

# The Attitude of Muslim University

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# The Attitude of Muslim University Students toward an Online Counselling System

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This study aim is to determine Muslim university students' intention to use an online counselling system. Four variables that influence attention to use the online counselling system were developed and tested through a survey. This research used a quantitative approach. There were 120 questionnaires distributed to students from four faculties. From 120 distributed questionnaires, 108 of them were returned and completed. The results of analyses show that interactivity, responsiveness, social stigma avoidance, anonymity, and direct non-mahram avoidability have a positive influence on Muslim intention to use the online counselling system. The findings highlight an important issue, which is Islamic universities may be encouraged to develop online counselling systems to reduce barriers regarding Islamic values and norms in counselling service provision.

**Keywords:** *Online counselling, Muslim students, Islamic universities, counsellors*

## Introduction

Previous studies highlighted that University and college student populations experience a high prevalence of mental health and academic pressure conditions, particularly depression and anxiety, and experience higher levels of psychological distress (Adlaf, Gliksman, Demers, & Newton-Taylor, 2001; Daniel Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009; D. Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Surette & Shier, 2017). University students may experience the stress and pressures at the early stage of their studies or during the whole process of the research. Unable to cope with these difficulties may result in study termination, retention, and academic failures. The relationship between students' mental health with academic success has been found in previous studies(e.g., Daniel Eisenberg et al., 2009; Wyatt, Oswald, & Ochoa, 2017).

Research also has pointed that significant numbers of students on college campuses experiencing mental health distress and an ever-increasing number of college students who are



choosing to make an off-campus educational experience or leave campus for a specified period (Morse, Spoltore, & Galvinhill, 2017). This phenomenon becomes worse when a university does not have a mental health support centre, such as a counselling centre. Students might keep a stressful situation without a solution, which may cause their education failure. In some cases, students' mental health support only relies on an academic advisor who takes care of a specified number of students according to a campus regulator appointment.

Student counselling services centre is recognised globally for its role in promoting holistic student development, assisting with psychological and personal difficulties, as well as facilitating academic retention and throughput in higher education (Brand et al., 2005; Naidoo & Cartwright, 2018). However, most counselling services are provided through face to face mode, which may discourage students' attention to use the services due to lack of confidentiality (López & Levy, 2013). This may cause students' satisfaction to become lower, and they may not return to the services in the future. Some students from Islamic universities believe that non-*mahram* men and women should not have direct contact (Srimulyani, 2007). This belief has caused male or female students reluctant to seek mental consultations with opposite sex counsellors.

Rosenbaum and Weatherford (2017) emphasise that counselling centres need to accommodate the particular demands of their stakeholders on campuses. Besides, a university must cope with various mental issues that affect the academic performance of its students (Brunner, Wallace, Keyes, & Polychronis, 2018). However, if the counselling is absent, a campus may do not have data relating to students' mental health, which causes poor strategy in assisting students in academic development.

This study, therefore, surveyed to understand Islamic university students' intention to use an online counselling centre provided by an Islamic university. For this study purpose, online counselling is recognised as any delivery of mental and behavioural health services, including but not limited to therapy, consultation, and psycho-education, by a licensed practitioner to a client in a non-face-to face setting through distance communication devices, for instance, the telephone, fax, asynchronous e-mail, synchronous chat, and video conferencing (Demirci, Şar, & Manap, 2014). This online counselling provides support for clients through various online facilities such as online chat, telephone, email, and online discussion forums. The facilities enable clients to reach the service in 24 hours and seven days a week without constraining by time and space.

Studies on the online counselling service adoption under Islamic higher education in Indonesia are limited performed. This study is expected to shed light on how Muslim students perceived online counselling and what variables determine their intention to use an online counselling



system. Understanding the phenomenon through online advice not only help the students solve their problem, but also support an Islamic university to improve services.

### **Related Studies**

Previous studies (e.g., Barnett, 2005; Brown, 2012; Chang, 2005; Chester & Glass, 2006) have conducted studies on online counselling at various institutions. Herr and Best (1984) began introducing the concept of communication therapy using computers through an internet connection. At that time, the concept of online counselling was still limited through a network of computers connected via an internet network that had not been supported by various online applications. Then many studies related to online counselling continue to emerge, which include Grohol (2004), Barnet (2005), and Mallen et al. (see also: Mallen & Vogel, 2005b; 2005; Zelvin & Speyer, 2004). However, most online counselling studies were conducted in non-Muslim education institutions where cultural and religious issues are not the main concern.

Many previous studies show the active use of online counselling services because their identity is more confidential (M. Dowling & Rickwood, 2013; Leibert, Jr., Munson, & York, 2006). For example, research conducted by Harbertsroh, et al. (2008) on college students in America found that these students were very enthusiastic about using online chat to consult because visually there was no need to meet. Thus the students can consult freely without feeling pressured due to shame or being seen by the counsellor. However, online counselling also requires skills to use technology for both parties, both counsellors and lecturers.

In another study conducted by Roehen, Kan, and Wong (2004) also found that male students even showed a more active nature in the counselling process when it was done online. In the online counselling process, problems with anonymity, comfort, and time can be more assured because of the nature of online counselling that does not require direct gaze. Richard and Vigano (2013) state that such positive things are conveyed more by their clients when they conduct research.

However, it is essential to consider that online facilities such as websites, e-mails, chats, etc., cannot replace counsellors' functions in service provision (Elleven & Allen, 2004). In other words, counsellors still have to play a significant role in providing counselling services as practised in a face to face mode. Online facilities have advantages in counselling services compared to conventional services because they do not require face-to-face meetings (Mallen & Vogel, 2005a).

Another study conducted by Tsan and Day (2007), which involved 176 college students, also found that their attitudes and behaviours related to the use of counselling services on campuses were increasingly active when they learned that counselling services could be obtained online.



Students actively send e-mails, instant text messages, and chat through online sites that are prepared. The students cannot be ashamed to mention their most personal problems to their online counsellors. This never happened when counselling services were given face-to-face. These results prove that online counselling services can provide tangible benefits for solving problems experienced by students. But ethical issues such as not divulging the secret of students still need to be considered even though counselling services are carried out online (Rummell & Joyce, 2010).

Success in psychiatric healing therapy was discovered by Dowling and Rickwood (2013) in their research on social workers. They found that online treatment (through online chat) was very effective in curing the problems of mental stress experienced by these social workers. Social workers often experience high mobility and meet people of different cultural and behavioural differences. This increases the stress of social workers. But with this counselling service, they can contact counsellors at any time.

Online self-help may help increase the reach of mental health services for college students, but little research has examined students' actual interest/use of these resources. An online survey of 389 college students examined the intentions and use of online mental health resources as compared with other support options. Findings indicated the highest intentions/use of informal supports (e.g., parents, friends) for mental health problems and lowest intentions/use for online self-help. However, a subset of students showed a preference for online self-help over other forms of support. Participants were also more likely to request online self-help resources (21%) than in-person therapy resources (9%) when offered these options. Reported barriers were also identified for using mobile applications (apps) specifically (e.g., stigma, credibility, privacy). Overall, results suggest mixed findings and relatively low interest for the use of online self-help among college students, while highlighting potential barriers that might be addressed to increase engagement (Levin, Stocke, Pierce, & Levin, 2018).

### Theoretical Constructs

An interactive website is considered as a website that provides a number of facilities to help users interact with website owners. These interactive facilities include the presence of e-mail and online forums to make it easier for people to contact service providers (United-Nations, 2008). Meanwhile, Kaaya (2004) and Nurdin also says that an interactive website has facilities such as there is a column for member suggestions and various means that allow for two-way communication. Furthermore, high interactive level of a website also has facilities to download various forms and also a means of posting various community comments. Users can ask various things through websites that are provided by an institution. Service providers also respond to various community questions through interactive means on the website (Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005).



A responsive website is understood as a website that provides various facilities to enable users to contact the service providers (Tubin & Klein, 2007) and the willingness to help customers in a short time (Wan, 2000). When the service provided through a website is delivered in the expected time, the customers may perceive it as a responsive website (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012). The website operators have a good willingness to respond to every customer inquiries base on a high service provision principle (Samsudina, Kamaldenb, Azizc, Ismaild, & Ujange, 2019).

Online counselling service provision may be useful in reducing social stigma associated with receiving mental health therapy (Wong, Bonn, Tam, & Wong, 2018). For people who are uncomfortable with receiving face to face counselling, online counselling system allows access to such services in private without having to visit the counselling centre. People who seek counselling service in a traditional mode often associated with stereotypes and prejudice resulted from misconceptions about mental counselling issues (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). The online counselling system can avoid this social stigma due to anonymity in the service provision process. Users and service providers may interact without require to disclose their identities.

Meanwhile, Muslims has a belief that non-*mahram* men and women are not allowed to have direct contact without accompanied by their close relatives. For example, the Islamic boarding schools have set a rule, which is none of the females is allowed to mix with male students during studying. The practice is often implemented in the form of a segregated educational setting (Srimulyani, 2007). Avoiding physical contact with men who are not related by a blood or marital bond, acceptance by other Muslims, and how to best raise children to be good Muslims (Othman, 2006; Rehman, 2003). Such in countries with majority Muslim belief that women should always be accompanied by their *mahram* (male guardian). The beliefs and norms may affect their behaviour in public services seeking.

Base on the literature review, five theoretical constructs are summarised in the following table.

**Table 1:** Theoretical Constructs

No	Constructs	Authors
1	Responsive	(Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012; Nurdin Nurdin, 2017b; Tubin & Klein, 2007; Wan, 2000)
2	Social stigma avoidance	(Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Lawlor & Kirakowski, 2014; Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007)
3	Anonymity	(M. Dowling & Rickwood, 2013; M. J. Dowling & Rickwood, 2014; Leibert et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2018)
4	Non- <i>Mahram</i> contact avoidability	(Othman, 2006; Rehman, 2003; Srimulyani, 2007)



## Methodology

This study used a survey to find out Muslim students' intention to use online counselling, which is provided through a campus online official website. The purpose of the survey was to find out the level of user intention to use online counselling website. Knowing the trend of user intention to use a technology product may help policymakers to improve the quality of the technology so that the technology services can be utilised maximally by users (Norfazlina, Akma, Adrina, & Noorizan, 2016; Nurdin Nurdin, 2017a). Besides that, the survey can also be a factor in the success of an information system created (N. Nurdin, Pettalongi, & Mangasing, 2019; Vaezi, Mills, Chin, & Zafar, 2016).

The survey sheets were distributed to 120 students randomly selected from four faculties at State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Palu. The survey used a five Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Each variable consisted of 5 questions, which total question to be responded were 25 questions. Out of 120 distributed surveys, seven of them were not returned, and five were discarded due to incorrectly filled out of the survey sheets. A total of 108 completed survey sheets was collected to be calculated and analysed. Simple statistical analysis was used to analyse the data collected from 108 users of online counselling systems. The result of the analyses was used to determine the percentage of students' intention to online counselling systems according to each variable developed in the theoretical construct section.

## Results and Discussion

This study was conducted in State Institute For Islamic Studies (IAIN) Palu, Central Sulawesi Indonesia. The respondents were recruited purposely within the Islamic university who have used an online counselling service centre. There are 47 men and 61 women respondents were recruited. The age of respondents is from 18 to 25 years old, and they are from four faculties of the university. The respondents' characteristics are depicted in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Demographic Data of Respondents

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Men	47	44
Women	61	56
Total	108	
<b>Faculty</b>		
a. Faculty of Islamic Teacher Training	45	47
b. Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business	32	30
c. Faculty of Islamic Law	21	19
d. Faculty of Islamic Philosophy and Communication	10	9
Total	108	
<b>Year of Start Education</b>		
2015	11	10
2016	22	14
2017	42	45
2018	33	31
Total	108	

From Table 2 above, we can see that the majority of the respondents are women. The highest percentages of respondents come from the faculty of Islamic Teacher Training, while the lowest rates of respondents are from the Faculty of Islamic Philosophy and Communication. The second and third majority of respondents are from the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Islamic Law, respectively. The number of respondents from each faculty reflects the number of students within the faculties in which the Faculty of Islamic Teaching and Teacher Training as the most crowded faculty.

### **Item Validity Test**

All item measurements used in this study were tested in a pilot study before used in the research analysis. The pilot study aimed to test the validity and reliability of the items. The result of the pilot study analyses shows that all items used in this study were valid and reliable. Therefore, all of the items can be used for further analysis. The result of the validity test of each item is depicted in Table 3 below:





**Table 3:** The Result of Validity Test

Variable	Items	Corrected Item Questions Total Correlation	R Table	Validity
<b>Responsiveness</b>	I can get a response faster from online counselling service	,402	0,257	VALID
	Online counselling services provide feedback through many channels	,309	0,257	VALID
	I can consult my problems through many online facilities	,575	0,257	VALID
	I always get feedback less than one day from the online counselling service	,532	0,257	VALID
	My questions were replied quickly by the online counselling service centre	,624	0,257	VALID
<b>Social stigma avoidance</b>	Using online counselling avoids embarrassment	,278	0,257	VALID
	I am not worried about discussing my problem because nobody will see me during an online consultation.	,663	0,257	VALID
	I think nobody will look at me when I use online counselling	,568	0,257	VALID
	I am not worried about negative view from friends when I use online counselling	,350	0,257	VALID
	I think the online counselling service will protect me from negative judgments	,518	0,257	VALID
<b>Anonymity</b>	I use the online service because my identity is kept confidential	,530	0,257	VALID
	I use an online counselling service because the counsellors will not identify me	,324	0,257	VALID



	I am confident to tell my problems to the counsellors in online consultation sessions	,436	0,257	VALID
	I believe the online counselling service system keeps my personal problems confidential	,701	0,257	VALID
	I think nobody can identify me when I use online counselling services	,669	0,257	VALID
	I begin to apply for sharia loan when my friends also use it	,282	0,257	VALID
<b>Non-mahram contact avoidability</b>	Online counselling service avoids me from looking at a different sex counsellor	,550	0,257	VALID
	I am more open to discuss my personal problems even though the counsellor is not the same sex with me in an online counselling session	,389	0,257	VALID
	I am not shy to discuss my personal problems to a different sex counsellor during online consultations	,580	0,257	VALID
	I don't feel sinful if I talk to a non-mahram counsellor in an online consultation session	,389	0,257	VALID
	I am not worried about men or women counsellor when I use the online counselling service	,580	0,257	VALID
<b>Attitude to use online counselling</b>	I will use the online counselling system in the future	,561	0,257	VALID
	I will regularly use online counselling service if it is available	,609	0,257	VALID
	I prefer to use online counselling than face to face counselling	,487	0,257	VALID
	I willing to use online counselling even though I have to queue	,362	0,257	VALID
	I will recommend online counselling service to my friends	,663	0,257	VALID



All data from Table 3 above show that each item has r value higher than r table (0,257), and they show positive results. Thus, all questions items are valid. Then, the result of the reliability test of each variable is shown in the following Table 4.

**Table 4:** The Result of Items Reliability Test

Variables	Reliabilities Coefficient	Cronbach Alpha	Reliable
<b>X</b>			
<b>Responsiveness</b>	5 items	0,791	Reliable
<b>Social stigma avoidance</b>	5 items	0,761	Reliable
<b>Anonymity</b>	5 items	0,780	Reliable
<b>Non-mahram contact avoidability</b>	5 items	0,710	Reliable
<b>Y</b>			
<b>Attitude to use online counselling</b>	5 items	0,690	Reliable

The reliability test from Table 4 above shows that each variable has Alpha Cronbach higher than 0,6, which means all variables (responsiveness, social stigma avoidance, anonymity, and non-mahram contact avoidability) are reliable. Next step, we calculate multiple linear regression, and the results are shown in Table 5 below:

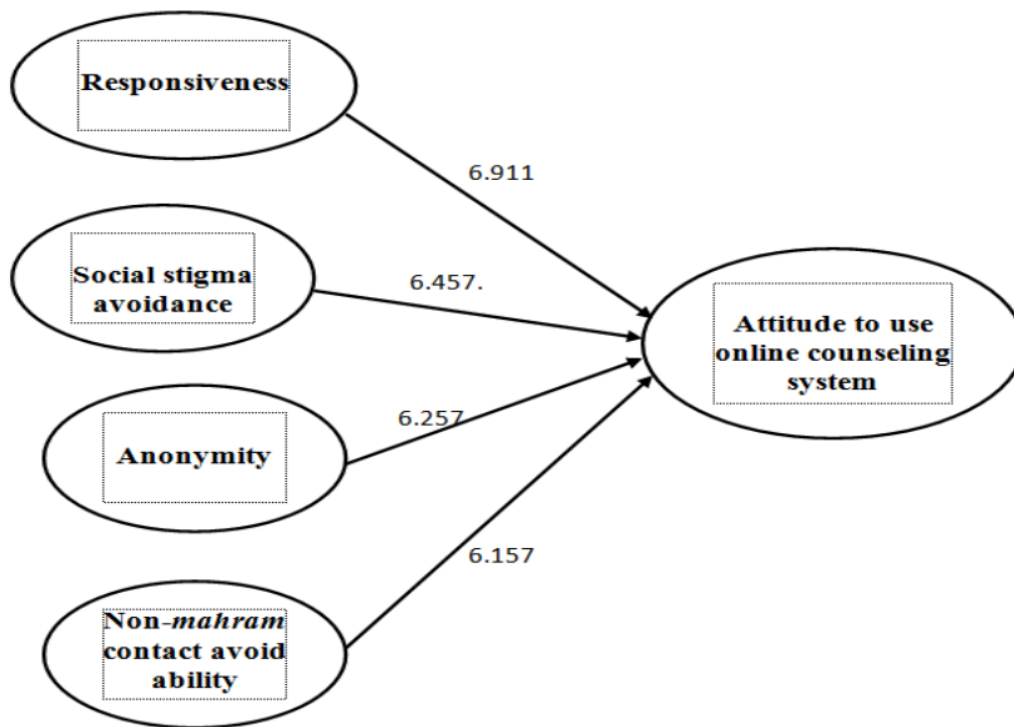
**Table 5:** Multiple Linear Regression Calculation

10 Model		Coefficients						Collinearity Statistics	
		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF	
		B	Std. Error	Beta					
1	(Constant)	1,681	2,271		-,740	,461			
	X1	,449	,065	,528	6,911	,000	,654	1,529	
	X2	,454	,075	,532	6,457	,000	,769	1,510	
	X3	,564	,083	,434	6,257	,000	,742	1,464	
	X4	,574	,093	,454	6,157	,000	,702	1,424	

a. Dependent Variable: Y

The regression calculation shows that the t value of variable responsiveness is 6.911, t value for social stigma avoidance is 6,457, t value for anonymity is 6,257, and t value for non-*mahram* contact avoidability is 6,157. The calculation results mean that all variables, responsiveness (X1), social stigma avoidance (X2), anonymity (X3), and non-*mahram* contact avoidability (X4) have a positive influence on attitude to use online counselling services. The result of hypotheses testing, then, is presented in figure 1 below.

**Figure 1.** The Result of Hypothesis Test



### Discussion

The results of the survey show that the four variable determined the trend of Muslim students attitude to use online counselling systems are in a positive trend. The four variables are considered to significantly influence the students' attitude to use the online counselling service. The data from the above figure 1 shows that most Muslim students who use the online counselling service agree that the service is very responsive because the online counselling website has a number of facilities that support consultations. Students can chat online with one



of the counsellors through the WhatsApp facility available on the PBK website. If students are reluctant to chat online, students can ask the counsellor to call them through the available telephone number.

The students' perception of the level of responsiveness of the online counselling system proves significant. We suspect the primary cause of high responsiveness perception of the online counselling service might be due to quick feedback from the counsellors behind the online service. The counsellors who provide service through online systems are available all times during the workday. Besides, the counsellors' ability to handle counselee questions through the system is also high due to their expertise in online counselling. Previous research has suggested that the quick response in an online counselling service is more often caused by professionalism associated with combining counselling skills with the skills to master technology at once (Barak, Klein, & Proudfoot, 2009). This could happen to the team of IAIN Palu counsellors who had been trained provided online counselling service before.

The issue of confidentiality in online counselling is also significant to maintain, as revealed by Mallen et al. (2005). As such, the psychological pressure of the counsellor gets heavier. Besides that, maintaining confidentiality is also a code of ethics in the counselling profession that must be supported by counsellors (Rummell & Joyce, 2010) both in the form of offline and online counselling.

As the findings show that most students also agree that their attitude to using online counselling is influenced by the ability to avoid social stigma in which people who seek advice are often considered to have mental illness issues (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Lawlor & Kirakowski, 2014). Through the online counselling systems, the students can hide their physical identity from their colleagues and counsellors, which, then, increases their intention to use the system. The ability to hide identity is also associated with anonymity, which was also found significant. The students agree that the online counselling system can protect their identity from public attention. In this study, anonymity in online counselling is also understood as secure confidentiality in particular when the online counselling service is provided through an online application such as WhatApps. Previous studies (e.g., Richards & Viganó, 2013; Young, 2005) found that anonymity in online counselling service increase likelihood to the service by users because of the level of convenience perception.

Most students also agree that their intention to use online counselling is influenced by the ability to avoid social stigma, which is people who seek advice are considered to have mental illness issues (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Lawlor & Kirakowski, 2014). Through the online counselling systems, the students can hide their physical identity from their colleagues and counsellors, which, then, increases their intention to use the system. The most crucial variable that determines Muslim students' intention to use the online counselling system is the ability



of the system to reduce physical contact between female or male students with their different-sex counsellor. Most of the Muslim students, in particular, who graduated from Islamic boarding schools, have a strong belief that direct contact with non-*mahram* is a sin (Srimulyani, 2007). The faith influences eighty per cent of the students to use the online counselling systems. The finding highlights the essential ability of the online counselling system in reducing barriers relating to Islamic values and norms in men and women relationships in campus services provision.

### Conclusion

This study found that four variables have positively influenced Muslim students' intention to use the online counselling system. Most students agree that interactivity, responsiveness, social stigma avoidance, anonymity, and direct non-*mahram* contact avoidability have become factors that determine their intention to use the system. The findings highlight that Islamic higher education institutions may need to provide online counselling system to reduce barriers related to cultural and religious issues. The online counselling system may help Islamic universities to cope with low usage of current face to face counselling services.



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