



Viewpoints of Students towards Cyber Counselling

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The use of technology has altered the appearance and operations of numerous professions, including that of the counsellor. However, cyber counselling, a recent form of counselling, is a relatively recent phenomenon in Ghana. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to measure the perspectives of students at the University of Cape Coast on the use of cyber counselling.

Methods: Using a sample of 600 undergraduates from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, a descriptive survey was conducted. The male to female ratio was 3:2. A questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale was utilised to collect the data. Means and standard deviations provided answers to the two study research questions that guided the survey. In addition, the two hypotheses were analysed using independent samples t-test.

Results: The survey discovered that respondents had either positive and negative viewpoints or opinions regarding the use of cyber counselling. In addition, both males and females showed affinity to cyber counselling. However, males were somewhat more hostile towards cyber counselling than females.

Recommendations: It was suggested that counsellors should increase their use of cyber therapy in their work with adolescents, as they have learned the skills and knowledge to utilise the internet and are comfortable with cyber counselling or e-counselling.

Keywords: Cyber counselling; e-counselling; electronic gadgets; telephonic; web based; WhatsApp.

1. INTRODUCTION

Counselling is a talking therapy that allows people to discuss their problems with trained professionals in a peaceful and safe ambiance. It has made people understand themselves, maintain good interpersonal relationships, and develop good communication and relationship skills, according to Hays & Erford 2018. Another definition of counselling that is a relationship that supports clients with physical, emotional, and mental health issues, helping them resolve crises, reduce feelings of distress, and improve their sense of wellbeing (American Psychological Association, 2008).

The exact meaning of "counselling" might vary among experts and authors. But in general, it is the process whereby a client talks about issues in detail, either intending to overcome them or exploring them comprehensively. For the purpose of this paper, the working definition of counselling is a professionally trained expert who helps people overcome their issues after a systematic chain of sessions.

1.1 Types of Counselling

For this paper, counselling can be classified as follows based on how or where the sessions take place. People most commonly favour the following types of counselling. In-Person: In the counsellor's office, the client meets the counsellor in person for face-to-face counselling sessions. It is one of the most prevalent and conventional counselling formats. A face-to-face

meeting is a characteristic of traditional counselling. It excludes relationships conducted via fax, television, telephone, letters, or other non-person modes of communication. The physical presence of two individuals satisfies emotional needs that cannot be met through any other form of communication [1]. Telephonic Sessions: The telephonic rounds that can be scheduled using telephone calls from the convenience of the client's home. This method is appropriate for busy individuals who may have difficulty entering the chambers. In this adaptable procedure, the client and counsellor discuss the client's issues in a safe setting.

Cyber counselling: also known as online counselling, is utilised when the client desires to maintain anonymity by avoiding face-to-face contact with the therapist. It is possible to correspond with the counsellor by email and to meet via video conference, online chatting, WhatsApp, Viber, and other electronic means. Clients are allowed to select the type that best meets their requirements. Online counselling, virtual counselling, internet counselling, e-therapy, e-counselling, web counselling, and computer-based counselling are alternative terms for cyber counselling.

Cyber counselling has existed since 1972, when the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) first experimented with it (Mathew, 2011), and has demonstrated a variety of client benefits since then. The trend of cyber-counselling is growing in popularity at present. In a university setting where students are extremely busy,

scheduling conflicts may hinder their ability to participate in face-to-face counselling sessions. They may also find that cyber counselling better suits their hectic lifestyles. In addition, some students may prefer distant communication because it allows them to express themselves freely; consequently, they are more at ease revealing their emotions via this medium. Others consider cyber counselling to be non-threatening. However, in order for an electronic counselling session to be successful, both the counsellor and the patient or the client must possess and utilise an internet-connected electronic device such as a mobile phone, smart phone, or computer. However, the use of the internet has some additional setbacks, such as data theft by hackers, the inability to find seasoned counsellors that match the needs of the client, unreliable networks, and poor power supplies, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana. There is also the issue of privacy and anonymity concerns for clients [2] (Nickolai 2014).

Regarding self-disclosure, students find it easier to disclose themselves via technological means as opposed to in-person. This is because demographic information like sex, age, and name may be concealed (Baker, Kurt, & Mike 2011). There is also evidence that clients may be more forthcoming; they may feel less defensive, fearful, and vulnerable. This is because, unlike in-person counselling, clients cannot see the counsellor during exchanges. In addition, individuals do not have to cope with and interpret the therapist's rapid emotional feedback signals, which may alter their emotions of the client. Cyber counselling delivers convenience, accessibility, and cost are other significant advantages [3,4]. For instance, both the counsellor and client can receive counselling anywhere without being confined to the counsellor's office or having to drive great distances to meet [5]. Studies have posited that even though both men and women enjoy online activities, including cyber counselling, there are gender differences towards cyber counselling [6,7,8].

1.2 The Ghanaian Context

Cyber counselling has been defined as the process of a professional counsellor meeting a client one-on-one in a remote environment using electronic means (Li et al., 2013). Adepoju [9] reported that many countries in Africa are turning to the use of electronic means to seek healthcare and other services. A lot of students in Ghana

have and use electronic gadgets a lot, especially among students in the second cycle and other higher educational institutions. There is also a high knowledge of the use of internet facilities by Ghanaian youth, especially among students [10]. Another study by Amponsah, Aheto, Anapey, and Kwapong [11] showed many students in Ghana have been using electronic means to study and do other stuff. The rapid advancement of the use of the internet could be explained in terms of the government's initiative to provide Wi-Fi services freely to all post-basic education schools in the country. The use of electronic means of counselling is now picking up gradually in Ghana. Currently, the University of Cape Coast has started providing cyber counselling services to students as of the 2021-2022 academic year and has made it a component of the university's students portal system, where a dedicated phone line is available for this purpose on a 24/7 basis. In Ghana, WhatsApp, e-mail, and video calls are the most frequently used online chat tools among the populace, especially the youth, Amos, Bedu-Addo, and Antwi [12].

It has been identified that few studies on the use of cyber-counselling have been done in Africa; hence, this current study adopted an online questionnaire called the Online Counselling View Point Scales by Rochlen, Beretvas, and Zack (2004) to study the points of view of students towards cyber-counselling in Ghana and to provide literature on cyber-counselling to fill the gap.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this work was to find out the:

- i) Specific viewpoints or attitudes of students regarding the available cyber counselling.
- ii) Viewpoints of students regarding cyber counselling based on their sexual orientation.
- iii) Differences in both positive and negative viewpoints of cyber counselling among students.

1.4 Research Questions

The two research questions that were formulated to guide the study are:

1. *What are the specific views of University of Cape Coast students toward cyber-counselling?*
2. *What are the views of University of Cape Coast students towards cyber-counselling with respect to sexual orientation?*

1.5 Hypotheses

Two research hypotheses were formulated to drive this work:

1. **H0:** *There is no significant difference in students' expression of positive View Point towards cyber counselling on the Basis of Sex.*
H1: *There is significant difference in students' expression of positive View Point towards cyber counselling on the Basis of Sex.*
2. **H0:** *There is no significant difference in students' expression of negative views towards cyber-counselling on the basis of sex.*
H1: *There is a significant difference in students' expression of positive views towards cyber-counselling on the basis of sex.*

2. METHODOLOGY

The research design for this work was the descriptive survey, and it was appropriate for this study because it was described the current point of views or the attitudes of students towards cyber counselling in Ghana. The study's population consisted of 600 undergraduate students of the University of Cape Coast. The instrument used was the Online Counselling Attitude Scales by Rochlen, Beretvas and Zack (2004), which is four point Likert scale. It has areas that measure the positive and negative viewpoints of counselling with Values and Discomfort dimensions for each; a high value means a better rating while a lower value means a bad rating. The responses available run from 4 to 1, indicating Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). It projects a mean score value of 12.5, and the reliability test produced a Cronbach's alpha of.85, which indicated that the tool was very reliable and good to use among the students (in Ghana).The data was gathered during the normal hours of the semester, when students were in school receiving tutorials. The data was analysed using mean scores and standard deviation for the research questions. The two hypotheses were analysed using a t-test on independent samples.

3. RESULTS

The results are presented in the following paragraphs:

Research question 1: *What are the specific View Points of University of Cape Coast students towards cyber counselling?*

This research question sought to find out the specific positive and negative view points of University of Cape Coast students towards cyber counselling.

With the exception of one specific positive view point, respondents' scores relating to positive view points have met the criterion mean score of 2.5. This means that respondents have a positive view of cyber counselling. It can be realised that the majority of the respondents indicated that if cyber counselling were available at no charge, they would consider trying it (M = 2.88, SD = 0.89). Again, respondents stated that using cyber counselling would help them learn about themselves (M = 2.79, SD = 0.87). However, respondents indicated that they have a less positive view point towards confiding their personal problems in an online counsellor (M=2.42, SD=0.92).

The data showed that for all five items, respondents' scores on the specific negative view points have met the cut-off point of 2.5. This shows that they have negative View Point towards cyber counselling. The respondents agreed that, if they were having personal problems, seeking help with an online counsellor would be the last option they would consider (M = 2.64, SD = 0.96). Again, respondents stated that it would take a major effort for them to schedule an appointment with an online counsellor (M = 2.62, SD = 0.85). Discussing stressful events with online counsellors was also feared by the respondents (M = 2.50, SD = 0.96), (N = 581).

Research Question 2: *What are the views of University of Cape Coast students towards cyber-counselling with respect to sex?*

The purpose of this research question was to find out the students' positive and negative view points towards cyber-counselling with regard to sex.

The results showed that the mean scores for the two groups are higher than the cut-off point of 12.5 indicating that both sexes have positive View Point towards cyber counselling. However, the females indicated a more positive View Points towards cyber counselling (M=13.42, SD=3.77) as compared to the males (M=12.93, SD=3.62).

Indicating that both sex have negative View Point in relation to cyber counselling. In other words, respondents demonstrated negative View Points towards cyber counselling based on their sex. However, the males indicated a more unfavourable View Point towards cyber therapy (M=12.91, SD=3.28) as opposed to the females (M=12.60, SD=3.43).

Hypothesis one:

H0: *There is no significant difference in students' statement of positive View Point towards cyber counselling on the Basis of Sex.*

H1: *There is considerable variation in students' statement of positive View Point towards cyber counselling on the Basis of Sex.*

To investigate whether significant difference exists in students' statement of positive view point regarding Cyber counselling on the Basis of Sex, independent samples t-test was undertaken. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 displays the independent samples t-test performed on students' statements of favourable View Point regarding cyber counselling with regards to sex. It can be inferred from table one that there is no significant difference between male and female students' positive viewpoints regarding cyber counselling (t = -1.54, df = 579, p = 0.122, 2-tailed), given the probability value (p-value) of 0.122 is greater than the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, based on the result, the null hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis two:

H₀: *There is no significant difference in students' negative perceptions of cyber-counselling based on sexual orientation.*

H₁: *There is a significant difference between male and female students' negative perceptions of cyber-counselling.*

A t-test was conducted on independent samples to determine whether or not there is a significant

difference in the students' expression of a negative viewpoint towards cyber counselling based on sexual orientation is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 displays the t-test on independent samples was performed on the students' negative view points toward cyber counselling on the basis of sex. There is no significant difference between the negative attitudes of male and female students toward cyber counselling (t= 1.093, df= 579, p=0.275, 2-tailed). This is because the probability value (p-value) of 0.275 exceeds the significance threshold of 0.05. Accordingly, based on the outcome, the null hypothesis was maintained.

4. DISCUSSION

Students have favourable attitude or viewpoints of counselling; hence, they are more likely to benefit from the increasing trend of cyber counselling in Ghana. This assumption is consistent with those stated by Békés and Aafjes-van Doorn [13], who reported that the majority of their young respondents from North America and Europe had a somewhat good attitude toward cyberspace, meaning that they will utilise cyber therapy in the future. Connolly, Miller, Lindsay, and Bauer [14] discovered in another study that adolescents have positive perceptions of cyber-counselling. It can be inferred from the study that students were inclined to use cyber counselling due to its compatibility with their busy academic schedules, as cyber counselling could be conducted at any convenient time and location without requiring physical presence [5].

However, some of the students showed poor viewpoints about some specific attitudes towards cyber counselling, some of these attitudes include an unwillingness to share personal matters with a cyber counsellor. This is to be expected, as not all people are willing to share some intimate issues with an outsider Bhat [15].

Table 1. Independent samples t-test on students positive viewpoint towards cyber counselling on the basis of sex

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	Sig (2 tailed)
Female	234	13.42	3.77	579	-1.54	.122
Male	347	12.93	3.62			
Total	600					

Source: [7]

Table 2. Independent samples t-test on students negative viewpoint towards cyber counselling on the based on sexual orientation

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	Sig (2tailed)
Female	234	12.60	3.43	579	1.093	.275
Male	347	12.91	3.28			
Total	600					

Source: [7]

On the basis of the sex of the respondents, the study further demonstrates that in terms of sex, they both do not show any significant differences, which could explain why both sexes view the usage of cyber counselling as beneficial. Furthermore, it could be attributed to the fact that they all use electronic devices and enjoy online activities, including cyber counselling; however, it was discovered that females have a more positive attitude toward online counselling than males, which contradicts the findings of Littman [16], who stated that gender is not a predictor of choice of online counselling among adolescents studied. Which assertion is also confirmed by Nuttman-Shwartz & Shaul [16] that there is no gender differences in the viewpoints of men and women, which is in sharp contrast by Awabil and Akosah [7] who studied the attitudes of the youth in Ghanaian towards online counselling and reported that gender plays a role in the desire for cyber-counselling among university students.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the study's findings, there is a desire for online counselling, which has been welcomed with approval by the students. As a result, in order to progress in their careers, counsellors should utilise online counselling as a major approach. The use of the internet has made the world a global village, hence the use of cyber counselling will connect counsellors in all parts of the world to others who may need their services without hindrance due to time, space and distance, and this will ultimately increase the productivity of both counsellors and students. E-counselling has a bright future due to the proliferation of electronic devices and internet services on college campuses.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Cape Coast (for the original research, but for this article, ethical clearance was not needed as the data is secondary data that is available in the public domain).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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