovery while staying current with technological advancements.

2. METHODS

This comparative research type allows for an in-depth comparison of counsellors' professionalism in cyber and face-to-face counselling contexts. By employing this approach, the researcher can explore the differences, advantages, and disadvantages of both counselling methods regarding counsellors' professionalism.

A mixed methods approach is used to gain a more comprehensive view of counsellors' professionalism. This method combines both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding. The approach includes data collection through surveys, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. This enables the researcher to identify general trends while understanding individual experiences in detail (Hanson et al., 2005). The comparative techniques employed include analysis of historical data and case studies. This approach allows the researcher to compare how counsellors' professionalism is applied across different contexts and settings. These techniques help understand how cultural factors, policies, and technology influence counselling practices (Gray et al., 2007). Comparative research will provide more comprehensive insights into how counsellors' professionalism manifests in two counselling service contexts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines counsellors' professionalism in both cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling. It also explores various aspects that need to be understood, including cyber counselling, counsellors' professionalism, cybercounseling methods, face-to-face methods, the advantages of each counselling method, and the effectiveness of cybercounseling compared to face-to-face counselling.

Concept of Cybercounseling

Counselling originates from the word "counsel," which means to converse together, involving interaction between a counsellor and a client. Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist, defined counselling as a therapeutic process to facilitate client self-change. According to Rogers, counselling is a process where one's self-structure is relaxed within the

safety of the therapeutic relationship, allowing previously rejected experiences to be accepted and integrated into the transformed self. Counselling is a service that helps individuals through personal interaction between the counsellor and the client, aiming for optimal development. It involves helping individuals resolve their issues with the counsellor providing advice or guidance based on established principles. This process includes guiding individuals to change their lifestyle or thought patterns so they can manage their problems independently. Cybercounseling, or online counselling, is a form of counselling conducted virtually via the Internet and modern technology without face-to-face meetings.

Counsellors' Professionalism

Despite differences in platforms, counsellors in both types of counselling share fundamental similarities. They require deep psychological and counselling competence, including knowledge of counselling theories, intervention techniques, and professional ethics (Associations, 2005). The ability to understand and respond to clients' psychological and emotional issues with empathy and professionalism is also a core foundation. Client confidentiality is crucial in every counselling relationship, whether face-to-face or cybercounseling. In conventional counselling, maintaining client privacy and the confidentiality of disclosed information is a primary responsibility of the counsellor.

However, in the era of cybercounseling, this aspect becomes more complex due to the ease of data and information dissemination online. Counsellors in the cybercounseling era face the challenge of ensuring the security of the platforms used and complying with data protection regulations. This aims to protect client privacy and prevent sensitive information leaks. Counsellors must carefully select cybercounseling platforms with robust security systems, such as data encryption and layered user authentication. Clients should be provided with clear and comprehensive information about how their data and information will be managed and protected during the cybercounseling process (Watkins & Barber, 2000). Written consent from clients must be obtained before starting counselling sessions.

Client data and information access should be restricted to authorized counsellors and individuals directly involved in the counselling process. Counsellors must maintain the confidentiality of clients' online and offline identities. This includes not sharing names, addresses, or other personal information with third parties without client consent.

Client data and information must be stored securely and assured of confidentiality. Counsellors should follow data storage protocols that comply with applicable regulations. Clients need to be educated about potential risks associated with cybercounseling, including data breaches and misuse of information. They should also be informed about how to protect their privacy online. By implementing these measures, counsellors can build trust and a sense of security for clients in the cybercounseling process, allowing them to disclose their issues without concern openly. Trust and security are crucial to establishing effective and therapeutic counselling relationships.

Research indicates that client satisfaction with cybercounseling services can be equivalent to or even higher than face-to-face counselling. Factors such as convenience, ease of access, and time flexibility are why many clients are satisfied with this service. Research conducted by Zainudin and Yusop (2018) reveals that client satisfaction with cybercounseling is higher than that of face-to-face counselling (Zainudin & Yusop, 2018).

Ethics and security are crucial aspects of cybercounseling. To maintain client confidentiality, counsellors must use secure platforms and comply with data protection regulations. Murphy et al. (2008) highlight the importance of data encryption and user

authentication in maintaining the security of online counselling sessions (Sessicounsellingy & Mitchell, 2008).

Counsellor professionalism in cyber counselling also includes adapting to the technology and digital platforms used. Counsellors must have sufficient technical skills to use online communication tools effectively and efficiently. Research by Aini and Mudjiran (2020) emphasizes the importance of mastering information and communication technology for executing online counselling services (Aini & Mudjiran, 2020).

Studies comparing the effectiveness of face-to-face counselling and cybercounseling find that both methods have advantages. Face-to-face counselling allows direct observation of nonverbal expressions and body language, which can help counsellors provide more accurate interventions. On the other hand, cybercounseling offers greater flexibility and accessibility, which can be especially useful for clients living in remote areas or with mobility limitations (Gieselmann & Pietrowsky, 2016).

The main difference in professionalism lies in communication and technology. In cybercounseling, communication occurs solely through digital media, requiring counsellors to have skills in reading non-verbal expressions and body language via digital platforms. Counsellors must accurately interpret messages and non-verbal cues to understand clients' emotional and psychological conditions. Conversely, face-to-face counselling allows for more personal and in-depth interaction. Counsellors can directly observe facial expressions, body language, and gestures, making identifying clients' emotional reactions and psychological states easier. This facilitates more targeted interventions and the establishment of a stronger rapport with clients.

Technical skills are another critical differentiator. Cybercounseling counsellors must master online communication tools and platforms used for counselling sessions. They must use technology effectively and efficiently to facilitate communication and counselling. Managing counselling sessions professionally without direct face-to-face interaction is also a critical skill.

Cybercounseling Methods

Regarding counsellor work professionalism, the cybercounseling method offers an innovative approach to providing guidance and counselling services. There are several cybercounseling models that guidance and counselling teachers (BK) can use to deliver services to clients. One commonly used model is cybercounseling through email. In this model, clients can easily express their issues via email to the counsellor without having to meet in person. The advantages of using email in cybercounseling include the ability to articulate problems effectively through writing, flexibility in sending messages, and the ease of reflecting on issues in writing before interacting directly with the counsellor.

In addition to email, cybercounseling can also be conducted through asynchronous chat. This model allows clients to send messages anytime without being bound by specific hours. Cybercounseling via asynchronous chat can be accessed through smartphones, thus maintaining client confidentiality through counselling principles. Counselling services using this model are responsive, with counsellors providing prompt responses to prevent the client's issues from disrupting their developmental process.

Furthermore, cybercounseling is also available through specialized applications, such as Riliv. This application is designed to provide online counselling services to clients in need. Psychological assistance providers widely use this application to offer counselling services, thus enabling clients to receive help practically and efficiently.

Not only through email chat and specialized applications, cybercounseling can also be conducted through social media platforms, such as Facebook. By utilizing Facebook, counsellors can provide solutions for individuals uncomfortable with face-to-face counselling or constrained by distance and time. Social media provides broader access for clients to seek help in resolving their problems. In addition to the models mentioned above, cybercounseling can be conducted through other media, such as video conferences, Zoom Meetings, WhatsApp, Google Meet, and Jitsi Meet. These methods help BK teachers provide counselling services by leveraging available digital technology.

Face to Face Methods

In face-to-face counselling, professionalism encompasses technical competencies in applying various counselling techniques and ethical considerations, confidentiality, empathy, and building positive client relationships.

- **Technical Skills:** A professional counsellor must have adequate technical skills in applying relevant and effective counselling techniques according to clients' needs. This includes conducting accurate evaluations and analyses of clients' issues and formulating appropriate intervention plans.
- **Active Engagement and Empathy:** Professionalism in counselling is characterized by active engagement in the counselling process and the ability to show deep empathy toward clients. A counsellor can convey support and understanding through facial expressions, body language, and appropriate verbal responses, helping build a trusting relationship.
- **Confidentiality and Ethics:** A professional counsellor must respect the confidentiality of the information shared by clients during counselling sessions. They must also adhere to the professional counselling code of ethics, which includes maintaining client privacy, avoiding conflicts of interest, and ensuring that counselling services are delivered with integrity and respect.
- **Effective Communication:** Professionalism also includes the ability to communicate effectively with clients. This involves active listening, asking relevant questions, and conveying information clearly and openly. Good communication is critical to building a trusting relationship between counsellor and client.
- **Assessment and Effective Intervention:** A professional counsellor should be able to comprehensively assess clients' issues, considering environmental factors and social contexts affecting their well-being. Based on this assessment, the counsellor can develop appropriate and effective intervention plans to help clients achieve their goals.
- **Building Working Relationships:** Professionalism also involves cultivating positive and mutually beneficial working relationships with clients. This includes identifying and understanding client's needs and expectations and assisting them in overcoming any obstacles that may arise during the counselling process.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** A professional counsellor must be able to monitor and evaluate clients' progress throughout the counselling process. This allows the counsellor to assess the interventions' effectiveness and make necessary adjustments according to clients' needs.

Advantages of Cybercounseling Methods

Cybercounseling, or e-counseling, is a virtual counselling model in which a counsellor and client interact via the Internet. This approach allows counsellors and clients to communicate without needing to meet physically at the same place and time. As the research outlines, there are several benefits to using cybercounseling.

1. Cybercounseling enables counsellors and clients to stay connected and interact efficiently without being bound by specific times and places. In this context, internet technology and devices like computers or mobile phones are the primary means of bridging the relationship between counsellors and clients. This provides significant flexibility for both parties to schedule counselling sessions according to their availability. For example, students with busy school schedules or adults with demanding jobs can easily access counselling services whenever needed without disrupting their daily routines.
2. Cybercounseling allows counsellors and clients to overcome geographical and logistical barriers. With internet access, counsellors are not limited by geographical distance when providing counselling services. This is particularly beneficial for students or individuals living in remote areas or those who do not have easy access to traditional counselling services. Even in situations like the current pandemic, cybercounseling offers an ideal solution to continue providing counselling services without needing in-person meetings (Mayasari, 2022; Sari, 2021).
3. The presence of cyber counselling also provides an opportunity for counsellors and clients to develop technological skills. Through virtual interactions, clients—especially those unfamiliar with internet use—can learn and improve their understanding of technology. This can help reduce the digital divide or "tech gap" among them, allowing them to remain relevant and connected with ongoing technological advancements.
4. Another advantage of cybercounseling is time and cost efficiency. By using internet technology, counsellors can serve more clients in less time, as there is no wasted time travelling or waiting at an office. This can also reduce transportation costs and administrative expenses associated with face-to-face counselling. Additionally, for students or clients who may face financial or mobility barriers, cybercounseling becomes a more affordable and accessible solution.
5. Furthermore, cybercounseling allows counsellors to provide information and support more broadly and accessibly. With specialized websites created by counsellors or institutions, clients can quickly and easily access the information they need, such as exam scores, school requirements, or practical guides. This helps increase the accessibility of information and provides additional support for clients outside of counselling sessions.
6. Finally, cybercounseling also facilitates agreements between counsellors and clients regarding ethical codes and rules in the counselling process. For example, it includes setting time limits on using polite and respectful language in electronic communications, such as emails or online chats. Thus, cybercounseling provides effective counselling services and promotes ethical and professional practices in using Internet technology (McCrickard & Butler, 2005).

Advantages of Face-to-Face Methods

Face-to-face counselling offers several significant advantages over online counselling methods, such as:

1. **Building Stronger Relationships:** Face-to-face interactions allow counsellors and clients to build stronger and deeper relationships. Body language, facial expressions, and eye contact can help build trust and understanding. This can create a safer and more supportive environment for clients to explore their issues openly and honestly.
2. **More Effective Communication:** In-person communication enables counsellors and clients to communicate more effectively and accurately. Counsellors can more easily interpret non-verbal cues from clients, such as facial expressions and body language, which can help them understand the deeper meaning behind clients' words. Clients can also better grasp the nuances of the counsellor's communication, such as tone of voice and body language, which helps them understand the counsellor's messages more clearly.
3. **Enhanced Empathy and Understanding:** Face-to-face interactions make it easier for counsellors to show empathy and understanding to clients. Counsellors can directly observe clients' expressions and behaviours, which helps them better understand the client's feelings and experiences. This can strengthen the trust and connection between the counsellor and the client.
4. **Facilitating Certain Counseling Techniques:** Some counselling techniques, such as gestalt and sand play therapy, are more effective in person. These techniques involve using physical space and specific objects, which are difficult to replicate online.
5. **Observing Emotional Reactions:** Counselors can more easily observe and respond to clients' emotional reactions in face-to-face settings. This allows counsellors to provide more timely and practical support and interventions. Clients may feel more comfortable and secure expressing their emotions openly in the same room as the counsellor.
6. **Building Trust:** Face-to-face counselling can help build trust between the counsellor and the client. Clients' willingness to meet physically with the counsellor can demonstrate trust and commitment to the counselling process.

Effectiveness of Cybercounseling Compared to Face-to-Face Counseling

Cybercounseling has become increasingly important in this digital age because it offers greater flexibility and accessibility than traditional face-to-face counselling. The professionalism of counsellors in this context plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of the services provided. When assessed from the perspective of counsellor professionalism, the effectiveness of cyber counselling can be observed through several key aspects, such as time management, spatial flexibility, and discipline. Each aspect significantly shapes clients' practical and satisfying counselling experience (Baker & Ghaemi, 2011).

First, regarding time management, cybercounseling demonstrates significant advantages over face-to-face counselling. Counsellors and clients can schedule counselling sessions more flexibly, allowing them to choose times that suit their schedules without being constrained by physical and logistical limitations. Research by Arswimba (2023) indicates that clients greatly value the time flexibility offered by cybercounseling, as they do not need to allocate additional time for travelling to counselling locations. This also allows counsellors to handle more clients daily, enhancing service efficiency. This flexibility benefits clients and counsellors, who can adjust their working hours more easily to fit personal and professional needs (Arswimba, 2023).

Second, the spatial flexibility offered by cybercounseling allows counsellors to provide services to clients in various geographical locations without needing to be physically present. This mainly benefits clients in remote areas or those with mobility limitations (Eysenbach & Michelson, 2007). Research by Zainudin and Yusop (2018) found that client satisfaction with cybercounseling services is higher than face-to-face counselling, primarily due to the ease of access and the flexibility of location offered by online sessions (Haug et al., 2009). Additionally, this spatial flexibility allows clients to access counselling services from comfortable and safe environments, enhancing openness and effectiveness in the counselling process. Counsellors can also work from various locations, potentially improving their well-being and productivity (Zainudin & Yusop, 2018).

Third, discipline in cybercounseling plays an essential role in its effectiveness. Professional counsellors must maintain discipline in scheduling, starting sessions on time, and ensuring consistency in service delivery, even in a virtual setting. Research by Ramli et al. (2020) shows that counsellors who can uphold high levels of discipline in cybercounseling create effective and satisfying counselling experiences for clients. This discipline includes a commitment to scheduled times and reliable platforms to ensure smooth communication. Additionally, counsellors must be disciplined in maintaining client privacy and data security, a critical aspect of cybercounseling. This indicates that counsellor discipline is related to time management and adherence to professional and ethical standards (Ramli et al., 2020).

Furthermore, adaptation to technology and understanding digital ethics are integral parts of counsellor professionalism in cybercounseling. Counsellors need adequate technical skills to use various digital platforms effectively and efficiently. Research by Aini and Mudjiran (2020) highlights the importance of mastering information and communication technology in online counselling services. Counsellors operating online communication tools well can provide more responsive services and support effective therapeutic processes. Understanding digital ethics is crucial to ensuring counsellors maintain client privacy and confidentiality. This includes data encryption and user authentication to prevent unauthorized access and breaches (Aini & Mudjiran, 2020).

However, despite the many advantages of cyber counselling, there are also challenges to maintaining professionalism. Challenges such as maintaining client confidentiality and data security remain a top priority. Murphy et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of data encryption and user authentication in safeguarding online counselling sessions. Adhering to digital ethical standards helps build client trust and protects their privacy. Additionally, counsellors must be prepared to address technical issues during counselling sessions, such as internet connection disruptions or software errors. This requires adequate technical skills and the ability to remain calm and professional in dealing with unexpected situations (Murphy & Mitchell, 2008).

Overall, the effectiveness of cybercounseling in terms of counsellor professionalism can be seen through more flexible time management, broader spatial accessibility, and discipline in maintaining service quality. With proper adaptation to technology and a strong understanding of digital ethics, counsellors can provide effective and satisfying services to their clients in cybercounseling. Professionalism in these aspects enhances service quality and helps build strong and trustworthy therapeutic relationships with clients. This demonstrates that cybercounseling can be an effective and efficient alternative to face-to-face counselling, provided that counsellors maintain high standards of professionalism.

4. CONCLUSION

When cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling methods are compared, it is evident that both have advantages and disadvantages. While both aim to provide quality counselling services, there are several differences in approach, technology, and benefits.

Firstly, regarding counsellor professionalism, both cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling require a deep understanding of psychology and counselling competencies. Counsellors must have a strong knowledge of counselling theories, intervention techniques, and professional ethics. Understanding and responding to clients' psychological and emotional issues with empathy and professionalism is a fundamental aspect of both types of counselling. Additionally, maintaining client confidentiality and privacy of the information shared by clients is a primary responsibility of counsellors in both settings.

However, in the era of cybercounseling, new challenges have emerged related to data security and privacy. Counsellors must ensure the platforms are secure and comply with applicable data protection regulations. Furthermore, counsellors need to restrict access to client data and information to authorized parties and carefully protect clients' identities.

In terms of benefits, cybercounseling offers greater flexibility in time and location for both counsellors and clients. This allows easier access for clients who live in remote areas or have busy schedules. Additionally, cybercounseling can be a more affordable and time-efficient solution in terms of costs and logistics.

On the other hand, face-to-face counselling has the advantage of building a stronger and deeper relationship between counsellor and client. Direct interaction allows counsellors to better understand clients' nonverbal cues and provide more effective support. Certain counselling techniques, such as gestalt therapy and sand play therapy, are more effective when conducted in person.

In conclusion, cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling have their respective roles and benefits in providing quality counselling services. Counsellors should be able to choose the method that aligns with the client's needs and preferences while ensuring that professionalism and ethics in counselling practice are consistently upheld. Additionally, counsellors must continue developing technical skills and adapting to technological advancements to provide optimal and effective counselling services. Both cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling play significant roles in supporting individuals' psychological and emotional well-being in today's society.

Recommendations

1. Counsellors may offer both types of services, namely cybercounseling and face-to-face counselling, to provide clients with a broader range of options. This way, clients can choose the method that best suits their preferences and needs at any time.
2. Counselors should educate and inform clients about both types of services, including the benefits and challenges of each. This will enable clients to make more informed decisions about their chosen method.
3. Before deciding on the type of service to provide, counsellors could thoroughly assess the client's needs and preferences. This can be done through initial interviews or assessment forms to gather client information.
4. Counsellors might consider adopting a hybrid counselling approach, where sessions are conducted in a combination of cyber and face-to-face formats. For example, counsellors and clients could have periodic face-to-face sessions to strengthen the relationship and facilitate deeper interaction, while regular sessions could be conducted online to maintain flexibility and service availability.

5. Counsellors need to continuously develop technical skills in using technology and online platforms to provide effective and secure counselling services. This includes training in online counselling platforms, data security, and risk management.
6. To ensure the security and effectiveness of online counselling services, counsellors may collaborate with IT professionals to select secure platforms and ensure compliance with applicable data protection regulations.

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