

**MILLENNIAL CLIENTS' TRUST-BUILDING STRATEGIES IN MENTAL
HEALTH COUNSELING****Siti Rahayu Pratami Lexianingrum^{1*}, Uud Wahyudin¹, Susanne Dida¹, Iis Latifah
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Abstract: Trust is a key element in the effectiveness of the mental health counseling process, especially in reaching millennials who have unique characteristics in terms of values, communication, and expectations of psychological services. This study aims to identify and analyze effective strategies counselors use in building trust with millennial clients. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations with three experienced professional counselors who work with clients aged 20-35, as well as three millennial clients. The results revealed four main strategies used consistently, namely: (1) empathic and authentic communication, (2) the use of storytelling and personal narratives, (3) the application of inclusive and culturally sensitive language, and (4) the use of digital media as an initial medium for building trust. The findings confirm the importance of cultural competence and adaptation of counseling approaches to the social and technological dynamics faced by the millennial generation. The practical implications of this research include the need for more contextually relevant counselor training, as well as the development of service policies that accommodate both relational and digital approaches in modern counseling practices.

Keywords: Trust; Mental Health Counseling; Millennials; Empathic Communication; Cultural Competence; Digital Media.

INTRODUCTION

A component that determines the success of psychological interventions. Trust creates a foundation that enables the formation of a therapeutic alliance, where the client feels safe to express their feelings, disclose personal problems, and openly accept professional help. Without trust, counseling relationships tend to be superficial, ineffective, and often end in premature termination of therapy. (Ramadhani et al., 2024).

Trust in the context of counseling can be understood through two key psychological dimensions: cognitive trust and affective trust. Cognitive trust relates to the counselor's professional competence and reliability, while affective trust is built through emotional connection and empathetic communication. These elements are crucial in shaping clients'

perception of the counselor's credibility and in fostering a safe therapeutic relationship (Zhang & Lian, 2025). Similarly, Paul Crits-Christoph et al emphasize that communication competence, especially the ability to express empathy, significantly enhances interpersonal trust in counseling settings (Crits-Christoph et al., 2019).

Recent literature highlights a growing interest in understanding how generational identity influences the formation of trust in therapeutic settings. Studies over the last five years have increasingly focused on the intersection between digital culture, counselor-client dynamics, and generational expectations (Alfia et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023; Paquin et al., 2025). A notable development in the field is the shift from traditional models of therapeutic alliance, which primarily emphasize counselor expertise and empathy, towards more adaptive, client-centered models that incorporate technology, cultural sensitivity, and social justice frameworks. These contemporary approaches recognize that trust is no longer constructed solely through face-to-face interpersonal interactions but is also shaped by digital communication modes, sociocultural identities, and systemic inequalities. Despite these advances, a lack of empirical research persists, specifically regarding how mental health professionals in diverse sociocultural contexts, such as Indonesia, can effectively establish trust with millennial clients. This study addresses that gap by offering a culturally and generationally grounded exploration of trust-building strategies in counseling practice.

However, in the current era, new challenges arise that are pretty complex in building trust, especially when dealing with the millennial generation as clients. Millennials, generally defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, exhibit distinct sociocultural characteristics compared to previous generations. They grew up in the digital era, are accustomed to instant access to information, have high expectations of personalized services, and tend to be skeptical of formal authority. These characteristics require adjustments to strategies in building effective and meaningful therapeutic relationships (Arif, 2023).

Building trust in mental health counseling is particularly important for millennial clients, who often have unique challenges and perspectives shaped by their generational experiences. (Amos, 2023). The unique behavior of millennials is reflected in the way they address mental health issues. On the one hand, millennials tend to be more open to psychological issues and no longer consider mental health something taboo. However, their participation rate in formal counseling services is still relatively low. (Wade et al., 2015). An earlier study by Pama showed that despite the young generation's increased awareness of the importance of mental health, only a small percentage of them choose to consult professionals. The majority prefer to confide in friends or family, or even do not seek help at all. (Pama et al., 2023).

One of the main reasons for this low participation is the lack of trust in existing counseling services. Many millennials feel that conventional approaches to counseling are irrelevant to their life experiences, which are heavily influenced by technology, social media, and individualistic values. They expect approaches that are more personalized, adaptive, inclusive, and reflect a deep understanding of the complexity of their identities. (Lustgarten et al., 2020).

In this context, counselors are required to develop innovative strategies for building trust, including skills in establishing equal (egalitarian) relationships, utilizing digital technology as an alternative communication medium, and strengthening multicultural competence and sensitivity to the social values of the millennial generation (Novella &

Azeharie, 2020; Reamer, 2012). These strategies are important because millennials value authenticity and equality as essential components in every relationship, including therapeutic ones.

Social constructivism-based strategies have gained attention in fostering trust within the counseling context. This approach emphasizes the significance of understanding the subjective meanings that clients construct through social and cultural interactions. In practice, it encourages active collaboration between counselors and clients in co-constructing new interpretations of life experiences. However, its implementation should be approached with caution. Alfia et al. argue that while social constructivism empowers clients, excessive reliance on subjective interpretations may lead to misconceptions that obscure objective realities. (Alfia et al., 2023).

It is also important to consider the role of empathy and emotional connection as key strategies in building trust. Connections built through empathy, emotional presence, and open communication allow clients to feel valued and fully understood. (Ramadhani et al., 2024). In addition, counselors need to foster intergenerational communication competence to overcome the value and language gap between themselves and millennial clients.

The development of digital technology has also changed the landscape of counseling relationships. The use of online platforms for counseling has become an increasingly common option, especially after the COVID-19 Pandemic. While offering flexibility and accessibility, these services also present new challenges in building and maintaining trust. The study by Li et al. (2023) highlights the importance of counselors' ability to recognize and respond appropriately to clients' emotional reactions in text-based communication, in order to keep the therapeutic relationship effective (Akbar & Abdullah, 2021). This requires an understanding of the historical, social, and technological forces that have shaped this generation's attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking behavior. (Badar & Lasthuizen, 2023).

Structural and systemic factors—such as social stigma, cultural representation within mental health services, and economic access—significantly impact millennials' trust in mental health institutions. For instance, a Canadian study found that income inequality erodes social cohesion and trust in public services, with unequal communities showing lower trust in institutions and worse mental health outcomes. (Paquin et al., 2025). Additionally, structural stigma—embedded in cultural norms and institutional practices—continues to deter mental health help-seeking, particularly among racialized groups. Therefore, trust-building must extend beyond interpersonal rapport and incorporate structural strategies: creating inclusive service environments, ensuring cultural representation, and advancing social justice through policy and equitable economic access.

In the Indonesian context, the need to develop a counseling strategy model that is responsive to the characteristics of the millennial generation is urgent. This is important given the high rate of mental health disorders in the younger age group and their low participation in formal services. Therefore, research is needed that explicitly examines and formulates effective strategies for building trust with millennial clients in mental health counseling, taking into account the psychological, sociocultural, and technological dynamics that surround their lives.

By understanding the critical role of trust and the challenges in establishing therapeutic relationships with millennials, this study aims to identify the most effective strategies for building and maintaining trust with millennial clients. It also seeks to explore the contextual factors that counselors must consider in this process and to examine how counselors can integrate humanistic, multicultural, and technological approaches into their professional practice. By investigating the strategies that counselors perceive as effective in building trust, this study contributes to enhancing the capacity of mental health professionals to meet the unique needs of millennial clients, thereby improving the accessibility and effectiveness of mental health services (Waid & Kelly, 2020).

This study is expected to contribute to the development of counseling practices in Indonesia that are more relevant, contextual, and capable of addressing the challenges of the times, as well as bridging the gap between the younger generation and mental health institutions. The findings of this study can also serve as a reference in the development of professional training, ethical guidelines, and the design of generation-based counseling interventions to improve the effectiveness and reach of mental health services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The digital age presents both opportunities and challenges for mental health counselors, requiring careful consideration of ethical practices. The rapid emergence of digital technologies in social work, including online counseling and video therapy, has challenged traditional perspectives on the clinical relationship. (Reamer, 2012). Technology has the potential to both challenge and enhance long-standing ethical standards and practices in the field. (Branson & Miller, 2020; Csiernik et al., 2006) Counselors should be aware of and adhere to ethical guidelines related to privacy, confidentiality, and consent when using digital tools. Ensuring the security of electronic communications and protecting client data is of paramount importance. Clinicians must receive adequate training and education on the safe and effective use of technology. (Wykes et al., 2019) Counselors should also be transparent about the technology's limitations and prepared to address technical difficulties that may arise. They should establish and adhere to appropriate ethical standards in the development, research, and integration of these technologies into community and clinical care. (Wykes et al., 2019). Counselors should also be aware of potential ethical dilemmas associated with online interactions, such as boundary violations and misrepresentation. (Sperry, 2011; Spiegelhoff & Ahia, 2011).

The proliferation of direct-to-consumer digital mental health and psychotherapy apps raises significant ethical concerns regarding accountability, data protection, and potential disruption to established therapeutic relationships (Martinez-Martin & Kreitmair, 2018). It is crucial for stakeholders, including software developers, healthcare providers, and consumers, to collaborate on establishing standards and best practices that address the ethical challenges posed by digital mental health interventions (Martinez-Martin. Counselors should obtain consent from clients regarding the use of technology in their treatment, ensuring that clients understand the risks and benefits involved. Counselors should refrain from sharing personal information on social media platforms and avoid engaging in online relationships with clients. The use of digital tools may reduce the supervisory role of the therapist, thereby increasing

therapeutic risks for the patient (Alfano et al., 2023). Furthermore, the convenience and anonymity afforded by computer-mediated communication may encourage individuals to seek online therapy, potentially eliminating the process and facilitating access to face-to-face care (Childress, 2000; Mattison, 2018).

Additionally, counselors should be aware of the digital divide and ensure that all clients have equal access to technology and digital literacy. Digital technologies encompass a wide range of devices, services, and applications, including internet use, smartphones, and social media. (Groenestein et al., 2024). It is important to address the diverse needs and preferences of clients when integrating technology into mental health services. Counselors also need to develop policies to handle emergencies that may arise during online therapy sessions, such as suicidal thoughts or threats of violence. When students consent to use technology-supported mental health services, they should be fully informed about how their data will be used and monitored, as well as the appropriate channels to contact clinical staff. (Lattie et al., 2019). Counselors should be knowledgeable about the legal and regulatory framework governing the use of technology in mental health services and comply with all applicable laws and regulations. Data analytics and AI are transforming various fields. However, it is essential to ensure ethical practices by detecting and mitigating bias, adhering to data privacy standards, and implementing robust security measures to maintain trust and accountability. (Akintayo et al., 2024)

While telepsychology offers geographic flexibility, it raises privacy concerns in the cross-border flow of information, requiring psychologists to have a comprehensive understanding of data mining, electronic storage, and internet infrastructure. (Gamble et al., 2015) To mitigate potential risks, psychologists are advised to use secure and encrypted servers and storage devices and implement strict data protection protocols. The use of digital technologies in mental health services has consequences for digital privacy and may increase the risk of clients unintentionally breaching confidentiality. (Lustgarten et al., 2020). Counselors are obligated to set clear boundaries and expectations with clients regarding the use of technology in their therapeutic relationship. (Stoll et al., 2020). Ultimately, ethical practice in the digital age requires ongoing reflection, critical evaluation, and a commitment to upholding the highest standards of care and professionalism. (Lustgarten et al., 2020)

Internet overuse, which is an increasing global problem affecting approximately 6% of the surveyed population, is linked to health threats and psychopathology such as anxiety and depression. (Akbari et al., 2021) . Counselors should be aware of the potential impact of technology overuse on millennials' mental health and well-being, addressing issues such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and addiction. (Akbari et al., 2021) . Counselors should be well-trained to handle ethical and safety dilemmas in digital mental health interventions and foster trusting relationships with clients. (Quill, 2021) Counselors should have a comprehensive understanding of social media's ethical implications and impact on individual well-being. (Ardi & Sukmawati, 2019; Fleming, 2020)

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the strategies used by counselors in building trust with millennial clients in mental health counseling practice. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring complex and contextual social and psychological phenomena, such as the dynamics of therapeutic relationships, clients' subjective perceptions, and counselors' dynamic and contextual professional practices. This approach emphasizes the subjective perspectives of the participants, aiming to uncover the essential structure of their experiences. (Altuwairiqi et al., 2019)

The subjects in this study consisted of two main groups: three professional counselors with at least three years of experience in providing counseling services to clients aged 20-35 years (in the millennial category). Three Millennial clients who have undergone or are currently undergoing a mental health counseling process for a minimum of three sessions.

Subject selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, which is based on the consideration that the subject has direct experience and is relevant to the topic under study. The number of participants was determined flexibly following the principle of data saturation, i.e., data collection was stopped when no significant new information was found.

Data were collected through three main techniques, namely: In-depth interviews, conducted in a semi-structured manner with open-ended guiding questions that allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. Interviews were recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim. Interviews will be conducted using a flexible interview guide, which includes open-ended questions designed to elicit rich and detailed descriptions of counselors' experiences. (Woo et al., 2020).

Limited participatory observation. This type of observation involves the direct interaction between the counselor and client (in a simulated or permissioned session). The focus of the observation includes communication style, counseling approach, expression of empathy, and nonverbal elements that reflect trust building.

Researchers also collected supporting documents, such as counseling records, counselors' codes of ethics, and relevant youth counseling training materials, to enhance the validity of the interview and observation data.

The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself, who is the key instrument (human instrument), assisted by interview guides, observation sheets, and data analysis guidelines. Data validity was maintained through the use of source and method triangulation techniques, peer debriefing, and member checking.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques developed by Braun and Clarke. The data analysis stage, which involves organizing, reducing, and synthesizing data to gain meaningful insights (Polala & Napiere, 2024). The analysis procedure includes:

- a. Read and understand the transcript data as a whole.
- b. Identify initial codes based on participants' narratives.
- c. Clustering the codes into key themes related to trust-building strategies.
- d. Revise and formulate the final theme.

Several strategies will be employed throughout the research process to maintain rigor and validity (Cirasola et al., 2024). These strategies include member checking, where

participants are allowed to review and validate their interpretations of experiences, and peer debriefing, where the researcher consults with experts in the field to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Presenting the results of the analysis in narrative form with direct quotes from participants as evidence of findings. Qualitative interviews will be conducted with mental health counselors who have experience working with Millennial clients. The interview protocol will explore counselors' perceptions of the unique challenges and opportunities associated with working with this generation, as well as the specific strategies they employ to build relationships and establish trust (Berger et al., 2009). Qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to effective trust-building strategies. In addition, qualitative studies can help researchers understand why distressed adolescents may not seek help and how they perceive in-person and remote health services, especially in school-based health centers (Richards et al., 2023). It is crucial to respect the patient's culture, beliefs, and values, and to consider these factors when developing a treatment plan. Incorporating cultural assessment information into case conceptualization can improve care (Ahad et al., 2023)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strategies for Building Trust with Millennial Clients

To effectively build trust with millennial clients, mental health counselors should prioritize strategies that align with this generation's values, particularly authenticity, transparency, and tech-savviness. Research by Arensberg et al. (2022) suggests that millennials heavily rely on online reviews and digital platforms when selecting healthcare providers, indicating their preference for transparent and information-rich interactions. (Arensberg et al., 2022). Counselors can convey this by being genuine and upfront in their communications—sharing appropriate professional boundaries, admitting their limitations, and engaging in honest interactions. Additionally, experiential reports on working with millennials emphasize the importance of “being yourself” and integrating technology into practice—such as offering appointment booking via text or email—to create a supportive, responsive environment.

Building rapport is another important aspect of building trust. (Griffith & Johnson, 2018). This involves actively listening to clients, showing empathy, and validating their experiences. Millennials often seek counselors who understand their perspective and can provide a safe and non-judgmental space for them to express their thoughts and feelings. (Stubbe, 2018). Additionally, counselors should adopt a collaborative and empowering approach. Instead of adopting the traditional and hierarchical therapist-patient model, counselors should work in partnership with millennial clients, involving them in the decision-making process and respecting their autonomy. (Chairunisa & Tonapa, 2022). This approach fosters a sense of ownership and agency, thereby increasing the likelihood that clients will actively participate in therapy and adhere to treatment plans.

Additionally, mental health professionals should be adept at incorporating technology into their practice, utilizing digital tools for communication, education, and support (Gabriel et al., 2020). This includes utilizing secure messaging platforms, online resources, and

telehealth options to increase accessibility and convenience for millennial clients (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

Counselors must demonstrate cultural competence and awareness of diversity. Cultural factors, which include family support, sibling relationships, and perceptions of stigma, significantly influence mental health. (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). Understanding the cultural background, values, and beliefs of millennial clients is crucial for building trust and delivering culturally sensitive services. Counselors should be aware of their own biases and assumptions and be open to learning from their clients' experiences. Counselors should seek training and continuing education to keep up with the latest developments in mental health care and best practices for working with millennial clients. (Lustgarten et al., 2020).

Finally, addressing the doubts and uncertainties that some millennials may have about mental health services is crucial. The findings from this study make an important contribution to the understanding of mental health counseling practices that are responsive to the needs and characteristics of millennials. By identifying key strategies in building trust, this study confirms that trust is not just a relational component but also a core process in achieving therapeutic effectiveness. Trust mediates client openness, increases receptivity to therapeutic interventions, and strengthens the overall therapeutic alliance.

One of the central findings is the importance of cultural competence in counseling practice. Millennial clients come from increasingly diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation. They are also more aware of social justice issues and identity sensitivity. Therefore, the counselor's ability to understand and respond to cultural differences is a fundamental requirement for building trust. Counselors who fail to demonstrate sensitivity to the client's cultural context risk creating a rupture in the therapeutic relationship (Qureshi & Collazos, 2011).

Table 1.1 Thematic Matrix - Millennial Client (M1)

The following is the Thematic Matrix Based on Millennial Client Interviews (M1), which organizes the main findings into a structure of main themes, sub-themes, codes, and verbatim quotes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Code	Client Verbatim Excerpt
1. The Need for Authentic Relationships	Counselor communication style	Relaxed, not patronizing	"He is not like a 'textbook psychologist'; his way of talking is relaxed but still professional."
	Emotional connection	Accompanied, not judged	"What helps the most is when I feel accompanied... not immediately given advice."
2. Influence of Language Style and Terminology	Humanized language	Avoid clinical terms	"Honestly, I am more comfortable when the language is casual... it feels more human."
	Judgmental language	Uncomfortable with labels	"...like discussing 'this disorder', 'that symptom'... I became like a hospital client."

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Thematic Code	Client Verbatim Excerpt
3. Validation Through Counselor Stories	Counselor's narrative	Showing the human side	"He also likes to talk about his own experiences, showing that he is also human."
	Feeling not alone	Normalization of experience	"I do not feel weird because I am not the only one experiencing this."
4. The Role of Social Media in Building Trust	Digital pre-belief	Acquaintance through content	"I look at their content first. If it is relatable and not judgmental, it makes me more confident."
	Content as counselor reflection	Speaking style reflects approach	"It feels like I already know you before entering the counseling room."
5. Expectations of the Counselor's Role	Do not want to be judged	Fear of judgment	"I was hesitant at first because I was afraid of being judged. However, after the first session, I was brave enough to continue."
	Parallel relation	Not a hierarchical relationship	"My advice, do not be too 'psychologist-y', haha... keep it professional but close."
6. Initial Barriers to Accessing Counseling	Initial hesitation	Fear of opening up	"It is also scary to tell something so personal to a stranger."
	Need initial comfort	The first session determines	"After the first session, which was good, I finally got the courage to continue."

From this millennial client data, it can be inferred that trust is built not from professional authority, but from:

1. Natural and humanistic communication style
2. Non-judgmental language selection
3. Counselor's emotional availability
4. Warm pre-interaction through social media

Table 1.2 Thematic Comparison: Counselor vs. Millennial Client

The following Thematic Comparison Table of Counselor and Client brings together the findings from both interview transcripts (K1: Counselor, M1: Client). This table is designed to display the alignments and gaps between the counselor's perspective and the client's experience of building trust in the counseling process.

Main Theme	Counselor Perspective (K1)	Millennial Client Perspective (M1)	Conclusion/Adjustment
1. Authentic & Empathetic Communication Style	The counselor adopts a warm and approachable style, avoiding a formal tone.	Clients feel comfortable with the relaxed and non-patronizing style.	Very much in line - non-hierarchical communication increases trust.
2. Emotional Validation and Equal Relationship	The counselor emphasized the importance of not rushing into solutions and giving space.	Clients want to be "heard", not "advised"; value emotional support.	Correspondingly, clients need to feel emotionally safe before intervention.
3. Use of Personal Narrative	The counselor uses personal stories and anonymous cases to normalize the experience.	The client feels "more connected" when the counselor tells a human story.	In line, narratives create relationships and validate experiences.
4. Sensitive Language & Terminology	Counselors avoid using clinical terms that carry a negative label.	Clients are more comfortable with casual and non-stigmatizing terms.	Perfect fit - language selection determines initial comfort.
5. The Role of Social Media and Pre-Connection	The counselor used Instagram and TikTok as initial educational media.	The client views the counselor's content as the primary factor in counseling decisions.	Parallel - digital presence plays a significant role in building initial trust.
6. Challenges of Building Trust	Counselors recognize trust issues and instant expectations as challenges.	The client admitted that she was initially afraid of being judged and hoped to "connect quickly".	Match - both identified the early stages as crucial.
7. Expectations of Counselors	The counselor seeks to be a reflective partner, not an instructor of solutions.	Clients expect a humanized approach, not a clinical or formal one.	Fundamental counseling values such as empathy and acceptance are highly valued.
8. Barriers to Initial Access to the Service	Counselors cited stigma and a lack of understanding of procedures as initial barriers.	The client admits to feeling hesitant, afraid to open up, and unsure of where to begin.	There is a perception match - needs a low-barrier & educational approach.

Qualitative Interpretation:

- **High Conformance Level:**

The majority of the main themes that emerged from counselors and clients overlapped directly. This suggests that the counselor's strategies responsive to millennial values and language were indeed well received by clients.

- **Trust Critical Point:**

The initial phase of counseling (pre-session to first session) is key to building trust. If the approach at this stage is not suitable, the therapeutic relationship may not form.

- Language, Relationships, and Digital Media = Pillars of Strategy

Three main pillars of trust-building strategies were consistently found: (1) inclusive language, (2) equal relationships, and (3) ethical digital engagement.

These factors should be considered as the basis for developing a counseling model for the millennial generation. In line with this, the following are the four main themes identified in this study:

1. Empathetic and Authentic Communication

One of the most effective strategies for building trust with millennial clients is to apply empathetic and authentic communication from the outset of the counseling session. All counselor informants emphasized that millennial clients tend to be sensitive to emotional warmth and sincerity in interpersonal interactions. Communication styles that are too formal, rigid, or contain hierarchical distance create psychological barriers that interfere with the counseling process.

In contrast, counselors who display empathic attitudes, active listening, and use a familiar, colloquial style are more easily accepted and trusted by clients. This approach reinforces emotional validation, which involves acknowledging the client's subjective feelings and experiences as the first step in forming a healthy therapeutic alliance.

2. Storytelling and Personal Narrative

The practice of sharing personal narratives or stories from other clients (with privacy and permission) has proven to be an effective strategy in building emotional connection and fostering a sense of relevance in clients. Millennial clients, who tend to have a high preference for narrative content and relatable experiences, find it easier to understand therapeutic concepts when delivered in the form of stories rather than abstract or academic approaches.

Narratives also serve as a means of meaning-making, where clients can see that they are not alone in their struggles. From a health communication perspective, narratives help bridge between the cognitive and affective aspects of message communication, making them a potent tool in building trust.

3. Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Language

The choice of language used in counseling sessions was found to play a key role in clients' perceptions of safety and acceptance. Counselors who use neutral, nonjudgmental language and avoid overly medical terms are perceived as more effective in creating an inclusive space. Many millennial clients feel resistant when given psychological labels such as "disorder," "abnormal," or "dysfunction," as these terms are perceived to have negative and stigmatizing connotations.

In contrast, when counselors use more humanistic and strength-based language, clients feel more valued and less judged. This practice aligns with the principle of non-stigmatizing communication in mental health, where language serves as a tool to foster clients' dignity and positive self-identity.

4. Digital Engagement as Trust Media

One of the innovative strategies identified in this study is using social media and digital platforms as an initial entry point for building a therapeutic relationship. Counselors reported that many millennial clients first become familiar with them through educational content on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. This light-hearted, educational, and relatable content provides an initial glimpse into the counselor's personality, values, and counseling approach.

This digital engagement helps create a sense of familiarity and trust even before the client enters the formal counseling room. This phenomenon reflects the transformation of therapeutic communication from an exclusive, closed-room model to a digital media-based, public communication model. This integration between interpersonal communication and mass communication is particularly relevant in reaching digital-native generations such as millennials.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insight into strategies that mental health counselors can use to build trust with Millennial clients.

This research underscores the importance of cultural competence, authenticity, and the use of technology in mental health practice. By implementing these strategies, counselors can create a safe and supportive therapeutic environment where Millennial clients feel understood, valued, and empowered to achieve their mental health goals. Involving clients in the mentoring process is essential. (Toros & Falch-Eriksen, 2021).

Mental health counselors who prioritize building trust with their clients are more likely to establish a strong therapeutic alliance, encourage positive treatment outcomes, and empower Millennial clients to take control of their mental health and well-being. Trust can grow when healthcare providers respect clients and work together to define goals (Toros & Falch-Eriksen, 2021). In addition, organizational leaders should develop strategies that build on existing levels of trust within the organization and then work to increase those levels of trust over time (Pablo et al., 2007). Transparency is crucial in building trust, as sharing information and adhering to agreements fosters positive relationships (Toros & Falch-Eriksen, 2021).

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