PEER COUNSELOR: ONLINE PFA (PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID) DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

COVID-19 brings impact globally towards every aspect in life, including mental health. The regulation of social distancing and quarantine as the means to control COVID-19 outbreak has changed the ways of socializing which unavoidably affects mental health as well. With this sudden change, mental-health help services are affected in the area of service procedure from face-to-face service to online service. Online PFA (Psychological First Aid) is a relevant alternative and becomes the solution for mental-health help service during pandemic. At Center of Psychology and Career Development (P4K: *Pusat Pelayanan Psikologi dan Pengembangan Karir*) in Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University (UIN SAIZU) Purwokerto, Peer Counselor (PC) is the forefront in PFA service for students and publics. PC consists of students majoring Islam Guidance and Counseling at Faculty of Da'wah who join P4K through selection test and PFA training. Online PFA becomes a way out because of its easy availability as long as the PCs are trained well. The purpose of this research is a reflective learning regarding the implementation of Online PFA Service during COVID-19 conducted by PC in Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University. The data were collected by conducting Online Focus Group Discussion (FGD). There were 17 PC respondents selected by purposive sampling method. The result of FGD shows that the issues explained by the clients are commonly related to education, family, friendship, and love. The most common online communication method requested by clients is through chat, secondly voice call, then voice note, and lastly video call. The issues experienced by PC during the service include unstable network, unconducive environmental condition, and countertransference. PFA telecommunication-service is very helpful in comforting clients' issues. The result of this research is that PFA service given by PC increases self-development of PC, especially for skills related to counseling.

Keywords: peer counselor, online PFA, COVID-19 pandemic

KONSELOR SEBAYA: LAYANAN TELE-PFA (PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID) *SELAMA PANDEMI COVID-19*

Abstrak

COVID-19 berdampak global pada hampir semua aspek kehidupan, termasuk kesehatan mental. Penerapan metode social distancing dan karantina sebagai upaya pengendalian penyebaran COVID-19 telah mengubah cara bersosialisasi, bahkan mengganggu kesehatan mental. Dengan perubahan ini, pelayanan kesehatan mental juga terpengaruh dimana mekanisme pelayanan yang sebelumnya dilakukan secara tatap muka berubah menjadi pelayanan online. Tele PFA merupakan alternatif yang relevan sebagai solusi layanan kesehatan mental di masa pandemi. Di Pusat Pelayanan Psikologi dan Pengembangan Karir (P4K) UIN Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri (UIN SAIZU) Purwokerto, PC merupakan garda terdepan dalam pelayanan PFA bagi mahasiswa dan masyarakat. PC adalah mahasiswa senior pada jurusan Bimbingan Konseling Islam Fakultas Dakwah yang bergabung dengan P4K melalui seleksi dan pelatihan PFA. Tele PFA dipilih karena dapat dilakukan oleh siapa saja yang terlatih dan memiliki pengetahuan tentang cara melakukan PFA melalui berbagai metode online. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendapatkan gambaran deskriptif tentang dinamika layanan Tele PFA. Penelitian ini berfokus pada layanan Tele PFA yang dilakukan oleh PC yang tergabung dalam P4K UIN SAIZU. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan

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Focus Group Discussion (FGD) yang dilakukan secara online dengan 17 responden PC. Hasil FGD menunjukkan bahwa keluhan yang disampaikan klien umumnya berkaitan dengan masalah pendidikan, keluarga dan percintaan. Dari hasil penelitian terlihat bahwa metode Tele PFA yang paling banyak diminta adalah melalui chat, diikuti layanan melalui voice call, voice note dan video call. Tantangan yang dialami oleh PC saat melakukan layanan terkait jaringan, kondisi lingkungan yang tidak mendukung selama layanan dan countertransference. Layanan tele PFA sangat membantu dalam meringankan masalah klien dan juga meningkatkan pengembangan diri PC, terutama yang berkaitan dengan keterampilan konseling.

Kata Kunci: konselor sebaya, tele-PFA, pandemi COVID-19

Introduction

COVID-19 outbreak has caused deep sorrow for people around the world, including Indonesia. COVID-19 or Coronavirus Disease-2019 is a type of respiratory disease caused by a new kind of coronavirus called *Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2* (SARS-COV2). Since March 2020, WHO has declared COVID-19 as global pandemic meaning that this virus is spreading all over the world. In Indonesia until 30th July 2021, active cases of COVID-19 reached 3.3 million cases with more than 90.000 deaths (*COVID.go.id*, 2021). This is not only very harmful for public's physical health, but also for their mental health, especially anxiety (Stafford et al., 2021) and depression. Women and people with psychiatric history are prone to psychological effect of COVID-19 pandemic (Karaivazoglou et al., 2021). There is a need to emphasize that critical condition is not merely physical need, but for physiological need as well (El-Khani et al., 2016). Variation of up and down in psychological welfare during COVID-19 depends on pace and intensity of COVID-19 outbreak and social distancing of an area (Sønderskov et al., 2021).

Not only that, all governments around the world affected by pandemic try kinds of regulations to prevent and push down the number of total COVID-19 cases, one of them is physical and social distancing implemented through lockdown system, Indonesia Large-Scale of Social Restriction (PSBB), and also Restrictions Towards Community Activities (PPKM) (Wahidah et al., 2020). These implementations affect psychology services, in regard to conducting face to face service. Therefore, there arises a need for innovation and coordination in the system of mental-health service during pandemic, and the solution is through creating an online psychology service (Javadi & Nateghi, 2020). Psychology service or PFA (Psychological first Aid) which is now conducted online is the service for countering this pandemic situation because it is almost the same as face-to-face service, with some concerns regarding hardware and software or different media needed for conducting this service. The media for this service are usually chat, voice call, video call, website, and other social media. The advantage side of this online counseling is able to reach targets in a large scale, anytime and anywhere. In contrast, the disadvantage is the difficulty in delivering nonverbal instructions which might cause inaccurate diagnosis and intervention (Sari, 2021).

The existence of PFA is very important during COVID-19 pandemic because this is closely related to psychological readiness of the public in facing this pandemic, otherwise they would experience crisis in their mental health condition (Priyantini et al., 2021). PFA is simple, easy, and effective way to help people with psychological problems in this time of crisis by receiving the help of PFA from well-trained

individuals for PFA (Damayanti & Avelina, 2018). The goal of this service is to reduce psychological stress and prevent worse impact, lower the feeling of fear, isolation, give help in solving problem and self-defense. The result of PFA evaluation in crisis and disaster conditions show that people receiving PFA have adaptive response (Zainuddin & Sulastri, 2021), feel more relaxed, have positive hope for the future (Schafer et al., 2016) and give happier verbal expression (Amin et al., 2021). There are three principles in PFA service: look, listen dan link (Psychosocial Centre, 2020). PFA is not only for professionals, but also for people who received PFA training (Minihan & Gavin, 2020), including Peer Counselor (PC). PC is teenagers with basic counseling skills who has purpose to lighten up psychological problems of their peers (Risnawaty et al., 2019). The existence of PCs is expected to provide solutions to teenager's problems (Hidayati et al., 2017), especially during COVID-19 pandemic.

As a form of contribution to solving psychological problems especially for students during COVID-19 pandemic, UIN SAIZU through Center of Psychology and Career Development (P4K: *Pusat Pelayanan Psikologi dan Pengembangan Karir*) provides online PFA service for students through Teman Sehati (Heart-to-Heart Friends) platform. PFA service providers are peers or Peer Counselor (PC) with a service duration of an hour. PC is students of the Faculty of Da'wah majoring Islam Guidance and Counseling (BKI: *Bimbingan Konseling Islam*) in their final semester or semester 7 and have attended PFA tele-training. The regulation regarding social restriction prevents PCs to provide services at P4K Center, resulting PCs to perform their services at home with their personal communication device and unstable network because they live in a remote area and so do their clients. In terms of service, PC is assisted by CC (Call Center) whose job is to record and connect clients and PCs. This situation is new, challenging, and interesting to study, because before pandemic, most of the psychological services were conducted offline with conducive conditions. In offline service, the client and PC are in the same room, thus PC is able to read the client's verbal and nonverbal expressions well and there are no communication barriers resulting PC to provide optimal services.

This research is expected to be a reflective learning regarding the implementation of online PFA service during COVID-19 pandemic conducted by PC in Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University (UIN SAIZU) Purwokerto. For PCs as agents providing Online PFA service, this situation is new and has never implemented before, making this interesting to study in hope to optimize the quality of service.

Method

This research used qualitative method. Participants were selected through purposive sampling method meaning that the participant's selection was in line with the researcher's subject criteria such as: 1). Students in Peer Counselor of Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University (UIN) Purwokerto, 2). Have conducted Online PFA service during COVID-19 pandemic, 3). Have provided services around 6 (six) months. The participants who meet these requirements are 17 (seventeen) students. The data were collected through Focus Group discussion (FGD) in July 2021 from teleconference or online meeting. In this FGD, the participants were divided into 3 (three) groups. Every group consisted of 5-6 people with 1 leader and 1 co-leader. The process of FGD were recorded in the form of video conference.

According to framework of Psychosocial Centre 2020 about online PFA during COVID-19, the aspects studied in this research are: 1) Cases handled by PCs during Online PFA service 2)

Communication media during online PFA 3) Situations during online PFA, 4) Effectiveness of online PFA during COVID-19. The analysis of data research was conducted by using thematic analysis with the purpose to analyze qualitative information by giving meaning of every data collection (Poerwandari, 2017). The process of analysis included writing verbatim transcript, reading the transcript repeatedly, adding codes based on research's aspects, analyzing the data, and presenting the data.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Research Subjects

No	Initial	Age	Gender	Duration of Peer Counselor
1	SB	25 years old	L	6 months
2	NH	22 years old	P	6 months
3	SN	22 years old	P	6 months
4	YR	22 years old	P	1 year
5	IK	22 years old	P	6 months
6	NS	22 years old	P	6 months
7	IM	22 years old	P	6 months
8	LH	21 years old	P	1 year
9	YN	23 years old	P	1 year
10	DO	23 years old	L	6 months
11	GN	20 years old	L	6 months
12	DW	23 years old	L	6 months
13	VR	23 years old	P	6 months
14	NT	21 years old	P	6 months
15	LL	22 years old	P	1 year
16	RN	23 years old	P	6 months
17	EF	22 years old	P	1 year

The Results of Research

Table 2. FGD Results

FGD Results	Verbatim Transcript Quotation
• Cases in online PFA service provided by PCs during COVID-19 include education, family, friendship, and love. • The severe problems include trauma, self-harm, and suicidal tendency.	**NH**: *"the first is school problem, the second is love problem."* **LL**: *"having insomnia, feeling traumatic when seeing blood, having relationship problem with the partner..."* **VR**: *"Relationship with partner, feeling uncertain for making decision whether to continue going to school or what, having distrust issue with partner"* **GN**: *"from toxic friendship to self-harm..."* **DW**: *"thesis problem, family problem, behavior-pattern problem"*. **SB**: *"mostly is having anxiety, Ms., also negative thinking, family problem, and love problem…"* **NH**: *"Feeling burden to continue doing the thesis, yet want it to be done quick,…" ..Client also has suicidal tendency.."* **SN**:*" ...feeling traumatic for being the victim of sexual violence, the second time was also with their relative…" when they got recommendation, they are happy to receive that"* **IK**:*" ... Related to family problem, parental attention, their mother never gives them those...'.* **IM**: *"...This one is a love problem, Ms…".* **YN**: *"...having mood swing, having a feeling of becoming a disappointment for their family because they are late to join Student Study Service (KKN), decrease in GPA… they even do self-harm..."*
• Communication Media during online PFA service requested by clients from most to least are chat, voice call, voice note, and video call.	**NH:** *"all chats", …some of them are voice notes. The advantage of voice notes is that we could understand better what our clients are feeling because there are differences between chatting and voice notes Ms, It's clearer to use voice notes, we will know when our client is angry, like the first client is feeling angry at that time, thus their tone shows their anger as well, so we would be able to calm them down. The disadvantage side is …time consuming Ms, because I have unstable internet connection here, so it will take a long time to download it..* **VR**: *"I usually use WhatsApp chat, voice note, or phone call, for video call, they usually don't like it Ms, so they prefer a phone call. For chatting, the disadvantage is that I need to follow up further continuously. For phone call, the problem is unstable network because they usually call through WhatsApp, not regular phone call, so sometimes when having a serious conversation with client, the network disappears, so they have to repeat again. Also for chatting, the client is sometimes busy doing something else, so they reply late, and we have to wait for that...* **DW**: *For chat service, we couldn't do that, we wouldn't know the client's feeling, maybe just from emoticon they frequently use, but still we don't know their expression and feeling exactly.* **NH**:*" ...the second one is through call. Most of them are WhatsApp Call... It's easier through phone call, because sometimes through chatting, when we have replied the chat quickly, but the client hasn't read the chat for a long time, and it makes the conversation not focus. However, through phone call, we will be more focus, we could give feedback and they would response immediately*

SN*: "...Only for WhatsApp Chat, it's more comfortable there because we have time to think before answering questions from client. The disadvantage is that we don't know their expression..."*

YN*: I personally use WhatsApp chat from the start until the end Ms.*

▪ Issuess during online PFA service are related to unstable network, unconducive environmental condition, and countertransference.

LL: *"...Sometimes, for example psychological issue, because of client's problem, it makes us think about it as well. When the clients tell their story and problem, we also think about it like making it enter to our subconscious, making us wondering this is what happens, how it feels, and so on..."*

VR: "*Because after giving counseling, sometime it makes me think about it for quite a while, makes me feel anxious, like feeling so uncomfortable for some reason … "*

SB: *"...Sometimes it takes my thought too, because I ever had a case where I thought about client's problems so hard that it physically hurt me.."… very uncomfortable, when giving counseling, suddenly a friend comes, even though we have tried to find a very good spot for counseling*

YR: *"…When the situation in my house is very crowded and we are giving counseling, the condition becomes very unconducive..."*

EF: *"Sometimes the client's stories got to my head until I feel really down"*

▪ Effectiveness of online PFA service is very good because it helps clients in facing their problems.

NH: *"Alhamdullilah the response was good, the client said 'Actually I just need someone to share my stories Ms, thank you for listening to me, and for the suggestions'..."*

VR: *"When they have felt better, I feel more relaxed..."*

GN: *"They feel they are listened, appreciated, because all this time, they only just tell me those stories, so they feel relieved. Also, the service is effective by adjusting the options to client's needs..."*

DO: *"They feel very relieved… I think it is effective, the results after the counseling, they report me their progress...".*

SB*:"* Alhamdullilah *the client said they are much better now… tele PFA helps a lot, Ms, it helps client who needs to share their problems, when their problems are too serious, they could get reference to other services, so it is very helpful in my opinion, especially it's free… it eases people who need help and suggestion.*

YR*: "I personally think it is very effective, Ms, because in this pandemic, we aren't able to have a meeting directly, so PFA online service is very effective. For example, we have problems, but we can't tell them to professionals because of the fee, distance, and so on. Therefore, through PFA, we could help them, we could direct them to what they need, for instance they need to go to psychologist, we would give them the contact, we direct them according to their needs. Usually, the client is also confused because they don't know what to do with their problems, where to go, so PFA are able to give first step for them, we help them by free, accessible anywhere or anytime..."*

Results of this services are also self-development and improving PC's skills.

NH: *"...amazing experience, I get to have new friends, knowledge, issues to face, and experience. I also feel a sense of happiness to help others, Ms."*

GN: *"This trains our professionality, and responsibility."*

DW: *"...We could see problems in many perspectives, have more self-awareness, learn more from professionals, have more patience, more empathy when facing problems..."*

SB: *"I have amazing experience … We are able to learn from clients ... I become more self-aware, are able to have more self-control, able to adjust to our own problem… so it*

increases empathy towards other."

NH: *"When study in university, I learn a lot of material, so by being a PC, I could have practical experience, Ms… Happy to help others. …" I now understand what is PFA, how to apply it to clients, I also learn so much from the clients."*

IK: *"I learn a lot, so when a friend tells their story, I am now skilled enough and more focus to listen their points from their problems"*

YN: *"I have new experience, Before I feel like my problems were so hard to carry, now after joining Teman Sehati (Heart-to-Heart Friends), apparently others have big problems as well, so I learn a lot from that"*

IK: *"I am happy Ms., delighted even. In PC, I learn so much about how the theory that I have learned before apply in real cases, I have much experience here about how to handle clients and understand people."*

EF: *"So much experience as PC, sharing with PC, CC and lecturer, I directly handle clients too."*

Discussion

Reflection upon implementing online PFA service conducted by PCs of Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University Purwokerto as a contribution towards mental health of students and public during shows that most clients are teenagers. Cases expressed by the clients are problems related to education, family, friendship, and love. These are supported through another research by Prasanti & Pebriani, 2018 which stated that PC in practical handles cases related to personal problem, family, love, and future problem. This is also in line with the research conducted by Brooks et al., 2020 which explained that in education field, age range of people affected by pandemic are around 18-19 years old. Findings from American Enterprise Institute survey show that 48% of teenagers experience loneliness, compared to 20% of clients with age more than 65 years old. Another survey from Mental Health Charity Young found that more than 80% of teenager condition get worse during pandemic with some signs such as frustration, limitation of playing, difficulty in communicating with family, academic problem, emotion management, unemployment, losing job, experiencing financial pressure harming their mental health condition whether in short term, medium term, or long term. Mental health stress classified as a long-term effect in this research includes PTSD, self-harm, and suicidal tendency.

Cases explained above are the cases handled by the principles of online PFA. Media for PFA tele-service based on this research showed that the clients mostly ask for chat, secondly voice call, then voice note, and lastly video call. Although considered to have many benefits, online service also has its advantage and disadvantage sides. The results of this research showed that the advantages of using chat feature are PC is more confident in dealing with clients because they have enough time to understand client's problem, will have time to exchange ideas with other PCs, and find more reference needed to help client's problem. On the other hand, the disadvantages of using chat include PC becomes unable to identify client's emotion making PC difficult to reflect client's feeling even though emoticons might help them a little, PC will need more time to type their message and more time to understand what the clients is expressing, and also some clients reply to the chat very late which hinders service duration.

The service using voice call has advantages which is the ability of PC to understand client's emotion through their intonation or client's response towards PC's suggestion, thus PC will feel easier to reflect the client's feeling and give good feedback for client and PC themselves. The disadvantage side of voice call is unstable network from the client or PC which makes the problem expressed by the client hard to understand for PC. Another media for online service is voice note. The good point of this is Pc will be able to understand client's emotion because of their voice response, while the weak point is time consuming because PC and client need to record and send the voice note alternately. The last online PFA service is through video call. The good side of this feature is PC's ability to understand client's expression well, similar to face-to-face session, thus it gives emotion reflection more clearly, but the downside is that the network is often unstable and interrupted.

The result of this research is in line with previous research in which communication device in online service is the main actor to determine the quality of the service. Online service gives benefit to reduce psychological problems of client, but this also has its own risk, limitation, and effectiveness which are different from face-to-face service. This means that it is better to provide face-to-face service compared to online service because of its effectiveness in online that depends on network availability (Haryati, 2020). The previous research also explained that media used in online service consist of chat, voice call dan video call, website, and other social media. The advantage of online counseling is being able to reach clients widely, anytime, and anywhere, while the disadvantage side is giving nonverbal instruction that might cause inaccuracy in diagnosis and intervention (Sari, 2021).

When conducting online PFA, the basic principle is to do it anywhere and anytime based on the agreement between client and provider of service. The issue raised in online PFA is different from face-to-face service, for example unconducive environment or disruption from friend, family, or crowded nearby condition during the service whether from PC or client that interrupts the counseling process. In addition, other problem occurs when PC should not take "steps" into client's problem usually called countertransference, thus PC will feel sad and uncomfortable for a while after counseling.

Until now online PFA is considered very helpful for client to face their problems. Clients are more comfortable and helped with online PFA service by Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University (UIN SAIZU). Mental health service in online or offline are considered effective in reducing anxiety (Berryhill et al., 2018). This is in accordance with research conducted by Anna, 2020 which stated that even though the service is conducted online, clients feel easier to express their feelings and thoughts.

It is very compelling to discuss the result of this research because the service provided by PC is not only beneficial for their client, but also beneficial for PC themselves as service providers (Muslikah et al., 2017) and also increase their empathy (Suryawati, 2016). This is expressed by PC of online PFA in Prof. KH. Saifuddin Zuhri State Islamic University (UIN SAIZU) when conducting the service. PCs feel very happy to help the client, feel helpful, are trusted by clients, increase their empathy, train their professionalism, and are able to practice the theory acquired in class resulting the improvement of their counseling skills.

Conclusion

The discussion above provides some conclusions that the cases handled by PC during PFA tele-service are related to education, family, friendship, and love. Communication media used in online PFA are mostly chat, secondly voice call, then voice note, and lastly video call. Issue experienced by PC in online PFA is unconducive environmental situation from PC or client because they are in their own home during the service. This condition makes interruption highly possible to happen such as outside interruption, unstable network, and countertransference.

From evaluation given by client to PC in online PFA service, they said that online PFA service is very helpful for the clients to solve their psychological problems, meaning that online PFA provides positive contribution towards public's mental health welfare. PCs as service providers receive benefits through this service which is able to practice their the theory in classes, thus increases their counseling skills and get a chance to help people.

Suggestion

In this research, the dynamic of PFA tele-service could only be seen from PC's perspective as service providers, yet have not seek the clients' perspectives on the service. The following research might look into the dynamic of online PFA from clients' perspective as the users in order to make the research more comprehensive in describing online PFA service during COVID-19 pandemic. This will further nourish the development of psychology services to be more effective and accessible to all people.

In practical field, in order to provide online PFA service maximumly, we need to concern on location of service that should be conducive to reduce interruption whether from PCs or clients. In addition, countertransference experienced by PCs should be anticipated by conducting peer collaboration to provide self-care for PCs, so their mental health is well-maintained and they are able to do their jobs well too ("Peer Collaboration: A Model to Support Counsellor Self-Care.," 2007).

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