CYBERCOUNSELING FOR GENERATION Z: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABSTRACT
Digital technology and the internet are developing rapidly due to advances in science and technology. The development of the internet has had a positive impact on various mental health services in Indonesia. Cybercounseling is a new innovation in the world of counseling. Cybercounseling is an online counseling service that can be accessed anywhere by its users. The purpose of this study is to discuss the application and challenges of cybercounseling in Indonesia. This study uses a literature review method, analyzing 15 selected articles from an initial pool of 50 articles obtained through multiple databases, using keywords such as "cybercounseling," "online counseling," and "Generation Z." The selection of articles focused on relevance to the development, opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for digital counseling. The findings suggest that cybercounseling aligns with the digital preferences of Generation Z, as its anonymity, accessibility, and flexibility facilitate engagement and reduce barriers to seeking support. However, its effectiveness is constrained by unresolved issues, particularly ethical standards, data security, and confidentiality, highlighting a gap between technological adoption and regulatory readiness. These challenges suggest that successful implementation depends not only on technological availability but also on clear governance and professional preparedness. In conclusion, the literature indicates that cybercounseling is a promising innovation for expanding mental health support for Generation Z in Indonesia. Nevertheless, realizing its potential requires strengthened regulations, reliable infrastructure, and continuous development of counselors' digital competencies. Addressing these factors is essential to ensure that cybercounseling services are effective, ethical, and responsive to the needs of a digitally connected generation in the Society 5.0 era.

Keywords: Cybercounseling; Digital Counseling; Ethical Challenges; Generation Z; Literature Review.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and social media has transformed the way individuals communicate, learn, work, and access mental health services. An APJII survey (2025) notes that internet users in Indonesia accounted for 80.66% of the total population in 2025, with the majority using it to access services anytime and anywhere. On the other hand, these advancements also have negative impacts on adolescents, such as anxiety, depression, and FOMO (Deb & Ghosh, 2025), which in turn drive an increasing need for digital counseling services.

The surge in demand for online counseling has become increasingly evident since the COVID-19 pandemic. Salsabila & Sari (2022) noted an increase in teleconsultation users from 4 million to over 15 million people, while The Good Doctor Indonesia reported a 7-fold increase in psychological consultations. This trend has continued to grow even as the pandemic subsided, particularly among Generation Z teenagers, whose entire lives have been shaped within a digital ecosystem and who rely on the internet as their primary medium for communication, learning, and even seeking help.

Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation to grow up entirely in the internet age, and is therefore known as "digital natives" (Bifary, 2024). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z tends to seek information, social support, and even mental health assistance through digital platforms. However, their relationship with technology has two conflicting sides: on one hand, social media has a positive impact on one-third of its users (Coe et al., 2023), but on the other hand, excessive screen time is correlated with a decline in psychological well-being (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). It is this discrepancy that makes understanding Gen Z's needs and preferences regarding mental health services so crucial.

Mental health issues are a serious concern among Generation Z. Data from UNICEF (2021) shows that 1 in 7 adolescents experiences mental health issues, with 46,000 adolescent suicide cases each year. In the

United States, Gen Z aged 18–29 has experienced an increase in symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness (Grelle et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020). In Indonesia, contributing factors include academic pressure, the stigma surrounding mental health, social isolation, and excessive exposure to information on social media (Akbar et al., 2024). These conditions create an urgent need for counseling services that are easily accessible, non-stigmatizing, and aligned with Gen Z's digital lifestyle.

In practice, conventional counseling faces various limitations that hinder its accessibility for adolescents. Social stigma is a major barrier preventing adolescents from seeking counseling, as they fear being labeled as "troubled" by those around them (Cerolini et al., 2023; Naparan, 2020). Additionally, limited service hours, hard-to-reach locations, and cultural and language barriers further restrict access to these services (Cerolini et al., 2023; Ridley et al., 2021). These limitations underscore the need for innovative counseling services that are more adaptable to the needs of today's adolescents.

Cybercounseling emerged as a response to these limitations. By leveraging communication technologies ranging from phone calls, video calls, instant messaging, to social media, this service enables counseling to take place without the constraints of time and space (Harsani et al., 2022). For Generation Z, this is an option that better aligns with their habits. Ristianti (2022) notes that 93.7% of adolescents require online counseling, with WhatsApp (69.9%) and video calls (18.6%) being the most preferred platforms. Their primary motivations are ease of access, a sense of safety, and avoidance of social stigma (Brahmansyah & Safitri, 2019; J. Wang et al., 2022). However, not all individuals share the same preferences regarding internet-based counseling. Some studies have found that adolescents prefer conventional face-to-face counseling over online counseling services (Rochlen et al., 2004; Teh et al., 2014). Meanwhile, other studies indicate that adolescents are more willing to use online counseling to address mental health issues (Chen & Zhu, 2016; Wong et al., 2018).

Cybercounseling holds great potential, but it is not without its challenges. The risk of data breaches and privacy violations is a serious concern if not supported by adequate safeguards (Stoll et al., 2020). The absence of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language can also diminish the quality of the therapeutic relationship and lead to miscommunication (Bambling et al., 2008). On the technical side, limited internet connectivity, inadequate devices, and the digital literacy gap between counselors and clients also hinder the effectiveness of the service (Harsani et al., 2022). Although research on cybercounseling has grown, studies that specifically and systematically address its effectiveness, ethical challenges, and relevance for Generation Z in Indonesia remain very limited.

This study aims to address this gap through a systematic literature review that summarizes the latest findings on cybercounseling for Generation Z. Specifically, this study maps the development of online counseling services in Indonesia, identifies opportunities and challenges in their implementation, and formulates evidence-based recommendations for the development of ethical, effective, and relevant services for adolescents in the digital age. Unlike previous reviews, which were generally broad in scope, this study places Generation Z at the center of its analysis, taking into account their unique characteristics as digital natives who are simultaneously vulnerable to mental health issues.

METHOD

This study uses a narrative literature review method to explore theories and previous findings related to cybercounseling, particularly in the context of Generation Z in Indonesia. This approach enables the examination, identification, and interpretation of relevant literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Miftachul et al., 2022). Data were collected from several academic databases and search engines, including SpringerLink, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Web of Science (WoS), DOAJ, ScienceDirect, and Garuda. The literature search was conducted using keywords such as "cybercounseling," "online counseling," "digital counseling," "Generation Z," and "Indonesia." The search was limited to publications published within the last ten years (2015–2025). The inclusion criteria were:
(1) articles discussing cybercounseling or online counseling, (2) studies relevant to Generation Z or digital service users, and (3) publications focusing on the Indonesian context or comparable settings. The exclusion criteria included duplicate articles, studies not directly related to counseling practices, and articles lacking sufficient relevance to the research focus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the literature search, 50 initial articles were found. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 15 articles were selected for further analysis. The selected studies were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns related to the development, opportunities, challenges, and recommendations for cybercounseling services. The literature obtained and reviewed is listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. List of reviewed literature

No	Author	Year	Title	Source
Concepts and definitions				
1	Pasmawati, Hermi	2016	Cyber Counseling sebagai Metode Pengembangan Layanan Konseling di Era Global	Syi'ar
2	Muslima	2022	Cyber Counseling: Definisi, Layanan, Fase dan Model	Jurnal Mudarrisuna: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam
3	Ayuni, Ball Qiss; Umaria, Syarifah Runika; Putri, Amallia	2021	Cybercounseling sebagai Inovasi Konselor Menghadapi Tantangan Disrupsi pada Era Society 5.0	Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Ar-Rahman
Service context				
4	Prayoga, Ammi; Habsy, Bakhrudin All; Purwoko, Budi	2025	Keberhasilan Konseling Berbasis Digital: Kajian Systematic Literature Review	G-COUNS: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling
5	Ristianti, Dina Hajja	2022	Online Counseling as a Service in College: A Generation Z Perspective	Jurnal Manahemen, Kepemimpinan, dan Supervisi Pendidikan
6	Fitri, Nur Madani; Aswar	2024	Model Bimbingan dan Konseling Untuk Generasi Z dalam Menghadapi Era Revolusi Industri 4.0	Tarbiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran
7	Kusumanegara, Dyah Ayu; Purwoko, Budi; Naqiah, Nadjlatun; Habsy, Bakhrudin All	2024	Layanan Bimbingan dan Konseling Berbasis Digital untuk Perencanaan Karier Siswa: Kajian Literatur Sistematis	Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Ar-Rahman
8	Wang, X., Joyce, N., & Namkoong, K.	2020	Investigating College Students Intentions to Seek Online Counseling Services	Communication Studies
Implementation of technology				
9	Pratiwi, Ajeng; Nurwahidin, Muhammad	2021	Peningkatan Konseling Mahasiswa melalui Cybercounseling Berbasis Asynchronous Chat di Universitas Lampung	SIGMA-Mu

No	Author	Year	Title	Source
10	Apsari, F. Yuni; Darmawan, Made; Prasetyo, Eli	2018	Pemanfaatan Teknologi bagi Generasi Millennial: Konseling Berbasis Teks Menggunakan Riliv (Aplikasi Android)	Jurnal Experientia
11	Lestari, Widya; Miswati; Husaini, Muhammad Jawahir; Manurung, Afwan Syahril	2024	Optimalisasi Media dan Cyber Konseling untuk Generasi Z di Sekolah: Kajian Literature Riview	Effect: Jurnal Kajian Konseling
12	Harahap, Ade Chita Putri, et al.	2024	Pemanfaatan Media Cyber Konseling Untuk Membentuk Sikap Modernisasi Siswa Di SMA Al-Azhar Medan	SIMPATI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan dan Bahasa
Effectiveness, ethics & challenges				
13	Anindya, Jovita; Budiman, Nandang; Nadhirah, Nadia Aulia	2024	Etika Profesi Bimbingan dan Konseling: Menghadapi Tantangan Kerahasiaan dalam Layanan Konseling Online	Indonesian Journal of Educational Counseling
14	Bizzotto, N., Marciano, L., Bruijn, G., Schulz, P., J.	2023	The Empowering Role of Web-Based Help Seeking on Depressive Symptoms: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis	Journal of Medical Internet Research
15	Hariastuti, R., et al	2024	Online Counseling Encourages Openness to Help Individuals Dealing with Psychological Disorder	SEEJPH

Description of the development of cybercounseling in Indonesia

Based on the articles reviewed, the development of cybercounseling in Indonesia has experienced rapid and adaptive progress, especially since the increase in the use of information and communication technology and the need for modern counseling services, as well as accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Apsari et al., 2018; Hariastuti et al., 2024). This development is marked by the transformation of counseling services, which are no longer limited to face-to-face interactions but have evolved in line with advances in information and communication technology (Harahap et al., 2024).

There are several contributing factors to the development of online counseling in Indonesia that are interrelated. Internet usage, projected to reach 79.5% of the population by 2024 (Prayoga et al., 2025), creates the infrastructure that enables online services to develop. Second, the demands of the 4.0 Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0 are driving counselors to innovate beyond conventional models (Ayuni et al., 2021; Fitri & Aswar, 2024). Generation Z, as a group more comfortable with digital communication and viewing in-person services as less relevant to their lifestyle, serves as the intersection between demand and supply factors (Fitri & Aswar, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated existing trends by forcing institutions that were previously slow to adapt to immediately shift to digital platforms (Apsari et al., 2018; Hariastuti et al., 2024). Thus, the development of online counseling in Indonesia has been influenced more by the crisis than driven by proactive long-term planning.

The implementation of cybercounseling has been carried out through various platforms and digital media such as websites, email, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, video conferencing (Zoom, Google Meet), and paid counseling applications (Riliv, ibunda.id, bicarakan.id, SatuPersen, KALM, Psylution) (Apsari et al., 2018; Lestari et al., 2024; Muslima, 2022; Pasmawati, 2016; Prayoga et al., 2025). In addition to the commercial sector, which has been a pioneer in online counseling services, the education sector has also begun to use cybercounseling services as a solution to address student problems. Junior high schools in

Gresik and high schools in Semarang have used websites and Facebook for counseling (Muslima, 2022), and guidance counselors and school counselors have started using digital media to help students resolve personal, academic, and career problems (Prayoga et al., 2025). For Generation Z, this approach is actually more relevant because it utilizes media that is already familiar in their daily lives. However, the use of general-purpose platforms like WhatsApp and social media raises questions about data security and privacy standards, which are not always met by platforms not specifically designed for counseling services.

A number of limitations were also identified in the reviewed literature. The absence of nonverbal cues makes it difficult for counselors to accurately gauge clients' emotional states, which could potentially compromise the quality of the assessment and the therapeutic relationship. More concerning, Anindya et al. (2024) found that the lack of standardized ethical guidelines in Indonesia for maintaining data confidentiality in online counseling services poses a serious gap, given the sensitivity of the information shared by clients.

On the other hand, a number of studies have demonstrated the advantages of online counseling over conventional services, albeit to varying degrees. In terms of accessibility, online counseling enables services without time or location constraints, reaching clients who are geographically or psychologically unable to attend in person (Ayuni et al., 2021; Pasmawati, 2016). The anonymity offered by digital platforms has also been shown to encourage client openness, particularly for those reluctant to seek help due to social stigma (Hariastuti et al., 2024). Ayuni et al. (2021) reported higher client satisfaction with online counseling compared to in-person sessions; however, this study was conducted on a limited population and may not be generalizable to all age groups or types of issues addressed. The contradiction between the advantages of accessibility on one hand and ethical vulnerabilities on the other indicates that the development of online counseling in Indonesia is still outpacing the readiness of its regulations and professional standards.

Identifying opportunities for cybercounseling

The high level of interest in online counseling among Generation Z is clearly reflected in empirical data. Ristianti (2022), in her study of 561 Gen Z respondents aged 15–25, found that 93.7% expressed a desire to use counseling services to support their academic success, and 71.8% of them had considered online services as an option. Interestingly, their preferred communication channels were WhatsApp (68.9%) and video calls (18.5%). Academic issues (33.6%) were the topic they most wanted to discuss, followed by family and friendship issues. This pattern indicates that the greatest opportunity for online counseling among Gen Z lies in its alignment with communication platforms they are already familiar with, rather than in technological sophistication. This trend aligns with the argument that mastery of information and communication technology is no longer an option but a professional obligation for today's counselors (Ayuni et al., 2021; Fitri & Aswar, 2024).

Cybercounseling services have the potential to reach clients who were previously underserved due to geographical or scheduling barriers (Muslima, 2022; Pasmawati, 2016). Bizzotto et al. (2023) add that a single digital platform can reach millions of users without the need for costly physical infrastructure. This highlights a significant advantage in terms of service scalability, which is particularly relevant for an archipelagic nation like Indonesia. However, it should be noted that the digital divide between urban and rural areas remains a barrier, so claims of "far more equitable" access need to be critically examined.

One of the greatest advantages of online counseling that consistently emerges in the literature is its ability to reduce psychological barriers through anonymity. For adolescents who are reluctant to seek help due to stigma, shame, or discomfort with face-to-face conversation, digital platforms create a safer space to open up (Anindya et al., 2024; Apsari et al., 2018; Harahap et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024). Hariastuti et al. (2024) specifically found that anonymity encourages clients' openness in addressing psychological disorders. This is a relevant finding given the high stigma surrounding mental health in Indonesia. Ayuni et al. (2021) reported that client satisfaction levels in online counseling were higher than in face-to-face sessions. However, these findings stem from a limited population and need to be re-examined in a broader and more diverse sample before they can be generalized. On the other hand, anonymity warrants attention as it can complicate client identity verification and pose risks when clients are in crisis situations requiring direct intervention.

Several studies have reported the positive impact of cybercounseling on adolescents' mental health and development. Hariastuti et al. (2024) noted a significant reduction in symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression among clients who used online counseling services. Kusumanegara et al. (2024) also found that digital-based services are effective in supporting students' career planning. This indicates that the benefits of cybercounseling are not limited to mental health alone, but also extend to academic and vocational development.

Challenges in implementing cybercounseling for Generation Z

Infrastructure challenges are the primary obstacle that consistently emerges in the reviewed literature. Unstable internet connections can disrupt the smooth flow of counseling sessions, particularly for services such as video calls (Pasmawati, 2016; Prayoga et al., 2025). In Indonesia, the connectivity gap between urban and rural areas remains significant, meaning that Generation Z in remote areas—who may actually need counseling services the most—face the greatest difficulty accessing them. Thus, the claim that online counseling can "overcome geographical barriers" must be accompanied by the caveat that infrastructure barriers themselves have not yet been fully resolved.

The next challenge relates to counselors' limited digital competencies. In online sessions, counselors lose access to body language and facial expressions, which in face-to-face counseling serve as important sources of information for understanding clients' emotional states (Muslima, 2022; Pasmawati, 2016; Prayoga et al., 2025). These limitations have the potential to reduce the depth of the therapeutic relationship and the accuracy of assessments. In addition to nonverbal limitations, some counselors also have limited digital literacy, lack training in utilizing counseling applications, and are hesitant to adopt new technologies (Muslima, 2022; Pasmawati, 2016). Yet Julius et al. (2020) emphasize that digital competence is essential for counselors to develop relevant service delivery methods. Generation Z clients, in particular, are far more technologically adept and more tolerant of the absence of physical contact, as they are accustomed to building emotional connections through text and online communication (Ramadani et al., 2025). This gap creates a dynamic in the counseling process where clients are more proficient with the medium than the service providers themselves. This needs to be considered in the design of future cybercounseling services. Ethical and data security issues require special attention to ensure that client privacy is maintained during the counseling process (Prayoga et al., 2025). This is because there are still no clear regulations regarding ethical and legal standards for online counseling services in Indonesia (Muslima, 2022). Therefore, the risk of client data confidentiality being compromised remains. This means that clients' personal information could be leaked if the system is not secure (Harahap et al., 2024). Thus, a code of ethics and service usage agreements, such as time management and the use of polite language in online communication, are essential (Lestari et al., 2024).

The final challenge relates to the limitations on the types of cases that can be addressed online. Not all psychological issues are suitable for the online counseling format, such as severe cases, complex trauma, psychosis, or personality disorders that require in-depth assessment and direct intervention (Prayoga et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant for Generation Z, given that many of them face fairly serious mental health issues due to academic pressure, social isolation, and excessive exposure to social media (Akbar et al., 2024). If these cases are not properly identified from the outset, online counseling risks providing inadequate services; therefore, an initial screening is an essential prerequisite for online counseling to function ethically and effectively.

Recommendations for the development of digital-based counseling

Current challenges and opportunities are paving the way for the development of digital-based counseling. Enhancing counselors' digital competencies is a top priority to ensure that services can be delivered professionally and innovatively in the Society 5.0 era (Ayuni et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2024; Muslima, 2022; Pasmawati, 2016). These competencies include mastery of technological platforms, the ability to read emotional expressions online, an understanding of digital communication ethics, and the skill of building trust without physical presence (Ristianti, 2022). This has become increasingly urgent given the significant gap between Generation Z clients, who are digitally fluent, and some counselors who are still lagging behind in technology adoption (Muslima, 2022; Pasmawati, 2016). This situation risks undermining counselors' credibility in the eyes of the clients they serve. Therefore, enhancing counselors' digital

competencies should be treated as a long-term professional investment, not merely as technical training (Prayoga et al., 2025).

In addition to counselor readiness, the design and format of the service itself also need to be redesigned to meet the needs of Generation Z. Hariastuti et al. (2024) suggest a combination of synchronous and asynchronous formats so that counselors can capture both the verbal and nonverbal aspects of clients more comprehensively, while Bizzotto et al. (2023) recommend a systematic integration between digital platforms and in-person services for greater effectiveness. Fitri & Aswar (2024) add that a humanistic and empathetic approach must remain the foundation even when services are delivered online. These three recommendations indicate that online counseling is not a replacement but rather a complement to conventional services.

Kusumanegara et al (2024) emphasize that digital services must be designed to be effective, efficient, innovative, and easily accessible, with personalized and relevant content tailored to individual needs. Schools and educational institutions are advised to provide digital media facilities that are easily accessible to students, teachers, and parents, training in the use of counseling applications, and the development of digital recording systems to facilitate the documentation of counseling results (Muslima, 2022; Prayoga et al., 2025). Anindya et al (2024) added emphasis on the use of secure and encrypted technology, protection of electronic devices, and investment in advanced technology security solutions.

In addition to providing technological infrastructure and using secure digital platforms, other issues related to the development of regulations, standards, and ethics in conducting cybercounseling need to be addressed. Ayuni et al (2021) provide detailed recommendations on standardization and codes of ethics, including ethical considerations, explanations of methods to clients, data security information, companion verification, discussion of alternative procedures, and explanations of possible technological failures. Bizzotto et al (2023) add to this the need for service quality standardization through digital counselor certification and strict codes of ethics, as well as strengthened regulation and data privacy through national legal policies. Anindya et al. (2024) explicitly call for the development of standardized national guidelines for online counseling in Indonesia. These findings indicate that regulation is an urgent necessity. For Generation Z, who actively share personal information digitally, the absence of an adequate data protection framework poses a real risk that could undermine their trust in online counseling services as a whole.

Collaboration between parties/agencies, public education, and continuous evaluation are necessary to strengthen the cybercounseling ecosystem. Bizzotto et al (2023) mention that multisectoral collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and mental health startups is necessary to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of services. This is in line with the statements by Hariastuti et al (2024) and Kusumanegara et al (2024), who recommend more comprehensive follow-up research to improve the effectiveness of implementation and long-term refinement of cybercounseling. Hariastuti et al (2024) added the importance of increasing public awareness so that online counseling services are better known and trusted by the wider community, as well as paying attention to Indonesian cultural aspects so that they are more accepted and relevant to the character of the community. Ayuni et al (2021) emphasized the need for cybercounseling supervision to assess the implementation of online counseling and evaluate the effectiveness of counselors. Therefore, the development of an online counseling ecosystem in Indonesia needs to be carried out in stages. Counselor competencies and regulations must first be established as a foundation before cross-sector collaboration and long-term evaluation can proceed effectively and truly benefit Generation Z

CONCLUSION

Online counseling in Indonesia is experiencing rapid growth and holds great potential as a modern counseling service solution, particularly due to its ease of access, efficiency, and alignment with the characteristics of Generation Z. However, its implementation still faces challenges, such as limitations in counselors' digital competencies, ethical issues, and data security. Therefore, strengthened regulations, enhanced professional competencies, and cross-sector collaboration are needed to support service quality. Moving forward, the development of online counseling needs to be carried out in an integrated manner to create a professional and secure system. Although it provides an important initial overview, this review still has limitations, as the number of articles reviewed only covers 15 articles; thus, the results do not fully

represent the entirety of online counseling practices in Indonesia and still require further research with a broader scope.

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