

# Online psychological consultation service: problems and solutions

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the content, advantages and problems encountered in practice of online psychological counseling services. The results of the study show that online psychological counseling plays an important role in supporting mental health in modern society, but to increase its effectiveness, it is necessary to strengthen regulatory, technical and methodological aspects. Also, scientific considerations are presented on effective solutions to overcome these problems.

**Keywords:** psychological service, online psychological counseling, remote assistance, problem, solution, mental health, telepsychology

## Introduction

In recent years, the issue of mental health has been considered one of the most important and urgent problems both globally and in Uzbekistan.

*Psychological support* - is a professional activity that serves to strengthen a person's mental health, help overcome stress and emotional difficulties, and mobilize personal resources. In modern times, this activity is expanding through remote services.

On February 21, 2024, the Committee on Science, Education, Culture and Sports of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis, in collaboration with the Association of Psychologists of Uzbekistan, held a roundtable discussion on the topic "Legal Basis of Providing Psychological Assistance to the Population in Uzbekistan." The roundtable discussion focused on the fact that, despite the scale of work being done to develop the field, there are still socio-psychological, including family problems, cases of dependence on the negative effects of "mass culture", as well as the increasing popularity of the activities of individuals who illegally acquire the status of "psychologist" without having sufficient knowledge and qualifications. As noted by experts, it is necessary to establish in the legislation the requirement that persons who introduce themselves as "psychologists" through social networks and provide such services must, first of all, have higher education in this area and an appropriate document granting the right to provide psychological assistance. In addition, the fact that the concept of "psychological service" is not defined by legal and regulatory documents and there is no register of practicing psychologists creates difficulties in controlling their activities. Also, the fact that short-term "Training of Psychologists"

courses organized in some higher educational institutions are becoming commercial was criticized. The participants of the event analyzed foreign experience in training and licensing psychologists. In particular, they noted that in European countries the period of psychological training is from 3 to 5 years. The issue of licensing the activities of practicing psychologists was also hotly discussed at the round table. The roundtable discussion provided relevant proposals and recommendations on the development of laws aimed at regulating activities related to the provision of qualified psychological assistance to the population.

Since strengthening mental health is considered an important factor for the development of society, the demand for online psychological counseling services is increasing. Along with the convenience of the online format, it also creates a number of problems. Taking into account the fact that the life of every person consists of psychological processes and the need for psychological services in their lives, and of course, psychological counseling is necessary for each person to develop and mature as a person, to understand himself and society. The development of information and communication technologies of our time, the increasing needs of each person for Internet networks, indicate an increasing need for online psychological services. Of course, there are a number of problems in providing online psychological services today. By eliminating these problems, establishing an online psychological service will serve as a worthy tool for growth and development for each person in our society.

Various psychological pressures, stress, family and social problems, and workplace tensions negatively affect people's mental stability. According to the World Health Organization, one in eight people in the world experiences mental health problems. Therefore, the need to organize effective and popular forms of psychological support is increasing.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the limitation of face-to-face communication, online psychological counseling services have developed rapidly. This experience has shown the effectiveness of remote psychological assistance. Today, the ability to receive psychological counseling using Internet technologies is a great convenience for people living in rural areas, people with limited time and transportation, and those who want to apply anonymously. The development of the psychological service sector, including the legal and methodological regulation of online counseling, is also relevant in Uzbekistan. The resolution of the President "On measures to strengthen the mental health of the population and improve psychological services" serves as an important legal basis in this direction. Thus, online psychological counseling is one of the most relevant issues, as it: creates a convenient form of psychological assistance for the general public, reduces regional inequality, and serves as an effective mechanism for supporting people's mental health.

The concept of online psychological counseling

Online psychological support is an important direction in modern psychological practice. It is complementing traditional psychotherapy and becoming a source of effective support for many people. Therefore, improving the legal, methodological and information security foundations of this area in the future is one of the important scientific and practical tasks.

Online psychological counseling is a process of providing psychological assistance remotely, via the Internet in real time or through correspondence. It differs from traditional counseling in its geographical boundaries, speed, and anonymity.

Online services come in several forms:

Individual or group counseling via videoconference;

Chat and e-mail consultation - in the form of written communication;

Mobile application-based psychological support;

Sharing experiences through forums and online communities.

The theoretical foundation of online psychological support is based on the following approaches:

**Humanistic psychology:** a person is capable of realizing their potential, the cognitive-behavioral psychologist acts only as a guide. This principle is also a key criterion in online counseling.

**Cognitive-behavioral approach:** cognitive restructuring exercises and self-control tasks are effectively used through online platforms.

**Social learning theory:** enhances mechanisms for mutual observation, modeling, and sharing positive experiences via the internet.

What are the main positive effects of introducing remote forms of psychological services and who will benefit most from them? Three undeniable advantages can be identified:

1. Increasing the availability of psychological support. In addition to expanding the geography of psychological services and improving the quality of services for residents of hard-to-reach areas, the introduction of remote psychological support methods can be carried out taking into account ethno-cultural factors. Moreover, clients' assessments of the quality of remote support are practically no different from their assessments of direct interaction with a specialist.

2. Saving resources and/or their competent redistribution. The reduction in costs will be significant even for hard-to-reach areas and special groups of subjects. The economic effect will be even higher if there is interest in organizing such forms of work from the local community. Interaction between a general practitioner and a specialist

The field of remote psychological work also helps in the prevention and early identification of people in need of psychological help.

3. Increasing the role of the client in the therapeutic process. Remote psychological work can be used with clients who have relatively low motivation to

seek psychological help or who, for certain reasons, cannot actively participate in the traditional help process. Remote work also provides a certain level of confidentiality and allows for partial relief from concerns about social disapproval and stigmatization that may arise from the fact of seeking psychological help, which can be important for those living in small towns or rural areas.

#### Advantages

- Convenience and speed - the ability to communicate with a psychologist anywhere and at any time.
- Anonymity - reduces personal discomfort.
- Comprehensiveness - provides psychological support to residents in remote areas.
- Technological integration - increased efficiency using video communication, mobile applications and platforms

- Wide opportunities for people with disabilities

- Providing continuous support during a pandemic.

Reasons for the emergence of online psychological counseling

#### *1. Technological development*

The widespread use of the Internet and mobile devices has facilitated remote communication between psychologists and clients. Online platforms, mobile applications, and video conferencing programs (Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, etc.) have made remote counseling a reality.

#### *2. The problem of time and distance*

The inability to make time for a personal meeting or travel from a distance has prompted many people to turn to online counseling. This service has become especially relevant for those living in remote areas.

#### *3. COVID-19 pandemic*

During the 2020 pandemic, as a result of quarantine and restrictions, a large part of psychological services moved online. This period demonstrated the effectiveness of online counseling in practice and gave impetus to its widespread development.

#### *4. Anonymity and psychological barriers*

Many people are embarrassed to go to a psychologist in person or are afraid of stereotypes in society. Online counseling has provided anonymity and has allowed to attract more clients.

#### *5. Globalization and speed*

In the digital age, people need immediate help. Online counseling has provided the opportunity to provide real-time assistance.

#### *6. Economic factors*

Online services are often cheaper and more convenient. For the psychologist, office rent and organizational costs are reduced, and for the client, travel and time are saved.

#### Disadvantages of online psychological counseling

1. Personal data security and privacy - there is a high risk of data leakage to third parties. In online services, the customer's personal data is transmitted over the internet. Insufficient protection of the database or platform can lead to a privacy breach.

2. Trust issues - lack of face-to-face communication between psychologist and client makes it difficult to build trust. Building trust between psychologist and client is more difficult than in a face-to-face meeting. In this case, nonverbal signals such as body language and facial expressions are not fully received.

3. Quality control - there is a risk of services being provided by unlicensed individuals. Online consulting services are being provided on various platforms, often by professionals without special licenses. This makes it difficult to control the quality of services.

4. Technical difficulties - internet quality, platform issues can disrupt the process. Low internet speed, platform technical glitches, or power outages can disrupt the online consultation process.

5. Insufficient legal framework - telepsychology is not specifically regulated in national regulatory documents. Online psychological counseling services are a new area in Uzbekistan. Therefore, the legal framework, ethical norms and compliance with international standards in providing services have not yet been fully developed. Online projects are being implemented in Uzbekistan to provide legal and psychological assistance to women, but there are no unified standards and methodologies in this area.

#### Solutions

1. Licensing and standardization of psychological services - introduction of separate telepsychology requirements and a certification system for specialists. To ensure the quality and effectiveness of psychological services, it is necessary to develop licensing and national standards. This should include additional requirements for the level of qualification of specialists, ethical rules, and the online format

2. Strict rules for ensuring confidentiality - data encryption, special consent forms and restrictions with third parties. Protection of personal data is one of the most important issues in online psychological counseling. Therefore, strict rules should be developed, such as data encryption, obtaining user consent, and limiting the sharing of information with third parties.

3. Professional development and adaptation to the online format - organization of training, supervision and advanced training courses in telepsychology. It is urgent for psychologists to acquire special competencies in telepsychology. Therefore, higher education institutions and professional associations should introduce certified courses and advanced training programs in telepsychology

4. Special platforms and technological support - use of platforms that comply with standards, development of national software. The use of special platforms is important for the effective organization of online consultation. They should meet HIPAA/GDPR

standards, have technical requirements such as encryption, identification and secure server location

Online psychological counseling services are of great importance in modern society, creating new opportunities for supporting people's mental health. At the same time, there are problems such as security, trust, quality control and technical difficulties. To overcome them, it is necessary to strengthen licensing, confidentiality rules, train specialists and use special platforms. By implementing these solutions, the effectiveness of online psychological counseling services in Uzbekistan can be significantly increased.

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