

Effectiveness of a Multicultural Counseling Approach with Local Cultural Integration in Addressing Psychosocial Problems of Children Facing Mental Health Stigma

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of a multicultural counseling approach integrated with local cultural values in helping children experiencing psychosocial problems due to stigma related to mental health disorders. This study was conducted using a systematic literature review method to obtain a comprehensive overview of the application of local cultural principles in multicultural counseling practices. Data sources were collected from 45 scientific publications published between 2019 and 2024 through various national databases such as SINTA, Google Scholar, and official journal portals of universities in Indonesia. Based on the results of screening for topic suitability, abstracts, and methodological quality, 20 articles were selected as the main material for the analysis. This study used a content analysis sheet as the study instrument, and the data were analyzed through a qualitative approach with thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns, strategies, and trends in the application of local culture-based multicultural counseling. The results of the study indicate that the application of local culture in counseling can reduce social stigma, strengthen family and community support, and improve children's psychosocial well-being. Counselors also play a crucial role in providing education and advocacy based on cultural values to make services more inclusive and contextual. Overall, this approach is considered effective and relevant to be developed as a counseling model that is adaptive to cultural diversity in Indonesia

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Introduction

Mental health issues in children and adolescents are currently a global phenomenon that has also received widespread attention in Indonesia. As individuals in their developmental stages, children are highly vulnerable to various pressures from their families, schools, and communities. These pressures can trigger psychosocial disorders such as anxiety, depression, deviant behavior, and difficulties in establishing social relationships. Approximately, 9.8% of children aged 15 and above as adolescence in Indonesia experience emotional mental disorders, and it is expected to continue to increase due to the complexity of social life and high academic demands (Dasopang et al., 2020; Subu et al., 2024).

One of the main challenges in treating childhood psychosocial disorders is the stigma surrounding mental health disorders. In many regions of Indonesia, mental disorders are still often associated with mysticism, curses, or a lack of faith, leaving families embarrassed and reluctant to bring their children for professional help (Seprianto et al., 2023). Children experiencing these conditions not only experience stigma from their environment but also internalize feelings of shame and inferiority, leading to self-stigma and withdrawal from social interactions (El-Mukhayyarah et al., 2025; Martínez-Hidalgo et al., 2018).

In Indonesia's multicultural and multiethnic society, differences in religion, customs, and social norms influence how people view mental health. Therefore, a multicultural counseling approach is crucial to accommodate this diversity. Multicultural counseling emphasizes understanding the cultural background, life values, and experiences of individuals throughout the counseling process, thereby minimizing cultural bias and increasing the effectiveness of interventions (Isti'adah, 2025).

Furthermore, a multicultural counseling approach integrated with local cultural values is considered to have great potential in supporting the recovery of children with psychosocial disorders. Local wisdom encompasses traditional values, symbols, and social practices such as traditional games, rituals, arts, and mutual cooperation, which serve as natural therapeutic tools (Nuraida, 2021; Pranowo & Perianto, 2019). Through this approach, children can feel more accepted, understood, and motivated to re-engage in positive interactions with their environment (Iftirosy et al., 2025; Liu & Clay, 2002; Venner & Verney, 2015).

Several studies also show that local culture-based counseling can strengthen children's sense of identity, social support, and self-confidence, as this approach is rooted in values they have been familiar with since childhood (Alamsyah et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; Couture, 2021; Lu, 2017). However, the implementation of this approach still faces obstacles, especially in remote areas, due to limited facilities, a lack of counselors with cross-cultural competence, and community resistance to modern counseling methods (Purniani, 2023; Kurniawan & Ahmad, 2023).

The uniqueness of this research lies in its integrative effort to combine a multicultural counseling approach with local cultural values in the context of treating children facing the stigma of mental health disorders. This approach is not only oriented towards psychological healing, but also towards social and cultural empowerment that fosters empathy, self-

acceptance, and appreciation for cultural identity. Its significance for the field of guidance and counseling lies in its contribution in strengthening the theoretical and practical foundations for a counseling model that is inclusive, adaptive, and in harmony with the character of the diverse Indonesian society.

Method

This study employed a systematic literature review to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of a multicultural counseling approach integrated with local cultural values in addressing the psychosocial problems of children stigmatized by mental health disorders. This approach was chosen because it enabled researchers to thematically collect and analyze previous research findings, thereby identifying trends, gaps, and research development directions relevant to Indonesia's socio-cultural conditions.

Data collection was conducted through a search of scientific articles published between 2019 and 2024. Data sources were SINTA-accredited national journals with SINTA rankings of 1 to 6, accessed through several academic databases such as SINTA, Google Scholar, and official university journal portals in Indonesia. Of the 45 articles collected, 20 were selected based on topic suitability, methodological quality, and depth of content analysis.

The selection of national sources was deliberate because this research focuses on the cultural and social context of Indonesian society. Studies from reputable, globally indexed international journals were not prioritized, given that most focus on Western cultural contexts, which have different values and social systems than Indonesia. Therefore, national literature is considered more representative in describing the application of local wisdom in multicultural counseling practices. This selection of sources also constitutes a key contribution of the research, as it provides a contextual understanding, based on local data, and relevant to the development of counseling services in Indonesia.

The collected data was analyzed using a qualitative approach with thematic analysis techniques. Each article was reviewed using a content analysis sheet to identify key themes, such as: (1) forms of stigma experienced by children, (2) effective multicultural counseling strategies, (3) the role of local cultural values in the psychological recovery process, (4) social and cultural barriers in child mental health services, and (5) community-based counseling intervention models and local wisdom. All references were managed using Mendeley to maintain accuracy and consistency in citations.

This research design aims to provide a strong conceptual foundation for developing a multicultural counseling model that is adaptive to the cultural diversity and social needs of Indonesian society.

Results and Discussion

A systematic review of thirty nationally published articles indicates that a multicultural counseling approach integrated with local cultural values is highly effective in reducing social stigma and strengthening the psychological well-being of children experiencing mental health disorders. Overall, the thematic analysis revealed five main patterns: strengthening children's cultural identity, increasing social acceptance, reducing stigma and self-stigma, increasing family and community support, and developing intervention models based on local wisdom that are more adaptive to the Indonesian social context.

Multicultural counseling serves not only as a means of resolving psychological problems but also as a social learning tool for developing cross-cultural understanding. Through this approach, counselors can help individuals understand differences in values and

perspectives without fostering prejudice. This approach significantly helps reduce stereotypes and stigma surrounding mental health disorders, which remain persistent in society (Seprianto et al., 2023). Similar results were also revealed by studies that emphasized the importance of implementing local values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and traditional games to create a safe and inclusive counseling atmosphere (Nuraida, 2021; Isti'adah, 2025).

The integration of local cultural values into counseling practices also plays a role in strengthening social bonds and empathy among community members. Iftirosy et al. (2025) explains that a local culture-based approach encourages students to see differences as an asset, not a barrier. Thus, local values become an effective instrument for fostering social solidarity, especially for children experiencing social pressure due to the stigma of mental disorders. Other research even found that implementing a local culture-based counseling program in schools increased the effectiveness of counselor communication and students' active participation in the counseling process (Wahidah & Karneli, 2025).

A traditional game-based approach also demonstrated a significant positive impact on children's emotional balance. A study by (Nuraida, 2021) showed that this method not only develops social skills but also helps children learn to control their emotions and increase self-confidence. The socio-cultural approach to counseling services, as explained by Isti'adah (2025), bridges the gap between the modern world and traditional values by emphasizing communication rooted in respect, equality, and social harmony. Research findings also confirm that the application of local values such as spirituality, togetherness, and respect for others plays a crucial role in children's psychological recovery. Alamsyah et al. (2024) and Zamroni (2019) emphasize that local wisdom not only strengthens cultural identity but also functions as collective therapy, restoring children's sense of self-esteem and pride in their own culture. Thus, multicultural counseling based on local culture can be understood as a form of sustainable social and emotional rehabilitation.

Furthermore, counselor competence is also a crucial determinant of service effectiveness. Research from Spears & Ochester (2025) and Wijaya et al. (2025) shows that counselors with cross-cultural competence are able to adapt interventions to clients' social contexts more empathetically. Such counselors understand the cultural symbols and social norms of the communities in which they work, thus creating stronger therapeutic relationships. Other research also highlights that integrating local cultural values in addressing mental health issues among young people helps develop intervention strategies that are more realistic and relevant to current developments (Iftirosy et al., 2025).

However, the analysis also found that implementing this approach still faces various challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas. Some communities still associate mental disorders with negative spiritual factors or local myths, leading to resistance to professional help. This finding aligns with research Dasopang et al. (2020), which highlighted the persistence of fear and shame in accessing psychological services. To address this, Arswimba et al. (2023) emphasized the need for collaboration between educational institutions, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the community to expand the reach of culture-based counseling services.

Furthermore, cultural values such as cooperation and a sense of community can accelerate children's emotional recovery (Wang & You, 2022). These values strengthen feelings of acceptance within their communities and reduce feelings of isolation caused by stigma. Meanwhile, El-Mukhayyarah et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of understanding self-stigma, a form of internal stigma experienced by children due to negative

perceptions from their environment. A multicultural approach that is humanistic and based on local culture can reduce the negative impact of this self-stigma.

From an educational perspective, research by [Zamroni \(2019\)](#) revealed that local wisdom-based counseling also contributes to the formation of national character. Education based on local values can foster tolerance and strengthen harmonious social interactions in multicultural schools. In other words, multicultural counseling not only impacts mental health but also plays a crucial role in character development in Indonesian children.

Findings from the [Valencya \(2025\)](#) reinforce that intervention models emphasizing spiritual, social, and emotional balance have proven effective in fostering inner peace and increasing social support. This is further supported by research by [Arswimba et al. \(2023\)](#), which states that integration between families, educational institutions, and communities is key to the sustainability of psychosocial services in Indonesia.

Although some studies highlight barriers such as a lack of counselor training and limited resources in remote areas, the majority of findings indicate that a multicultural approach based on local wisdom remains relevant and effective ([Kanehara et al., 2022](#); [Noor & Sugito, 2019](#)). In fact, [Wahidah & Karneli \(2025\)](#) emphasized that innovative community counseling rooted in local culture opens up significant opportunities for creating counseling models that are easily accepted and applied in schools and communities.

By reviewing these findings, it can be concluded that the success of a multicultural counseling approach based on local culture is determined by three main factors: (1) the counselor's ability to understand and manage cultural differences; (2) active support from families, schools, and communities; and (3) the alignment of educational policies with culturally based services. These findings align with [Speight et al. \(1991\)](#) view that the effectiveness of multicultural counseling depends on the extent to which the counselor understands the cultural values that shape individual behavior.

In the Indonesian context, these findings reinforce the notion that local culture serves not only as a social setting but also as an integral part of the psychological healing process. A multicultural counseling approach that integrates local culture offers a contextual, adaptive, and inclusive solution to address the stigma surrounding children's mental health and builds a counseling system rooted in the values of humanity, empathy, and togetherness.

Conclusion

A multicultural counseling approach based on local culture has proven effective in addressing the stigma of mental health disorders in children, particularly in Indonesia's multicultural society. This study shows that the integration of local cultural values such as mutual cooperation deliberation, respect for parents, and cultural symbols such as mother tongue and folklore creates a safer, more meaningful, and more acceptable recovery space for children and their environment. A community approach involving families, religious leaders, and the community also strengthens the social aspect of the recovery process. However, counselors must remain critical in selecting the cultural values adopted to ensure they do not conflict with the principles of children's rights and professional ethics. The novelty of this study lies in its critical synthesis that multicultural counseling integrated with local wisdom is not only culturally relevant but can also serve as the foundation for a contextual and sustainable psychosocial support system for children. Further development through cross-sector collaboration is needed for this approach to be widely adopted in counseling practice in Indonesia.

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