



Community counseling strategies to improve mental health literacy

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Community counseling strategies to improve mental health literacy



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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze community counseling strategies to increase public awareness about mental health services literacy. A cross-sectional survey design method was used and the samples included 339 respondents with an age range of 13 -50 years from various cities in Indonesia. The samples were selected using the Incidental sampling technique. Data were collected using a community awareness instrument for mental health services, implemented through an internet-based survey hosted on the Sobat Konseling account. The data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics. The results showed that respondents genuinely cared about mental health after being exposed to various vital information. However, there was a lack of understanding regarding the symptoms of mental disorders. There was also limited awareness regarding the function of professional services, with only 1.47% of respondents selecting to consult a professional counselor, while others preferred to seek advice from friends and families, or refused to seek counseling at all. The results served as a reference for community counseling, providing insights into the formulation of strategies to enhance knowledge and skills in identifying mental disorders. Moreover, there is a need to build trust and understanding of the roles and experiences of counselors in handling psychological disorders through online counseling services.

Keywords:

Mental disorder,
Public awareness,
Mental health literacy,
Community counseling

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Introduction

Mental health is a global issue often used as an indicator of national development (Kivimäki et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2018). Due to its importance, an agreement was established on September 25-27, 2015, at the headquarters of the United Nations (UN), in New York, United States. This event marked the ratification of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) document and was attended by representatives from 193 countries, including Indonesia (Ishatono & Raharjo, 2016). The SDGs encompass initiatives aimed at promoting continuous economic welfare, sustaining social well-being, ensuring environmental quality, as well as achieving justice and effective governance to enhance the quality of life for present and future generations (Rudiyanto, 2020).

Comprising 17 goals, the SDGs are a global and national commitment aimed at improving the welfare of the community (Jusuf, 2017). These goals serve as development indicators at both the national and regional levels (Bappenas, 2020). The SDGs recognize mental health as an indicator of a healthy and prosperous life, emphasizing the need to improve the mental well-being of communities worldwide. This is supported by the staggering estimates indicating that approximately 450 million

people worldwide experience mental disorders, including schizophrenia (Ameer, Arif, Sidorov, Gómez-Adorno, & Gelbukh, 2022; WHO, 2019). In Indonesia, there are 9,162,886 cases, amounting to 3.7% of the population (Riskesdas, 2018). The suicide rate stands at 71% per 100,000 population, with an estimated 1,800 cases per year (Budijanto, Kurniawan, & Widiyanti, 2019). In addition, the pressure of daily life and the burdens faced by individuals increase the susceptibility to stress, which indirectly causes mental or psychiatric health problems (A. W. Putri, Wibhawa, & Gutama, 2015).

Counselors in education, community, and health centers often encounter a common problem of counselees lacking information about mental health, leading to stress (Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, & D'Andrea, 2011). Public knowledge about mental disorders is limited, as sufferers are often considered a disaster or under a trial by God (Lubis, Krisnani, & Fedryansyah, 2015). Consequently, professional counselors often spend hours helping counselees address these problems, which may be avoided when there is an adequate understanding of mental health (Ahmed & Firdous, 2020; Lewis, et al., 2011; Umar & Salahudin, 2023).

People often turn to other sources rather than seek help from mental health professionals (Hancock, Northcott, Hobson, & Clarke, 2023; O'Connor, Martin, Weeks, & Ong, 2014). In both rural and urban areas, the dominant approach is visiting the Kiai, as religion is considered capable of providing cognitive and behavioral coping to overcome mental health disorders (Bin Zubir Salim, 2015; Subandi, 2012). The study by Hakim reported that attention to psychological problems in Gorontalo Province was significantly low. This situation was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hakim, 2012). At the commemoration of World Mental Health Day on October 10, 2020, WHO emphasized the consequences of lifestyle changes resulting from the Pandemic (Ridlo, 2020). The PDSKJI survey (2020) showed that 65% of respondents experienced anxiety symptoms, while 62% and 75% had depression and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), respectively. Another survey conducted by CESD Unpad after 6 months of the pandemic reported 47% depression symptoms, 22% acute stress, and 35.51% PTSD. Therefore, there is a need to provide mental health education to the community (Fatimah, Budi, Santoso, & Putra, 2021; Ildil et al., 2021; Weist et al., 2012).

Individuals with high mental health literacy are more likely to seek professional help (Handayani, Ayubi, & Anshari, 2020; Novianty & Hadjam, 2017). To achieve this, various communities genuinely concerned about mental health use social media to educate the public. These platforms include counseling friends, ordinary people, dear counseling, storytelling, edupotism, and others, which offer content containing mental health knowledge and online services (Bauman & Rivers, 2023; Casey, Joy, & Clough, 2013; Lazuras & Dokou, 2016). The development of educational services is expected to increase public awareness about the importance of mental health. Further studies are also needed to provide in-depth knowledge of mental health (Atilola, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to analyze public awareness of mental health services as well as effective community counseling strategies to improve literacy across Indonesia.

Methods

This study used a quantitative method with a cross-sectional survey design, wherein information about a population at a single point in time was analyzed (Connelly, 2016). The choice of this method was driven by the need for swift data presentation (Cresswell, 2015). The study population included all Indonesians who participated in filling out online surveys. Sampling was conducted using the incidental sampling technique (non-probability sampling), resulting in 339 respondents with an age range of 13 -50 years from various cities in Indonesia. Data collection was carried out through collaboration with a platform for mental health on social media, namely Sobat Konseling, which provided infographics, videos, and counseling services. Internet-based surveys were used along with Google Form through the account on Instagram. A questionnaire was employed to assess public knowledge of mental health services using seven indicators including (1) Importance, (2) Concerns, and (3) Reading about mental health, (4) Understanding symptoms, (5) Experiencing symptoms, (6) Understand the role of help services, and (7) Consult professionals. The questionnaire had been

validated for validity and reliability, making it appropriate for use in this study, then statistical computations and quantitative descriptive analysis methods were used.

Results and Discussion

This study collected data from 339 respondents residing in various provinces across Indonesia through the official Sobat Konseling account. It was assumed that the majority of respondents were social media users on *Instagram* who followed this account. The characteristics of the respondents analyzed are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The characteristics of respondents

Characteristics		F	%
Gender	Male	86	25,4%
	Female	253	74,6%
	Total	339	100%
Work	Student	111	32,74%
	University Student	170	50,15%
	Freelancer	31	9,14%
	Teachers	3	0,88%
	Others	24	7,08%
	Total	339	100%

Table 1 shows that the number of female respondents was greater than males, with a total of 253 (74.6%) and 86 (25.4%), respectively. The majority were University students, with a total of 170 (50.15%), followed by freelancers amounting to 31 (9.14%). Furthermore, the characteristics of respondents by region are presented in Table 2.

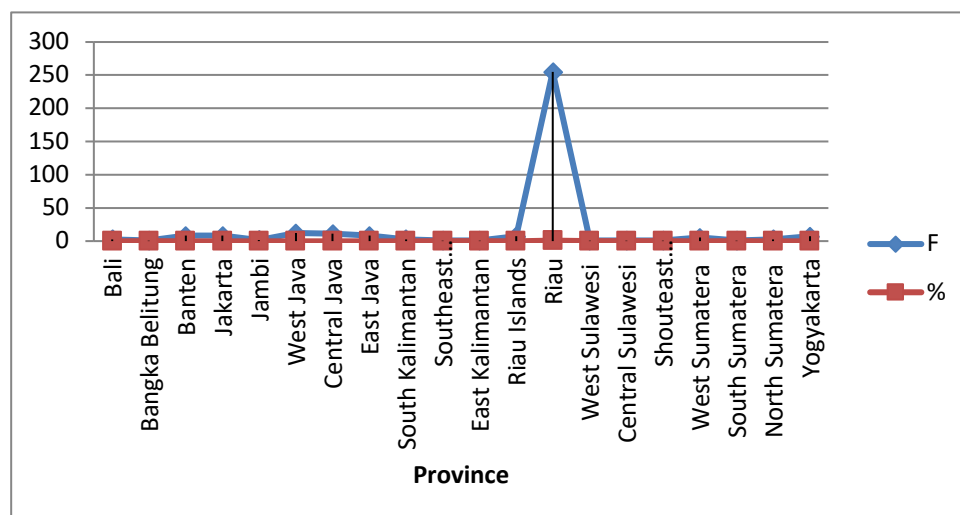


Figure 1. Demographic data of respondents based on city

Table 2 shows the demographic data for respondents taken from 20 provinces, covering western and central Indonesia. The majority of respondents were from Riau, with 255 (75.22%), probably because this study was conducted in this province. The demographic data visualization is presented in Figure 1.

A vertical black line in the middle of the cone line in Figure 1 indicates that the majority of respondents were from Riau Province. Furthermore, an overview of public awareness about mental health is presented in Table 3.

Table 2. The characteristics of respondents based on province

Province	F	%
Bali	3	0,88%
Bangka Belitung	1	0,29%
Banten	8	2,36%
Jakarta	8	2,46%
Jambi	2	0,59%
West Java	12	3,54%
Central Java	11	3,24%
East Java	8	2,36%
South Kalimantan	3	0,88%
Southeast Kalimantan	1	0,29%
East Kalimantan	1	0,29%
Riau Islands	7	2,06%
Riau	255	75,22%
West Sulawesi	1	0,29%
Central Sulawesi	1	0,29%
Southeast Sulawesi	1	0,29%
West Sumatera	5	1,47%
South Sumatera	1	0,29%
North Sumatera	3	0,88%
Yogyakarta	7	2,06%
Total	339	100%

Table 3. Description of Public Concern for Mental Health

No	Indicator	Alternative Choice	F	%
Indicator 1	Importance of mental health	Yes	240	70,79%
		No	99	29,20%
Indicator 2	Care about mental health	Yes	323	95,2%
		No	16	4,68%
Indicator 3	Reading mental health information	Yes	256	75,5%
		No	74	21,82%
Indicator 4	Understanding symptoms of mental disorders	Yes	144	57,52%
		No	185	87,68%
Indicator 5	Experiencing symptoms of mental disorders	Yes	108	31,86%
		No	231	78,13%
Indicator 6	Understand the function of help services	Yes	135	39,8%
		No	204	60,1%
Indicator 7	Consulting about mental disorders	Friends	170	50,15%
		Family	91	26,84%
		Psychologist	5	1,47%
		None	73	21,53%
		Total	339	100%

Based on Table 3, this study identified 7 indicators of Public Concern for Mental Health. In indicator 1, 70.79% of respondents stated that mental health was important, while in 2, 95.2% were found to genuinely care. Furthermore, in indicator 3, 75.5% of respondents read mental health information, and in 4, approximately 87.68% did not understand the symptoms of mental health disorders. In indicator 5, 78.13% did not experience symptoms, and in 6, 60.1% lacked knowledge about the function of professional services. Regarding indicator 7, 50.15% of respondents selected to consult friends. Figure 2 shows in more detail the graph of data distribution on the 6 indicators of Public Concern for Mental Health.

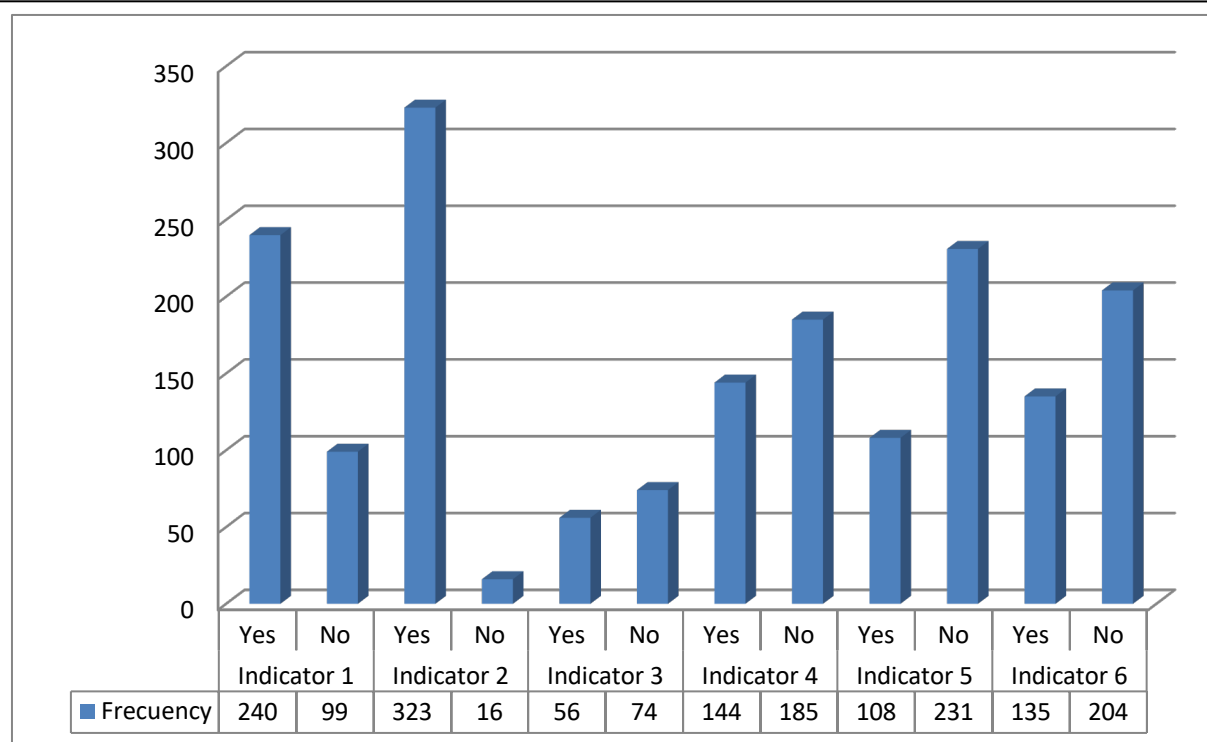


Figure 2. Graph of Public Concern for Mental Health

Figure 2 shows a graph representing data related to 6 indicators of Public Concern for Mental Health. Based on the graph, three indicators stood out in terms of respondents' preferences. The majority namely 323 (95.2%) selected the "Yes" option for indicator 2 "Care about mental health", followed by 256 (75.5%) in 3 "Reading mental health information", and 240 (70.79%) in 1 "Importance of mental health". This shows that the majority of respondents genuinely cared and recognized the importance of mental health. The results also showed 3 indicators with the highest number of "No" responses, including 4 "Understanding symptoms of mental disorders" with 240 (70.79%) respondents, followed by 5 and 6 related to "Experienced symptoms of mental disorders" and "Understand the function of help services" with 231 (78.13%) and 204 (60.1%) respondents respectively. The results indicated that the respondents lacked sufficient knowledge about the symptoms of mental disorders and the function of help services. Consequently, there is a need for counselors as professional practitioners to provide education and understanding to the public. Data on indicator 7 regarding the choices of people in consulting about mental disorders are presented in the Pie chart (Figure 3).

Figure 3 and Table 3 show that 170 (50.15%), 91 (26.84%), and 5 (1.47%) respondents consulted friends, families, and professionals, respectively, while 73 (21.53%) did not consult anyone. The results indicate a concerning lack of public literacy about seeking help from professional counselors and psychologists. According to previous studies, barely 1% of people prefer to seek assistance from a psychologist, which can lead to higher stress levels (Ifdil, Putri, & Amalianita, 2021). One of the most common reasons people avoid seeking care is the fear of being judged for their illness. This occurs frequently, possibly due to the stigma and perception of mental disorders as a disgrace (Supriyanto, Wibowo, Mulawarman, & Japar, 2022). The understanding of mental health among Indonesians is very limited, with the majority finding it difficult to recognize the symptoms (Subu, 2015). Furthermore, many are unaware of the availability of counseling services, both in person and on the Internet. People are also hesitant to consult counseling clinics due to the relatively high which are not covered by insurance, leading to other alternatives such as seeking advice from friends and family, while some might select not to consult anyone (Hanifah & Afridah, 2018; Rudianto, 2022).

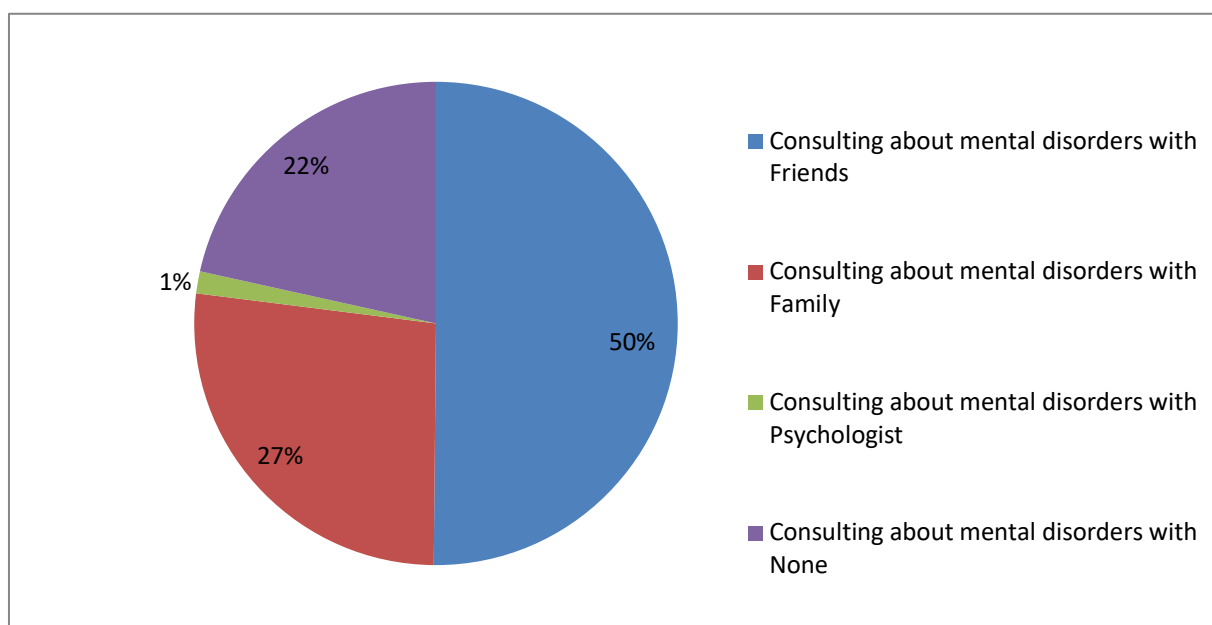


Figure 3. Pie Chart of indicator 7 “Consulting about mental disorders”

Mental health disorders, when left untreated deteriorate psychological well-being and affects all parts of life (Kim & Ko, 2018). Psychological problems can even lead to psychosomatic illness where sufferers experience physical symptoms without any underlying medical cause (Boukdir et al., 2022). Stress and anxiety stimulate the body to release hormones and chemicals that cause damage or dysfunction in various parts, resulting in physical disturbances such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, weakness or inability to move limbs, and heartburn (Ibeziako & Bujoreanu, 2011; Karimovna, Nasirovna, Tursunaliyevna, Abduvaliyevna, & Ravshanovna, 2023). Other symptoms such as lack of appetite, insomnia, headaches, and body aches are also associated with mental health issues. Moreover, various mental disorders such as PTSD, phobias, trauma, and OCD require expert care (Ifdil, Putri, et al., 2021; Lafleur et al., 2011). Consultation with a skilled counselor can help to prevent severe psychological illnesses (Ifdil, Putri, et al., 2021).

Optimal mental health involves the ability to adapt and overcome stress, conflict, frustration, and other challenges through certain alternatives (Amalianita, Putri, Fadli, Fitria, & Ifdil, 2021; R. M. Putri, 2023; Subu et al., 2023). Based on the results, 256 (75.5%) respondents read information about mental health and 185 (57.52%) understood the disorder symptoms. According to (A. W. Putri, et al.), a lack of knowledge can lead people to remain silent and resort to overly simplistic coping mechanisms, suggesting the need to improve mental health literacy. People who have a high level of literacy are more likely to seek professional help (Novianty & Hadjam, 2017). Therefore, increasing mental health literacy will automatically improve the knowledge of individuals in dealing with mental disorders (Idham, Rahayu, As-Sahih, Muhiddin, & Sumantri, 2019). There is a need for preventive and developmental interventions to enhance the management of stress (Amalianita & Ifdil, 2021). These preventive interventions can be provided through community counseling-based mental health education.

Counseling strategies should involve collaboration with peer professional counselors to educate and build trust within the community regarding the function and importance of dealing with mental health disorders. Furthermore, counselors are recommended to provide counseling services both in person and online to ensure easy accessibility to consumers. Mental health education efforts encompass promotive, preventive, curative, and rehabilitative activities, which should be carried out in a comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable manner by the government, local governments, and

the community (Ayuningtyas & Rayhani, 2018). Community mental health focuses not only on the deficits and disabilities of the people (disease perspective), but also on their strengths, capacities, and aspirations (recovery perspective) (Thornicroft, Deb, & Henderson, 2016).

In this modern age of high cellphone usage, social media can serve as an innovative platform for mental health education (McCarroll & Curran, 2013). As part of the efforts to achieve SDGs and government initiatives, many communities are prioritizing the use of social media as a forum for education. Using communication technology, counseling has evolved to include various methods such as email, chat, and webcam sessions (video live) (Wibowo, Milenia, & Azmi, 2019). Numerous platforms including counseling friends, ordinary people, dear counseling, storytelling, edupotism, and others provide content containing mental health knowledge. Some accounts have discussion sessions, offer videos based on real stories of people who have experienced mental disorders and recovered, as well as hold seminars by inviting health experts. These initiatives aim to increase public mental health literacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, access to important information through the internet has raised community awareness about mental health. However, some people were found to still lack information and the ability to recognize indicators of mental problems. The community also did not understand the function of professional services, resulting in the preference to consult friends, family, or remain silent when mental issues occur, rather than seeking assistance from counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. The results showed that the increase in mental health awareness was not accompanied by adequate information such as the appropriate venue for professional treatment. Therefore, mental health practitioners must broaden their reach to promote services and deliver knowledge on a worldwide scale through the Internet. This will facilitate the spread of information and abilities needed to deal with mental disorders in society.

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