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Cyber Counseling:

Pastoral Support through WhatsApp Group to Fellow Congregants

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ABSTRACT

The digital era requires humans to continue to follow and adapt by learning to utilize technology. Likewise, church congregations are required to follow the flow of the times to improve the quality of digital services. Therefore, in the midst of digital developments, the term cyber counseling has emerged which can be used as a pastoral service through WhatsApp Group social media for church congregations. The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze cyber counseling as a tool for providing pastoral support through WhatsApp Group to fellow congregations. This article uses qualitative research with a descriptive nature and collects data through literature studies and then analyzes it to obtain results such as ethical reflection in cyber counseling, the role of WhatsApp Group in pastoral support, practical implementation and mentoring techniques in WhatsApp Group, and cyber counseling offers for today's congregations. Through the results obtained, it can be concluded that cyber counseling through the WhatsApp Group application can convey spiritual messages and guidance, question and answer sessions or open discussions, joint prayers and empathetic support, self-reflection sessions and personal spiritual development, learning through media content.
Keywords: *Cyber counseling, WhatsApp Group, Pastoral Support, Congregation, Digital.*

INTRODUCTION

This research in the background of pastoral conversations on social media WhatsApp Group as one of the means in providing support to fellow congregations even though they do not meet directly. There is also a pastoral conversation at WhatsApp Group use WhatsApp because it refers to global statistical data in 2024, WhatsApp ranks number 1 with 88.70% of Indonesians using it as a messenger application (Reportal, 2024). This view is inseparable from

Artikel History

Submitted:	Revised:	Published:
28 December 2024	10 March 2025	25 March 2025

the way the church has adapted to technological developments so that the use of WhatsApp Group to conduct cyber counseling can provide pastoral support to fellow congregations wherever their existence.

In the last decade, the world in particular Indonesia has passed a broad digital revolution, revolutionizing the way we interact and communicate. One of the phenomena arising from this change is cyber counseling, which is a counseling service that is done online through various digital platforms (Sheilla et al., 2023). In the pastoral context, the use of applications such as WhatsApp for cyber counseling has become increasingly relevant, especially in providing pastoral support to fellow congregations (Firmanto, 2021). WhatsApp was chosen by the author because in Indonesia the application was the most popular compared to other social media chat. This phenomenon not only reflects changes in how to communicate, but also answers the urgent need for counseling services that are more flexible, easily accessible, and in accordance with the lifestyle of modern sociefro.

The development of information and communication technology has had a significant impact in various aspects of life, including in the field of counseling. In the context of the church, many congregations experience mental pressure due to various challenges of daily life, such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal relationships (Rakhmat Ponco Adi Saputro, Chin Chin Dwinanti, 2020). By utilizing WhatsApp, the church can create a safe space where the congregation can share experiences and get support from fellow members without having to meet physically. This is very important considering that many people feel more comfortable talking about their personal problems through text or sound messages compared to face to face (J. E. Nendissa et al., 2024). WhatsApp Group is the first choice because of its ease of use and the ability to accommodate interactions in groups. In the group, members of the congregation can support each other and provide encouragement with each other, creating a sense of togetherness in the midst of difficulties.

Although cyber counseling offers many advantages, there are several challenges that need to be faced (Budianto et al., 2019). One of them is to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the information shared in the group. In the context of counseling, confidentiality is very important. Therefore, the church needs to set clear rules about what can and cannot be shared in the group. In addition, not all members of the congregation have adequate technological skills to use this application effectively (Mansyur et al., 2020), it is necessary to have the ethics of counseling services as a reference for support for the congregation (J. E. Nendissa, 2024a). Some may feel awkward or uncomfortable talking about personal problems through text or sound messasoci.

The quality of counseling is also an important concern in the implementation of cyber counseling. Although some studies have shown that online counseling can be effective, there are concerns that digital interactions cannot replace the depth of relationships that are intertwined in face -to -face counseling. Non-verbal limitations in digital communication can affect understanding and empathy between counselors and clients. Therefore, it is important for church leaders to get training on how to conduct counseling effectively through digital platforms (Irpan, 2022). In research on trend analysis of the use of social media in the implementation of cyber counseling shows that the WhatsApp application is effective in the

implementation of cyber counseling and has been tested to overcome various problems, such as increasing self -disclosure, increasing Self -confidence, fostering independence, emotional management, and appropriate decision making for the future (Budianto et al., 2019). This shows that WhatsApp is not just a communication application, but also an effective means to support individual mental health.

One of the main benefits of cyber counseling via WhatsApp Group is accessibility (Artati & Herdi, 2023). By using this application, the congregation can access pastoral support anytime and anywhere without having to attend physical meetings. This is very important for those who have a busy schedule or live away from the church. In addition, comfort is also an important factor. Many people find it easier to share personal problems through text messages rather than talking directly with someone face to face.

Cyber Counseling via WhatsApp Group also creates a sense of togetherness among members of the congregation. In the group, they can support each other and provide encouragement to each other. This can be very beneficial for individuals who feel isolated or alone in their struggle. The online counseling shows the results of better therapy than offline counseling, although the combination of the two gives the best results (Hasanah & Haryadi, 2022). *Cyber Counseling via WhatsApp Group is an innovative step in providing pastoral support to the congregation in this digital era. By utilizing existing technology, the Church* (J. E. Nendissa, 2022) can reach more people and provide assistance needed in a more flexible and comfortable way. Although there are certain challenges that need to be overcome such as privacy, technological skills, and quality service quality of the benefits of this approach is very large.

With a deep understanding of the benefits and challenges of cyber counseling through WhatsApp Group, the church can be more prepared to face the dynamics of modern life while still fulfilling their calls to support each other in faith and daily life. This is not only about providing emotional support but also about building a strong community in the midst of changing times and creating space for individuals to grow spiritually and emotionally in the context of the brotherhood of their faith.

The various studies that discuss counseling cyber include Sukoco & Arif who wrote about individual counseling services through cyber counseling, counseling formation of self -concept (Kw & S., 2019). From Dyah Kirana wrote about cyber counseling services as a form of innovation and breakthrough in the world of counseling for millennial generation (Kirana, 2019). Mukhamad dkk examined about realizing a system to support the online counseling process by creating mobile applications (Sangiba et al., 2022). In addition, Mariana & Herdi conducted research on exporting cyber counseling during the Covid-19 pandemic period for counseling guidance teachers and students (M. P. Sari & Herdi, 2021). The four studies above are different from this paper because they have not yet discussed the issue of cyber counseling as pastoral support through WhatsApp Group for the congregation so that it becomes a novelty or renewal of the purpose of this study. This novelty is based on the right integration between traditional pastoral principles with modern technology and produces innovations in ecclesiastical services that are not only relevant, but also provide innovative and adaptive solutions to keep up with the times, so that it can Effectively and efficiently meet the spiritual

needs of the congregation in the digital age.This can be offered by the author so that it can be a guide for God's servants that not only direchly pastoral support is effective but through social media facilities can also have a positive influence on the congregation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article uses qualitative research that examines the phenomena or natural symptoms. Qualitative research is fundamental and naturalistic or naturalistic, and cannot be done in the laboratory, but in the field. Therefore, this kind of research is often referred to as Naturalistic Inquiry or Field Study (Abdussamad, 2021). This article also uses a descriptive approach so that it can describe the meaning of data or phenomena that can be captured by researchers, by showing evidence (Abdussamad, 2021). Qualitative research with a descriptive approach will be supported by literature data collection techniques. The literature study was conducted to solve problems that are based on critical and in-depth review of journals, books, articles in Google Scholar related to cyber counseling and pastoral through Whatsssapp Group. Data analysis needs to be done in this paper thro Results ugh actual content and internal media features. This analysis can be used by researchers to examine human behavior indirectly through analysis of communication such as: textbooks, essays, newspapers, novels, articles, magazines, songs, images, advertisements, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar that can be analyzed (M. Sari & Asmendri, 2020). Thus, researchers hope that qualitative research methods supported by literature data collection techniques can overcome problems and analyze so as to get valid and accurate.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cyber Counseling

The word cyber was first used by Norbert Wiener in 1948, when he wrote writing about communication controls in animals and machines (Fahrurozi, 2024). The author uses the word cyber because it reflects the usefulness of technology in conducting counseling practices that offer time and place flexibility, as well as the accessibility of counseling services. Cyber counseling, or online counseling, is a form of counseling service that utilizes information and communication technology (ICT) to provide psychological and emotional support to individuals. Cyber counseling is a professional service performed between counselors and counselees who are separated by distance and time by utilizing internet technology both interactive and non -interactive, both directly and indirectly using a safe and information sitewhich is always updated, where counseling services can be provided via email, chat, safe video conferencing (Harahap, 2024). Cyber counseling can be an innovation in the Society 5.0 era that is adapted to its superiority that can be done with differences in place, cyber counseling can also save time, this is because it can be accessed by counselors and counselees anytime and anywhere according to the promiseagreed (Harahap, 2024). Cyber counseling management requires a counselor to have a set of technical knowledge related to the internet and all the devices in it. In addition, a counselor also needs to master norms and ethics in the use of cyber

counseling. This is important because it is in direct contact with the aspects of the confidentiality of data and history of the online counseling service process (Budianto, 2021).

In the pastoral context, cyber counseling can be used to provide spiritual and emotional support to members of the congregation through digital platforms such as WhatsApp Group (Bastomi, H., & Kudus, 2019). In the last decade, the use of this technology has developed rapidly, allowing counselors to reach more individuals in a more flexible and efficient way. The development of digital technology has opened new opportunities in the field of counseling. In the pastoral context, cyber counseling through WhatsApp Group can be used to provide spiritual and emotional support to members of the congregation. Priests or pastoral counselors can create a WhatsApp group to communicate with members of the congregation, provide advice, prayers, and other support. This also allows members of the congregation to support each other and share their experiences.

Benefit of Cyber Counseling via WhatsApp Group (Maulidia & Widodo, 2022)

Accessibility and Flexibility: WhatsApp Group allows counselors to provide support anytime and anywhere, without geographical restrictions. This is very useful for individuals who may not be able to attend face -to -face counseling sessions because of limited time or location.

Comfort and Anonymity: Many individuals feel more comfortable talking about their personal problems through text than directly. WhatsApp Group also allows members to remain anonymous, which can reduce the shame or stigma associated with seeking help.

Communication Efficiency: WhatsApp enables fast and efficient communication. The counselor can respond to questions or concerns quickly, provide timely support to group members.

Challenges and Solutions

One of the main challenges in cyber counseling is keep data and security of data. The counselor must ensure that the conversation in the WhatsApp group is protected and not accessed by the unauthorized party. Not all individuals have access to the technology needed for cyber counseling (Pangaribuan & Rumetor, 2024). Potential solutions include providing internet devices or access for those who need it. Counselors need to be trained to use this technology effectively. Training in digital communication and cyber counseling ethics is very important to ensure quality services. Cyber Counseling via WhatsApp Group offers many benefits in providing pastoral support, including accessibility, comfort, and efficiency (Anindya et al., 2024). Research shows that this application can improve psychological well - being and help individuals solve their problems. However, there are challenges that need to be overcome, such as privacy and technological limitations. With training or technical assistance at the beginning and security measures, cyber counseling can be a very effective tool in supporting the spiritual and emotional welfare of members of the congregation.

The role of Whatsapp Group in pastoral support

WhatsApp Group is an online version of group counseling that is usually run face to face directly, but the times changing group counseling can also function to use WhatsApp Group so that it becomes an effective medium for two -way communication between church leaders or Pastoral counselors and congregations. This group can function as a forum for discussion, sharing prayers, mutual support, and convey messages to strengthen faith. In addition, this group gives a sense of togetherness and strengthens the relationship between the ethnicity through scheduled and spontaneous interactions.

Creating a communication space that allows the congregation to interact with church leaders or pastoral counselors in a fast and easy time. With text -based communication, audio, or even video, members can convey their worrys, ask for prayer, or share testimony directly (Ardi et al., 2013). Allows members of the congregation to support each other and provide moral or spiritual support with each other, strengthening a sense of togetherness in the community. The congregation can share experiences or provide encouragement to colleagues who might face similar problems (Ifdil & Ardi, 2013). In this group, the role of counselors or pastoral leaders is to manage the discussion to remain positive and keep the discussion centered on Christian values.

Pastoral leaders can send daily or weekly reflections, Bible verses, and spiritual inspiration to all group members. This provides consistent spiritual intake for the congregation without having to wait for a direct meeting (Herman & Mulyadi, 2023). By sending periodic messages, leaders can direct the focus of members to the principles of Bible in daily life (Punuh, 2024). Can function as a container to pray together. For example, members can share prayer requests, and all other members, including pastoral leaders, can pray for these needs. This prayer can be done in writing or through voice note. In addition, the group can schedule a special time to pray together virtually, strengthen the bonds between the congregation even though it is done online. Pastoral counselors can design a discussion session where group members can discuss special topics, such as forgiveness, overcoming stress, or growth of faith (Franky, 2022). In this session, the counselor can direct the discussion by providing guidelines or reflective questions that help members to reflect on their experiences, and connect them with Christian values.

WhatsApp Group provides the ability for counselors to find out faster if there are members who need immediate support. Members can share their situation at any time, and pastoral leaders can respond in a short time (Theresiani Bheka & Intansakti Pius X, 2024). This allows leaders or counselors to immediately offer advice or encourage members to discuss further problems personally if needed. WhatsApp Group supports the development of a culture of love, empathy, and mutual support. Pastoral counselors can invite members to respond with love when someone shares problems or prayer requests (J. E. Nendissa, 2021). This builds an atmosphere that supports and reflects Christ's love in the community. One of the main strengths of WhatsApp Group is ease of access. Unlike physical meetings that might be constrained by distance, time, or cost, WhatsApp allows anyone who has internet access to connect. This makes it easier for members of the congregation who may have a busy schedule or location far from the church to remain involved and receive pastoral support.

Practical Implementation and Mentoring Techniques in Whatsapp Group

1. *Submission of spiritual messages and guidonli*

Counselors or group leaders can send spiritual messages and scheduled guidance.

Daily or weekly reflection: Presenting a brief reflection taken from Bible verses or spiritual writings that are relevant to the challenges faced by group members. This reflection can be a source of strengthening faith and personal reflection.

Bible verses that arouse enthusiasm: send verses that function as reinforcers in difficult times, for example verses about calm, hope, or healing.

Guide and Spiritual Advice: Provide specific advice based on the situation faced by members. For example, in dealing with uncertainty, counselors can discuss the importance of relying on God and maintaining surrender.

2. **Question and answer sessions or open discudiscus**

Provide a special time where group members can ask questions or share thoughts openly.

Scheduled Discussion: Counselors can set a certain time every week or month to open a question and answer session. At this time, members can ask questions or topics that they want to discuss, and the counselor will respond with advice or views from the Bible perspective.

Special Theme: Each session can have a special theme that focuses on certain topics, for example "Facing anxiety with faith" or "Managing conflict in the family." This can provide more focused and deep dilocation

3. *Prayer together and empathic support*

WhatsApp Group can be a space to create spiritual bonds through joint prayer activities and emotional support.

Virtual Joint Prayer Schedule: Counselors can arrange a joint prayer schedule where group members pray for certain topics. For example, every Friday afternoon a joint prayer is held through a short chat or voice message. This can foster a sense of togetherness among members.

Space for prayer requests: Providing space in a group where members can share their prayer requests. Every member who has a request can write it down, and other members and counselors can respond with prayers or reinforcement words.

Empathing and encouraging support: Counselors can teach empathic communication techniques to group members, so they can provide sincere support to each other. For example, by sharing the testimony and experience of relevant faith.

4. **Self -reflection session and personal spirituality developmque**

WhatsApp Group can also function as a medium to guide members to do self -reflection and deepen their personal spirituality.

Guide to Self -Reflection: Counselors can provide reflection guidelines that help members evaluate their spiritual lives. For example, this guide can include questions like, "What did God teach me this week?" Or "How can I show Christ's love in my relationship with others?"

Challenges of Faith and Weekly Commitment: Every week, counselors can provide small faith challenges, such as "Pray for someone in need," or "Contemplate a Bible part every day." This challenge can help members to continue to grow spiritually outside the group sessions.

Recording of Personal Development: Inviting members to record their spiritual development or write personal testimony about the growth of their faith. This can be shared in the group if members feel comfortable, and can be an inspiration for others.

5. **Learning through multimedia content**

WhatsApp Group can support the spread of multimedia material that can help in strengthening faith and emotional healing.

Audio and Devotional Videos: In addition to text, counselors can share audio or short video recordings that contain reflections, prayers, or spiritual teaching. This can be a more personal and in -depth means than ordinary text messages.

Article links or spiritual reading: Counselors can share articles or reading sources that are relevant to group needs. For example, reading about how to deal with fear or forgiveness in a Christian perspective.

Video Testimonials or Voice Note: Members who want to share testimonies can do it via voice notes or short videos. This can create a stronger bond among members, because testimony is often more effectively delivered verbally.

Ethical Reflection in Cyber Counseling

Cyber Counseling through the WhatsApp group requires an ethical approach in maintaining the confidentiality of personal information. The counselor must set clear rules to ensure that group members understand the importance of maintaining privacy with each other, especially for sensitive information. In ethical reflection, counselors need to understand the boundaries of online counseling. Sometimes, text media does not allow sensitive or complex problems. The counselor must be reflective in determining it is necessary to continue to face -to -face sessions or refer to other experts (such as psychologists or professional counselors) if the congregation problems need more specific help. One important reflection is to prevent the congregation to not be too dependent on the WhatsApp group for each of their problems. Counselors need to emphasize members of the group importance of personal strengthening, pray, and independent reflection, as well as encourage independence in dealing with daily problems. Healthy pastoral assistance must strengthen, not replace, the ability of individuals to rely on themselves and God in dealing with difficultes.

The counselor must maintain integrity and professionalism in the use of digital media, which includes providing timely responses but still maintains their personal boundaries. This ethical reflection is important so that the counselor remains within professional limits without

feeling overwhelmed by the demands of rapid communication in the group. To maintain the effectiveness of pastoral support through digital media, counselors can conduct periodic evaluations, either through simple surveys or group reflections. This evaluation is useful for assessing whether the congregation feels helped, whether the group goes according to purpose, and whether there are needs or changes that need to be made.

Cyber Counseling Offer for the Life of the congregation nowadays

Cyber Counseling has become one of the relevant approaches in supporting the life of the congregation in the modern era. This approach integrates communication technology in providing pastoral support, especially through popular platforms such as WhatsApp. The life of the world today faces new challenges that originate from technological developments, social change (J. Nendissa, 2021), and lifestyle is getting faster. In this context, the offer of cyber counseling through WhatsApp Group is an innovative and efficient solution to reach members of the congregation in an easier, flexible, and relevant way. WhatsApp Group offers a variety of features that support the interaction between priests or counselors and their congregations (Nendissa, 2024b). Through this group, the counseling process can be carried out directly or indirectly, both in the form of group discussions, giving advice, or personal consultations through private messages. One of the main advantages of using WhatsApp is its flexibility. The congregation does not need to attend a face -to -face session directly which is sometimes difficult to do because of busyness or geographical distance. Instead, they can access pastoral support anytime and anywhere only by using cellphones, tablets and laptops.

In addition, the use of WhatsApp Group, allows the creation of a strong sense of togetherness among members of the congregation. In this group, the congregation can have each other's experience, support, prayer, and create a solid community even though they are not in one physical location. Priests or counselors can provide spiritual guidance, carry out joint reflections or even organize discussions about important issues in the life of congregation. Thus, WhatsApp Group, not only becomes a medium of communication, but also a platform to strengthen spiritual and emotional bonds in the church commission.

Cyber counseling offer via WhatsApp also provides benefits in terms of affordability. In the digital age, almost everyone has access to mobile phones, tablets, and laptops using the WhatsApp application. This makes the platform an inclusive tool to reach various groups, including those who may be reluctant or awkward to attend counseling sessions directly. WhatsApp also allows multimedia use such as images, videos, and sound recordings that can enrich the pastoral guidance process. For example, priests who can share video reflections or audio prayers that can access at any time by the congregation. On the other hand, Cyber Counseling offers also open up opportunities for further innovation in pastoral services. WhatsApp can be used as part of a broader strategy, for example by combining with video call sessions for more personal interactions or by intellectualizing this platform with other applications that support Bible learning or church community management. This shows that technology can be a very useful tool in enriching church services, as long as it is used with wise and strategic.

Various offers of cyber counseling through WhatsApp Group presents opportunities to support the life of congregation today. This approach is not only relevant to the needs and lifestyle of modern, but is also able to reach the congregation in a more inclusive and efficient way. Although there are challenges that must be faced, the potential benefits are very large, especially in strengthening those who support each other. With the right approach, cyber counseling can be an integral part of pastoral services that have a broad and in -depth impact on the life of the congregatioalso.

CONCLUSION

WhatsApp Group as a counseling media has several advantages. First, this application is easily accessible by almost all people of the congregation because it is commonly used and does not require special training. Second, WhatsApp supports real-time and asynchronous communication, which allows the congregation to receive support anytime and anywhere according to their needs. In addition, WhatsApp also allows congregations and counselors to share important information, the Word of God, and reinforcement messages that can be accessed again whenever needed. From the perspective of pastoral support, WhatsApp Group provides opportunities to build a community that supports each other, where members can pray for each other, encourage, and share personal experiences that enrich faith. Pastoral counselors can use this group to monitor the development of each member, respond to questions related to spiritual life, and offer guidelines that can encourage spiritual growth. However, it is important for pastoral servants involved in cyber counseling to have a deep understanding of effective counseling and communication techniques. Although the conversation takes place online, the empathic relationship between the counselor and the congregation must be maintained. Given the non-verbal limitations in online communication, counselors need to ensure that the message conveyed does not cause misunderstandings and remains in accordance with pastoral principles. Cyber Counseling via WhatsApp Group provides an effective alternative for pastoral support in the digital age, with the potential to reach the congregation more broadly and intensively. This approach not only provides practical benefits but also supports the formation of a more close and attentive church community. To achieve optimal results, a mature strategy is needed in group management, understanding of technological restrictions, and adjusting counseling techniques.

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