

From Assessment to Action: The Role of Online Counseling in School Mental Health Efforts

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ABSTRACT

Mental Health issues among school-aged children and adolescents are so severe that the current campus assistance system is unable to resolve them in an ordinary way. In order to achieve this goal, by exploring which kinds of help do online counselling offer for enhancing schools' activities in mental health? And according to the screened data collected via digital channels, what type of assistance could they provide. Based on ecological system theory and the stepped-care model, it was argued in this paper that online counselling does not replace traditional face-to-face treatment; Instead, it provides an additional layer of support to address issues with access and detection identified in current services. Observe important parts, such as the creation of digitalised mental health assessment instruments, promoting the building of platforms for online guidance (individuals/Groups) ,and associated risks in environments where delivery of digital services is carried out, including privacy damage during therapy sessions and variations in therapeutic effects due to differences in technology application abilities among individuals. In summary, according to the research results of this paper, some policy recommendations aimed at integrating online counselling services into the existing school mental-health-care system at campuses would also be put forward.

KEYWORDS

Online counseling; School mental health; Digital assessment; Stepped care; Ecological systems theory; Telepsychiatry; Mental health equity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Unsatisfied needs for mental health care in school-age children and adolescents are currently at a high level among the problems facing global public health issues today. According to data released by the World Health Organisation in 2022, about one seventh of the world's youth have experienced some form of mental illness; However, only a small proportion has sought help from professionals. In schools, as young people have spent a considerable portion of their formative years there and have experienced early education in it, it would be advantageous to intervene sooner with those who are less well served by current resources. The national counseling-to-student ratio is far below the recommended level; the psychological consultation at many schools has accumulated a large number of cases with long waiting times, sometimes exceeding one week, and access varies across different regions due to varying geographic locations and economic conditions among students.

Online counselling has gradually become a substitute method of providing mental health service and some deficiencies found in traditional mode of providing this kind of service have been improved through online platform. digital platform can expand the influence of trained counsellors outside campus counselling Centre and set up an Asynchronous Communication mode that suits students' life scenarios; At the same time, it collects comprehensive mental Health Data on this basis in Real-time

to guide Personal intervention and Institutional design. Kessler and his team's epidemiological studies have shown that among many mental disorders, the median age of onset is often during adolescence and early adulthood; Therefore, it has become an important area where school-based screening takes place [4]. Whether schools need to focus on cultivating students' mental health issues varies; what matters most is expanding the actual capacity for handling such problems under constrained resources in most cases.

The viewpoint of this paper can be stated as follows: Reasonably integrated within the existing school mental health system, online psychological services function as a link bridging assessment outcomes with action - it first detects whether there are problems among students based on recognition systems, then offers corresponding guidance through instant-access platforms and scientific-diagnosis instruments. Based on an analysis of related theories, we form a combination through exploration; then provide details about how digital technology has been impacting the assessment and intervention processes within school mental health education; subsequently delve into some issues resulting from the application of these online platforms as well. The aim here is not so much to promote unconditionally the use of digital technologies as it would be difficult without considering their limitations in support for youth psychology outside institutions.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The two theories serve as the basis of this analysis on this problem's circumstances. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory describes that the influence of people on their own growth includes many aspects at various levels such as micro-systems, mesosystems, exosome System and macro systems; These influences vary in different situations [2] . It is applied in schools for use as a guide to focus on relationships between individuals rather than solely an explanation based on isolated problems within the mind. The school is an essential small system within the life of young people that either offers or does not offer adequate mental health support, which forms part of their education rather than being outside it. In terms of the whole ecosystem view, Online counselling should not replace existing systems that address students' needs but adjust them; Extend mid-system connection links among students, psychologists, parents and other participants through digital means to connect these resources.

The second system for organising the delivery of mental health services based on stepped care is organised in this way: starting from universal prevention and psycho education at one end, gradually increasing to guidance by oneself, supported therapy groups, counselling individuals, specialized treatment, up until professional medical rescue or other kinds of emergency assistance. Regarding the basic concept, it is given little help for people's daily necessities; if necessary measures become effective in solving problems after first attempts at intervention, then there would be an upgrade process[3]. Bower and Gilbody's seminal study on the step-by-step model for psychological therapy provided evidence to support that, through organisational design based on this approach, there would be an improvement in both efficiency and equity across the system; as a result, more intensive services were concentrated where they were urgently required rather than spread thinly among less severe problems.

Online counselling corresponds systematically to the graded approach map; It can offer various service forms according to its stages on this scale. Digital psychoeducation and self-guided assessment tools are at the bottom of the pyramid to extend coverage beyond whom would seek face-to-face consultation; Structured online counselling programmes are located in the middle position, offering accessible interventions for mild distress; And technology-assisted communication techniques support users in this part have reached their peak need continued care or other specialists. Overall, through both of these routes, we can see that although online counselling presents new prospects for the provision of psychological care in schools; however, if viewed solely as a

supplementary pathway within this existing System That Cannot Sense Students' varied Needs Fully As Such.

3. ASSESSMENT IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

The evaluation of students' psychology needs to integrate into a Service System that is good at detecting problems proactively and dealing with them promptly. The traditional way of assessing students' mental health is mainly reactive, with most students seeking help after their state reaches an extent requiring intervention (e.g., behavioral symptoms affecting daily functioning), and such programmes vary in terms of accessibility and participation among institutions. Digital technology has brought new opportunities for covering the range and extent of applications of mental health check-ups in schools; At the same time, many issues during implementation must be given due attention carefully.

The digitalisation of valid screened questionnaires has greatly reduced the logistics barriers to universal mental health screening in schools. Instruments such as the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 to measure depression and the Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 scale have been around for a while in clinical use; Now they can be applied via Web or APP channels so that scores are quickly obtained, elevations flagged automatically, and aggregated population-level data inform institution-wide planning. According to the American College Health Association's 2023 National College Health Assessment study, which gathers self-reporting mental health data from over a hundred thousand students at different universities through participation in several schools; This is another well-known method of obtaining population-level intelligence for school resource allocation based on digitised information. At the institutional Level, through aggregation of Data to help administrators and mental health professionals identify Patterns In service Use To develop targeted preventive measures And track how usage affects Users Experience At Different Time Stages.

Reyes-Portillo et al. conducted a systematic literature review on Web-based interventions for young people's internalising disorders to demonstrate that digital tools can serve as early warning systems for children's psychological issues by facilitating earlier detection through less sensitive self-revelation mechanisms compared with traditional forms of communication; Given the destigmatisation effects of this programme, especially beneficial for adolescents who tend to be sensitive towards social evaluations in helping situations.

At this time, lack of a follow-up intervention path will produce only data without implementation. There is a realistic danger that the school counselling team will be overwhelmed by cases exceeding its response capability after being screened; thus, in practice, we need to Design Screening Systems together with Service Capacity. A stepped-care framework offers an organising idea here; according to digital assessment data, allocate students into various categories on the care continuum, and deploy automatic low-intensity responses for minor presentations in this system, while assigning high-intensity cases directly to counselors.

4. FROM ASSESSMENT TO INTERVENTION: ONLINE COUNSELING IN PRACTICE

Translation of evaluation results to implement efficient interventions more effectively; it tests the actual application capability of online consultation at this time. There have been extensive researches on Internet-based psychological treatment over the past two decades; Although this is a field of developing school-specific applications yet it can provide reasonable trust for what Digital Service Delivery Can Bring About. Andersson and Cuijpers' significant meta-analyses on Internet-based treatment for depression found that these interventions could produce effects similar to those of traditional psychotherapy in treating mild to moderate cases; The latter had a greater reach than other

forms. Based on these results, whether it has an effect under other similar settings can be considered; We are still lacking information about resource accessibility issues affecting its effectiveness.

Individual online counselling - through video conference, secure message or a mix of synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication; This has become an important way for school-based individual digital mental health services under the promotion of fast-developing remote service facilities since the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in 2020. Hilty et al. have examined the effectiveness of tele-m mental care to provide reference criteria for its application; they point out that it must be ensured that the technological equipment used meets standards requirements, confidentiality procedures should be clear publicised and paid particular notice towards issues arising from remote communication settings during psychotherapy [9]. Transformation of School Counsellors into Online Forms, according to the aforementioned rules: ensure that students can enter a private, safe Internet Environment at any time during their sessions; Specify the recording conditions and retention periods of the sessions; Also set up particular communications skills required in Video-based Counseling.

Spence and others' study on the delivery form of online cognitive behavioural therapy for child and adolescents with anxiety found that an efficient digital intervention programme needs to be well-structured in terms of its structure and have some functions. The above examples support applying a structure-guided protocol-based format of online counselling in schools' mental health programmes; particularly those cases that are suitable for cognitive behavioural therapies[7]. Group-oriented online forms, such as psycho-education sessions and peer-support groups led by trained psychologists, extend the influence of professional help within a limited scale; One-on-many efficiency gains apply more directly to resource-limited school contexts.

Crisis Intervention still holds a position in school mental health services at which online transmission remains scarce. Digital platform supports preliminary risk assessment and safety planning communication; however, in managing acute suicidality emergencies, human intervention and institutional collaboration are required that virtual form does not possess. Therefore, an effective school mental health system can be seen that online counselling serves as an auxiliary to the in-person crisis intervention, using digital technology to expand service scope and maintaining physical support when required.

5. DISCUSSION

Here, some evidence has been provided showing an acceptable foundation for combining online counselling with the school's mental-health system. By combining digital assessment tools with platform-based intervention modes to solve some of the current problems encountered by traditional service delivery models, such as inadequate coverage, limited accessibility, and slow detection mechanisms; No proportional increase is needed for school mental health service scale under this new model. The theoretical backgrounds of ecological system theory and stepped-care model jointly offer an authoritative reference framework to integrate these two fields; thus, online counselling is situated in the general systemic logic of school mental health rather than seen as isolated technology.

There are still some problems unresolved. Probably, the problem of digital equity is at issue here. According to Lattie's summary of accessible digital mental healthcare services, there is a difference in having sufficient Internet access; There are private Digital devices with good conditions for using the Internet and some people have certain technical capabilities due to prior education or work experience. Students from low-income families, rural areas and underprivileged groups are all more prone to encountering obstacles in traditional in-person service provision and thus having less stable access to the corresponding digital facilities for online substitutes. A school mental health development model that solely offers online services and fails to address the problems of accessibility is likely to worsen it further.

Also need to pay attention therapy allocation problem for online environment. Staying connected in an array of factors that influence a patient's recovery outcome; Among these, had the greatest impact on therapeutic outcomes: The level of the therapist-patient relationship. There is a worry about whether, asynchronous in nature, digital communication formats may diminish the social connection of therapy and thus clinical research does not have an absolute answer to this problem yet. Online school-counsellor training focuses on the mastery of digital relationship-building skills; In institutions, specific rules and procedures should be established to adjust students' statuses from an online mode if they cannot meet the needs of psychological treatment.

In privacy and confidentiality considerations at schools, the existing legal framework concerning students' data overlaps with the Platform Terms of Service and institutional Data Management Practices. Teachers and parents should have full transparency of what data session contains, which individuals can access the data; In particular, when minors' right to privacy regarding confidential psychological counseling support cannot meet these standards due to family notification restrictions. Strengthening data Governance Frameworks in school-based online mental Health Services still needs to receive more Attention Policy-makers have yet to pay enough attention to this issue.

6. CONCLUSION

Online counselling has become an essential part of the construction of school mental health system, rather than resolving the problem that traditional structure had long held up on-campus psychological service provision; On its own, online-counselling cannot extend coverage as thoroughly as broader application can achieve. Whether the students encounter difficulties in learning, and whether they require special care - all of this are realised through a proper use scenario for digital resource application in teaching.

Based on the above discussion, Under what Conditions can an ideal combination of Online Psychological Intervention Strategies and School-based Mental Health Services Be Reached? The evaluation instrument should establish an implementation path of intervention rather than producing isolated measurement indicators. Service modality should be coordinated with the level of need at different stages in a stepped-care model, maintaining that specialists have reserved capacity and expanding low-intensity support to more people. In terms of institutions and policies, there is a need for digital equity at this time; online Services Should broaden the gaps that have already emerged. And the relational and ethical aspects of digital practice need to be addressed in counselor training, platform selection, etc. during this process.

The next generation study for integrated online-offline School Mental Health Systems in the future will have an increasing emphasis on long-term effects through various multi-gender/Multi-setting Examinations. Compared with existing international literature, there are still some deficiencies in our understanding of how governments globally regulate school-based digital mental health services, which can provide reference for the formation of China's own national regulations on this topic.

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