Undergraduate Students' Attitudes towards Online Counseling since the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has left tertiary students feeling anxious, stressed, and depressed. As a result, online counseling is a new option for students seeking counseling to alleviate stress and anxiety. The aims of this study were to 1) investigate undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2) compare the attitudes of undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic, classified by gender, academic year, grade point average (GPA), faculty, experience in face-to-face counseling, and experience in online counseling. The participants were 417 undergraduate students from Mahasarakham University who were selected by using a convenient sampling method. The research instrument was the questionnaire on undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling. The researcher used percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and one-way ANOVA to analyze the data. The findings indicated that the undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling were at a high level. Further, the undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling were statistically significant differences at a level of $p<0.01$ attributed to the variables of genders and GPAs.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The evolution of the Internet makes significant changes in human life, including the influence on mental health (Sukmawati, 2019). There is an integration between the Internet and counseling, also known as online counseling, to treat mental health problems. It is a novel concept that grows in popularity over time because, in the past, people only received face to face counseling from a counselor. However, in the modern era, technology has been combined with the concept of therapy, resulting in treatment or counseling delivered via the Internet. Counseling is delivered via phone, email, instant messaging, chat, and video conferencing (Sorapipatcharoen, Supwirapakorn, & Wisessuwan, 2015). At the same time, many international researchers define this term in a variety of ways, such as online counseling, cyber-counseling, e-counseling, web-counseling, telecounseling, computer-mediated counseling, distance counseling, and so on. As a provider of online counseling services, mental health professionals provide initial counseling for people with mental problems. The information technology system is used as a communication channel, which has been classified into five types: telephone-based, email-based, chat-based, video-based, and social network-based services (National Board for Certified Counselors [NBCC], 2016). Through these channels, the counselor and the client (the counselee) are at different places and communicate via the Internet (Richard & Viganò, 2013; Zainudin & Yusop, 2018). Through online counseling, there are two main ways of interacting with counselees: asynchronous communication and synchronous communication. The asynchronous format includes e-mail, message boards, and weblogs, where the counselor and the client do not communicate with each other instantly. Synchronous interactions include written dialogue or instantaneous conversations, also known as "real-time," when both the counselor and the

client use a computer to communicate simultaneously, such as instant messaging and video conferencing (Brown, 2012; Lau, Aga Mohd Jaladin, & Abdullah, 2013).

In Thailand, the Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, provides mental health services to the general public via online chat rooms through Microsoft Network Messenger (MSN). The open registration can be completed through an e-mail address: counseling_sty@hotmail.com. The counselees of this service range in age from children and teenagers to adults (Vongtangswad, 2010). Later, there is website counseling with the development of www.healuproom.com and www.youthonlinecps.com to provide online counseling through an online chat room (Fusikul, 2012). Several counseling psychologists use the Internet as a channel for online counseling services to provide services to youth groups, including university students (Vongtangswad, 2016). As a result, online counseling is effective and gains a significant impact on university students' ability to solve problems (Tannous, 2017). Based on increasing Internet access statistics, it is becoming more convenient to expand e-mental health services around the world to remove treatment barriers (Navarro, Bambling, Sheffield, & Edirippulige, 2019), including a survey of Thai people using social networking services. In 2020, it was reported that Thai people owned 52 million social network users, representing 75% of the Thai population (DIGITAL 2020: Thailand, 2020: Online). Students or university students are the most internet users who used approximately 10 hours and 50 minutes per day (Office of Policy and Strategic Affairs, Electronic Transactions Development Agency, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, 2020). Furthermore, in recent years, the Internet's effectiveness in facilitating help-seeking has been discovered, and the importance of addressing mental health issues among university students has become clear (Davies, Morriss, & Glazebrook, 2014; Ebert, Cuijpers, Muoz, & Baumeister, 2017). Several studies prove that online counseling is efficient and has many advantages, for example, convenient access to services, counseling that can be provided from any location and at any time, reduced transportable restrictions, and low-cost expenses (Bolier et al., 2014; Herrero et al., 2019; Kazdin, 2015; Rodda & Dan, 2014). E-mental health services reduce the stigma associated with accessing mental health services, especially in Asian societies (Heflinger & Hinshaw, 2010; Wong, Bonn, Tam, & Wong, 2018), where people in Asian societies are reluctant to reveal their stories, analyze the causes of their problems, and professional help-seeking compared to Western societies (Haroz et al., 2017; Youssef et al., 2014). It also helps people who are hesitant to go to face-to-face counseling with more confidence. The online counselees may only need confirmation of whether they need counseling, or they may only need someone to listen to their stories in a short amount of time. Besides, scheduling appointments can be quick and easy, and done at the desired time. If it is counseling at a service facility or clinic, there may be restrictions on business hours, only Monday to Friday during office hours (Poh Li, Jaladin, & Abdullah, 2013; Teh, Acosta, Hechanova, Garabiles, & Alianan Jr, 2014; Vongtangswad, 2010). Internet-based counseling programs are more efficient and adaptable (Ebert et al., 2018). Moreover, the Royal College of Psychiatrists of the United Kingdom recommends expanding access to evidence-based Internet intervention for university students (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2011).

Base on the situation of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), relevant agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization (WHO) advise people to live separately, keep physical distance, wash their hands frequently, and keep the environment hygienic to reduce germ spread (American Counseling Association (ACA), 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on people's lives. Both physical and emotional well-being are affected. In terms of physical health, it leads many individuals to become ill and die, making medical personnel's jobs substantially more difficult. It also has social rejection and discrimination. The mental health implications can last longer and have a greater prevalence than the pandemic (Ornell et al., 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic situation is filled with unpredictability, such as the intensity of the sickness, faulty information, social distancing, and the overall grief of losing a loved one. It also generates worry, anxiety, panic, and a negative influence on mental health among those who lost their jobs as a result of the establishment's closure and the economic crisis (Buyruk Genc & Kara, 2021). A study of tertiary students in Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and Thailand found that the notable concerns students faced during the coronavirus pandemic were anxiety, depression, and stress, respectively. This indicated that students were at risk of developing mental health problems, possibly as a result of unanticipated lifestyle changes (Jiang, Yan-Li, Pamanee & Sriyanto, 2021). Furthermore, the findings of a Thaksin University survey conducted between March and April 2020 on the impact and adaptation of social distancing measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus among tertiary students from six institutions in Songkhla province revealed that students had concerns that affected their daily lives. Boredom and anxiety led to stress during online learning, so they requested the government to solve problems during this pandemic by providing unified and accurate information and disseminating COVID-19 prevention materials for people of all genders and ages. They also requested an online counseling service (Thaksin University, 2020). Online counseling could reduce depression and anxiety to promote well-being of youths and university students effectively (Jitanan, Somanandana, Jitanan, Lalitpasan, &

Kham-in, 2021). As a result, since the coronavirus pandemic, there is an urgent need to provide online counseling to university students.

Mahasarakham University has four crucial units responsible for the care of students' mental health and mental health problems, which are as follows: 1) Counseling Work, Student Affairs Division, provides care and sets policy in terms of counseling students who have problems and need help. 2) Suthavej Hospital, run by a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses, works under the supervision of the Faculty of Medicine to provide mental health care and treatment to students. 3) The Faculty of Nursing's Mental Health Counseling Clinic; and 4) The Faculty of Education's Psychological Excellence Center (Tuklang and Yurayat, 2021). However, due to the pandemic situation, Mahasarakham University has announced measures to monitor the pandemic of COVID-19 and online teaching management; as a result, those agencies are unable to open for service as usual. Abundant research studies on need assessment are still required to develop an online counseling program for undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University. Yurayat and Seechaliao (2021) conducted a study that revealed that students had the requirements for advancing an online counseling program, with the mean of the expected conditions at the highest level. According to the findings, undergraduate students of Mahasarakham University needed an online counseling program to expand the channel of counseling beyond the previous form of solely face-to-face counseling.

Khantichitr, Promwong, Keawmanee, & Charoenukul (2021) claimed in their study that a person who has a good health belief model will engage in appropriate health prevention behaviors, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Attitudes are the opinions, beliefs, and feelings of a person based on learning and experience, which are stimuli for the person to behave. Attitudes could be positive or negative. Positive attitudes towards online counseling drive individuals to be more likely to seek online counseling (Lazuras & Dokou, 2016). Attitudes will vary according to individual preferences and opinions, including being influenced by factors such as demographic variables, knowledge, ability to use computers, experience, perceived usefulness and ease of use, and comfort with technology (Lazuras & Dokou, 2016; Menon & Rubin, 2011; Teh, Acosta, Hechanova, Garabiles, & Alianan, 2014). Understanding attitudes towards online counseling may help with its administration and use (Knechtel & Erickson, 2020). Furthermore, Mahasarakham University's mental health promotion and support agencies modify the forms of online counseling services, such as phone counseling, text messages, video conferencing, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Line. As a result, to maximize the effectiveness of online counseling, it is necessary to study students' attitudes toward online counseling to apply the study's findings to public relations and planning for the next phase of promotion, prevention, and therapeutic interventions. Students must be able to manage and solve problems as well as to adapt to future changes. This enables them to live a blessed life while maintaining psychological well-being.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This research study aims: 1) to investigate the attitudes of Mahasarakham University undergraduate students towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic; and 2) to compare the attitudes of Mahasarakham University undergraduate students towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic by emphasizing on the gender, academic year, grade point average (GPA), faculty, the experience of receiving face-to-face counseling, and the experience of receiving online counseling.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

This study included 39,593 undergraduate students from Mahasarakham University who enrolled in the Academic Year 2021 across 17 faculties and two colleges. A total of 417 students was selected as participants using Yamane's Sampling Method (Yamane, 1967), with a 95 % confidence level and a 5 % proportion of allowable error. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the university announced that only online teaching and learning would be available. As a result, the researcher used a convenient sampling method by publicizing via social media channels and collecting data from a sample of 417 people via an online questionnaire on the Google Docs website.

Include in these subsections the information essential to comprehend and replicate the study. Insufficient detail leaves the reader with questions; too much detail burdens the reader with irrelevant information. Consider using appendices and/or a supplemental website for more detailed information.

2.2 Variables

The independent variables were gender, academic year, faculty, grade point average (GPA), and experience with online and face-to-face counseling, whereas the dependent variables were the attitudes of undergraduate students

at Mahasarakham University towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher developed the attitudes questionnaire of Mahasarakham University undergraduate students to identify the attitudes of the undergraduate students towards online counseling based on literature and some related references and studies, including Amichai-Hamburger (2017), Bastemur and Bastemur (2015), Cipolletta and Mocellin (2018), Colbow (2013), Guay et al. (2017), Liu (2015), Richards and Viganó (2013), Stoll et al. (2020), Teo et al. (2020), and Vongtangswad (2010). The questionnaire consisted of 55 items divided into five areas: (14) items for the characteristics of an online counseling counselor; (11) items for the characteristics of an online counseling counselee; (10) items for the benefits of using technology for online counseling; (10) items for the therapeutic relationship of online counseling; and (10) items for the ethical issues of online counseling. The response ranges were on a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, and were represented by the numbers 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, respectively.

2.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

Five experts examined the content validity and Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) values, with IOC values between 0.60-1.00. Afterward, the researchers tried out a questionnaire on 30 undergraduate students who were not part of the target population. The results were analyzed and calculated for the discrimination index of the questionnaire. The discrimination index of the questionnaire was 0.33 to 0.79. Analyze the reliability of the questionnaire by Cronbach's reliability coefficient alpha. The reliability index of the questionnaire was 0.97.

2.5 Data Collection

The researchers used social media to recruit students who voluntarily participated in this research. After the students indicated their willingness to participate in the study, the researchers clearly explained the research objectives and procedures for data collection. The researchers asked the students to complete the consent form, and the participants completed the questionnaire via Google Forms. The data was collected, analyzed, and the results were generated using the (SPSS) program.

2.6 Data Analysis

The SPSS program was used to conduct the data analysis. Descriptive statistics were also used to analyze all the obtained data and were finally presented in the form of percentages (%), mean (M), and standard deviation (S.D). Interpretation Criteria for Attitude Mean Analysis of Undergraduate Students Mahasarakham University towards online counseling is as follows.

   4.50 - 5.00 means having the highest level of attitude

   3.50 - 4.49 means having a high level of attitude

   2.50 - 3.49 means having a moderate level of attitude

   1.50 - 2.49 means having a low level of attitude

   1.00 - 1.49 means having the lowest level of attitude

The inferential statistics were: 1) the independent samples t-test to compare groups by gender, experience with face-to-face counseling, and experience with online counseling; and 2) one-way ANOVA to compare groups by academic years and GPAs.

2.7 Ethical Consideration

The researchers protected the rights of the sample throughout the research process. The proposal has been considered by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Mahasarakham University on September 17, 2021 (No. 308-300/2021), and the subjects must sign the consent form before participating in research projects. Additionally, the researchers attach great importance to the ethical principles of human research, following the conditions of Mahasarakham University strictly by considering the following aspects: 1) the principle of respect for the person is to respect the decision of the sample. The sample must consent to information participation in activities like video recording and CVD recording voluntarily and not do anything that is against the law, traditions, and group culture. 2) Clarification of research objectives and detailed understanding of the types of actions, activities, and benefits that the sample group will receive or cause no harm; avoid making mistakes or suffering both physically and mentally. 3)Maintaining the confidentiality of personal information by writing and presenting research findings as an overview and reality.

3. Results

The findings of the study were divided into three sections as follows:

3.1 The Participant's Distribution according to the Variables of Gender, Academic Years, Faculties, GPAs, and Experience of Receiving Face-to-face Counseling and Experience of Receiving Online Counseling

Table 1. The participant's distribution according to the variables of gender, academic years, faculties, GPAs, experience of receiving face-to-face counseling and experience of receiving online counseling

Variables	Category	Number	percentage
1. Genders	Male	86	20.6
	Female	331	79.4
2. Academic Years	Year 1	207	49.6
	Year 2	161	38.6
	Year 3	22	5.3
	Year 4	27	6.5
3. GPAs	Between 2.01-2.50	38	9.1
	Between 2.51-3.00	67	16.0
	Between 3.01-3.50	160	38.4
	Between 3.51-4.00	152	36.5
4. Faculties	Humanities and Social Sciences	254	60.9
	Technology Sciences	103	24.7
	Health Sciences	60	14.4
5 Experience of receiving face-to-face counseling	Yes	51	12.2
	No	366	87.8
6. Experience of receiving online counseling	Yes	106	25.4
	No	311	74.6

Table 1 showed that the majority of the participants in this study were female (79.4%). The majority of them were first-year students (49.6%) studying in the Faculty of Humanities (60.9%). The majority of them had a GPA ranging from 3.00 to 3.50 (38.4%). Furthermore, 12.2 % of them received face-to-face counseling, while another 25.4 % received online counseling services.

3.2 Analysis of the Mean Score of Attitudes towards Online Counseling since the COVID-19 Pandemic =

Analysis of the mean score of attitudes of Mahasarakham University undergraduate students towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 2).

Table 2. The mean score of undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic in five domains

Attitudes Towards Online counseling	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1. Characteristics of online counseling counselor	4.42	.58	High
2. Characteristics of online counseling counselee	4.30	.55	High
3. Benefits of using technology for online counseling	4.33	.56	High
4. Therapeutic relationship of online counseling	4.36	.57	High
5. Ethical issues of online counseling	4.39	.57	High
Total Attitudes' Score	4.36	.50	High

Table 2 indicated that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall mean scores of students' attitudes towards online counseling were found high (M=4.36, S.D.=.50). When classified by domain, the characteristics of an online counselor had the highest average score (M=4.42, S.D.=.58), followed by the ethical issue of online counseling (M=4.39, SD=.57), the therapeutic relationship of online counseling (M=4.36, SD=.57), the usefulness of technology use for online counseling (M = 4.33, SD =.56), and characteristics for the online counselee (M = 4.30, SD =.55).

3.3 Comparative Analysis of the Mean Attitudes Scores Attributed to the Variables of Gender, Academic Years, GPAs, Faculties, and Experience of Receiving Face-to-Face and Online Counseling Services

Comparative analysis of the mean attitudes scores of Mahasarakham University undergraduate students towards

online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic was attributed to the variables of gender, academic years, GPAs, faculties, and experience of receiving face-to-face and online counseling services and can be described as follow:

1) Genders, experience of receiving face-to-face counseling services, and experience of receiving online counseling services (Table 3).

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic attributed to the variable of gender, the experience of receiving face-to-face and receiving online counseling services, and the t-test for the independent samples

Personal Factors		Mean	S.D.	t	Sig*	
Genders	Male	4.20	.49	-3.438	.001**	Females are significantly
	Female	4.40	.64			higher than men.
Experience of receiving	Yes	4.38	.43	.213	.831	There is a significant difference.
face-to-face counseling	No	4.36	.52			
Experience of receiving	Yes	4.40	.49	1.01	.313	There is a significant difference.
online counseling	No	4.35	.64			

** P < 0.01

Note. S.D. = Standard Deviation; t = The independent sample t-test; Sig = significant.

Table 3 revealed that undergraduate students from Mahasarakham University females had a statistically significantly higher mean score on online counseling than males at the .01 level.

2) The variables of the academic years, GPAs, and faculties (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of the Means of undergraduate students' attitudes towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic attributed to the variables of the academic years, GPAs, and faculties

Source of variation		SS	df	MS	F	Sig*	Pairwise Comparison
Academic years	Between Groups	1.171	3	.390	1.547	.202	There is no significant difference.
	Within Groups	104.246	413	.252			
	Total	105.417	416				
GPAs	Between Groups	4.516	3	1.505	6.162	.000**	Significant difference between three groups, including GPA 2.01 - 2.50 > 2.51 - 3.00, 3.01 - 3.50 > 2.51 - 3.00, and 3.51 - 4.00 > 2.51 - 3.00
	Within Groups	100.901	413	.244			
	Total	105.417	416				
Faculties	Between Groups	0.255	2	.127	.593	.554	There is no significant difference.
	Within Groups	22.984	107	.215			
	Total	23.239	109				

** P < 0.01

Note. SS = Sum of Square; *df* = degrees of freedom; MS = Mean of Square; F = One-way ANOVA; Sig = significant.

Table 4 showed that undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University with different GPAs had a statistically significant difference in their attitudes towards online counseling at the .01 level. When comparing the three pairs, the following differences included 1) students with a GPA of 2.01 - 2.50 had a statistically significantly higher mean score on online counseling than those whose GPA of 2.51 - 3.00 GPA at the .01 level. 2) Students with a GPA of 3.01-3.50 had a statistically higher mean score of attitudes towards online counseling than those with a GPA of 2.51-3.00 at .01 levels, and 3) students with a GPA of 3.51-4.00 had a higher mean score of attitudes towards online counseling than students with a GPA of 2.51-3.00 at the .01 levels.

4. Discussion

Based on the study of the attitudes of undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers discussed the findings of the research objectives as follows:

4.1 Attitudes of Undergraduate Students, Mahasarakham University towards Online Counseling since the COVID-19 Pandemic

The findings revealed that undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University had favorable attitudes towards online counseling since the COVID-19 pandemic at a high level. Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, schools and universities in Thailand were closed from March 18, 2020, for two weeks after the number of COVID-19 cases more than doubled in just three days, March 15-17, 2020 (de Alwis, Saif, & Niazi, 2020). Mahasarakham University also organized all courses online to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Further, government agencies establish social distancing policies that make the students of Mahasarakham University confront stress and anxiety, which affect their health problems; therefore, the university's mental health services are switched online. At this point, technology is used to integrate with online counseling services to keep social distance and reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Pierce et al., 2021). Telehealth and telepsychological services, or online counseling, are discovered as mental health services that are flexible and adaptable to different situations, as a form of crisis management. And since telehealth services allow professionals to provide quick services in disaster-affected areas or without traveling to that area on their own (Darkins, 2016). It is noted that telepsychology significantly increases during the pandemic and that counselees continue to use the service even after the pandemic ends (Pierce et al., 2021). Online counseling expands access to counseling and is especially useful during times of global crisis when traditional services are unavailable (Knechtel & Erickson, 2020). Some studies point out that online counseling is effective and has a positive impact on how university students dealt with problems in their daily lives (Tannous, 2017). Due to the ease with which services can be accessed, counseling can be provided from any location and at any time, with minimal travel restrictions and no real identification, and at a low cost (Bolier et al., 2014; Rodda & Dan, 2014). Furthermore, according to various research studies, the majority of university students prefer online counseling services and have positive attitudes towards them (Adebowale, 2014; Awabil & Akosah, 2018). Richards and Tangney (2008) stated that students find online counseling very helpful, and some researchers noted that online counseling is more beneficial than face-to-face counseling (Buyruk Genc & Kara, 2021, as cited in Zeren & Erus, 2020).

4.2 The Attitudes of Undergraduate Students at Mahasarakham University towards Online Counseling since the COVID-19 Pandemic, Classified by Genders, Academic years, Grade Point Average (GPAs), Faculties, Experience in Face-to-Face Counseling, and Experience in Online Counseling

According to research findings, female undergraduate students at Mahasarakham University had significantly higher mean attitude scores than males. When women have problems, they tend to solve them by talking about them or seeking help from others. As a result, the women's problem-solving model is compatible with existing hospital-based mental health therapies (Rungreangkulkij, 2010). Additionally, women who have previously learned about online counseling rate it higher than any other group (Knechtel & Erickson, 2020). Similarly, women are knowledgeable about the psychological services available on campus. Women are expressive, extroverted, agreeable, and open to new experiences. As a result, female college students are more likely than males to seek professional assistance (Atik & Yalçin, 2011; Chow, 2007; Zawawi, 2011). According to the World Health Organization, women seek help and discuss mental health issues with their primary care physician or general health care physician, whereas men are more likely to seek specialist mental health care and undergo inpatient treatment (WHO, 2021). Besides this, Thai society established different gender roles and norms that carry them down through generations. Assertiveness, self-reliance, ambition, competitiveness, self-confidence, stubbornness, aggression, and showing anger and violence (at some level) are all accepted masculine behaviors. Women, on the other hand, are expected to exhibit feminine characteristics such as being emotional, fragile, weak, helpless, insecure, and anxious easily. It can be concluded that men tend to take the opposite approach to women's stress management: men tend to keep their feelings inward and rarely speak out (Rungreangkulkij, 2010). As society expects men to be strong and not weak, men use stress-coping methods to control and deal with problems such as playing sports, drinking, using drugs, or, in extreme cases, escaping the obstacle by committing suicide. In addition, self-disclosure to others and social stigma are crucial factors in deciding to seek professional mental health care. It also impacts a person's negative attitudes towards receiving psychological assistance (Buyruk Genc & Kara, 2021). In other words, social norms cause people to avoid seeking mental health help and create negative attitudes towards psychological interventions (Chang, 2007). According to the findings of this study, females preferred to disclose themselves more than males. It is also socially acceptable for women to reveal their vulnerability by seeking more professional counseling. As a result, female students in this study had more favorable attitudes towards online counseling than male students.

Besides that, this study found that students with different GPAs had statistically significant differences in mean scores across the board for all aspects of attitude. Students with a GPA of 3.51-4.00 had higher mean attitudes

towards online counseling than other groups. Based on this data, the assumptions are that students with high GPAs have good adaptability and can deal with stress and problems in life well. When confront with personal and social problems in life, whether at school or elsewhere, students with high academic achievement can deal with them on their own and were opened to accepting assistance from various agencies, both face-to-face and online. As a result, having positive attitudes towards online counseling is critical for high-achieving students. People with high intellectual abilities process self-esteem and have a higher self-concept in the academic context, which results in higher learning achievement, according to the findings of various research studies.

As well as being high self-efficacy people, they believe they can adjust themselves to good environmental management and can control their needs and deal with stress and anxiety effectively (Zeidner & Matthews, 2000). Likewise, studies show that GPA is related to mental health power. In other words, high-achieving students tend to have higher mental health powers because mental health power helps them to have emotional stability, be resistant to adversity, be motivated, and be able to handle problems in studies and exams well. It is possible to conclude that mental health power or strength in life assists people in standing up, overcoming, and dealing with life's problems efficiently and educationally (Nakrapanich & Puengsema, 2021). On the other hand, e-mental-health interventions have been found to help students achieve a statistically significant higher GPA at the end of the semester. This is consistent with the findings of Melnyk et al. (2015), who discovers that, even if the effect is small and insignificant, online mental health support can improve students' academic performance.

5. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, Mahasarakham University students have favorable attitudes towards online counseling. However, male students' attitudes towards online counseling were lower than female students. Students with moderate academic achievement had lower attitudes towards online counseling than other groups. Therefore, the university should promote, through various channels, the need for students to have more access to online counseling services to reduce stress and deal with their mental health problems, including the need to build knowledge and understanding of online counseling. The online counseling service is anonymous, and students do not have to come to the hospital; they can get services at home or in any private place that creates a sense of security for them to have good attitudes towards seeking help from a specialist in psychology. In addition, because this research was a quantitative survey of the attitudes of students towards online counseling, in future research, qualitative research should be added to the counselees' life experiences with online counseling to use the research results to improve and develop an online counseling model that best meets the needs of the counselees.

Acknowledgments

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