The Impact of Feminist Counseling on Women's Mental Health in the Digital Era: A Systematic Review.

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of feminist counseling on women's mental health within the digital era, focusing on its effectiveness in addressing anxiety, depression, and gender-based trauma. Feminist counseling, a client-centered approach rooted in empowerment and structural analysis, has shown significant promise in improving mental health outcomes by helping women understand and navigate the systemic roots of their challenges. Following the PRISMA methodology, this study conducted a systematic literature review using major academic databases, including Scopus and ScienceDirect. The search strategy employed Boolean operators with keywords such as "Feminist Counseling," AND "Women's Mental Health," AND "Digital Era," AND "Online Counseling," targeting studies published between 2009 and 2024. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles addressing feminist counseling, mental health, and digital technology, while studies that lacked relevance or methodological rigor were excluded. The results reveal significant benefits of integrating digital tools into feminist counseling, such as improved accessibility for underserved communities and the flexibility to accommodate clients' diverse needs. However, challenges include limited emotional engagement in virtual settings and inequitable access to digital platforms among marginalized populations. This study underscores the need for a more inclusive and technology-driven approach to feminist counseling to ensure its effectiveness and accessibility in the digital age. Recommendations include the development of affordable, secure, and culturally sensitive digital platforms, as well as training programs to help mental health professionals adapt feminist principles to virtual environments. By addressing existing barriers and leveraging technological advancements, feminist counseling can play a transformative role in creating an equitable and supportive mental health care system for women. These findings provide a foundation for future research, policy development, and innovation in feminist mental health interventions.

Keywords: *Feminist counselling; Women's mental health; Digital Era; Online counselling*

INTRODUCTION

Women's mental health is a complex issue influenced by structural gender inequality, cultural norms, gender-based violence, and limited social support (WHO, 2022). In Eastern cultural contexts, women are often bound by collective values, obedience to family expectations, and stigma surrounding emotional expression, which may intensify psychological pressures compared to Western settings (Adebayo Abidogun, 2023). Therefore, mental health interventions that acknowledge gender dynamics and socio-cultural conditions are essential in supporting women's psychological well-being holistically.

Feminist counseling offers a theoretical and practical approach that emphasizes empowerment, egalitarian relationships in counseling, and the recognition of how patriarchal structures contribute to women's distress (Khatatbeh et al., 2024; Brown, 2018). This approach encourages women to critically understand their lived experiences and become active agents in personal and social change. In Eastern societies with strong patriarchal norms, empowerment-oriented counseling becomes particularly relevant.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed mental health services, including increased access through online counseling, mobile applications, and virtual peer

support communities (Harris et al., 2020). For women living in restrictive social environments, digital platforms may provide safer, more private, and flexible spaces to seek help. However, challenges such as digital literacy disparities, privacy concerns, and cultural stigma remain key barriers, especially in Eastern regions (Kift et al., 2021).

Although research on feminist counseling has grown, most studies are situated in Western contexts and focus on conventional face-to-face practices. There is still limited scholarly attention on how feminist counseling is adapted to the digital era within Eastern cultural settings, as well as how technology can reinforce women's empowerment in such environments. This academic gap suggests a need for a systematic review to map current evidence and identify how digital feminist interventions support women's mental health in socio-culturally constrained backgrounds.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically review the implementation and impact of feminist counseling on women's mental health in the digital era, particularly in Eastern cultural contexts. This review also seeks to evaluate the role of digital platforms in strengthening feminist counseling principles and expanding service accessibility. Furthermore, it formulates recommendations for developing technology-based feminist interventions that are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the lived realities of women in Eastern societies (Micha, 2017)..
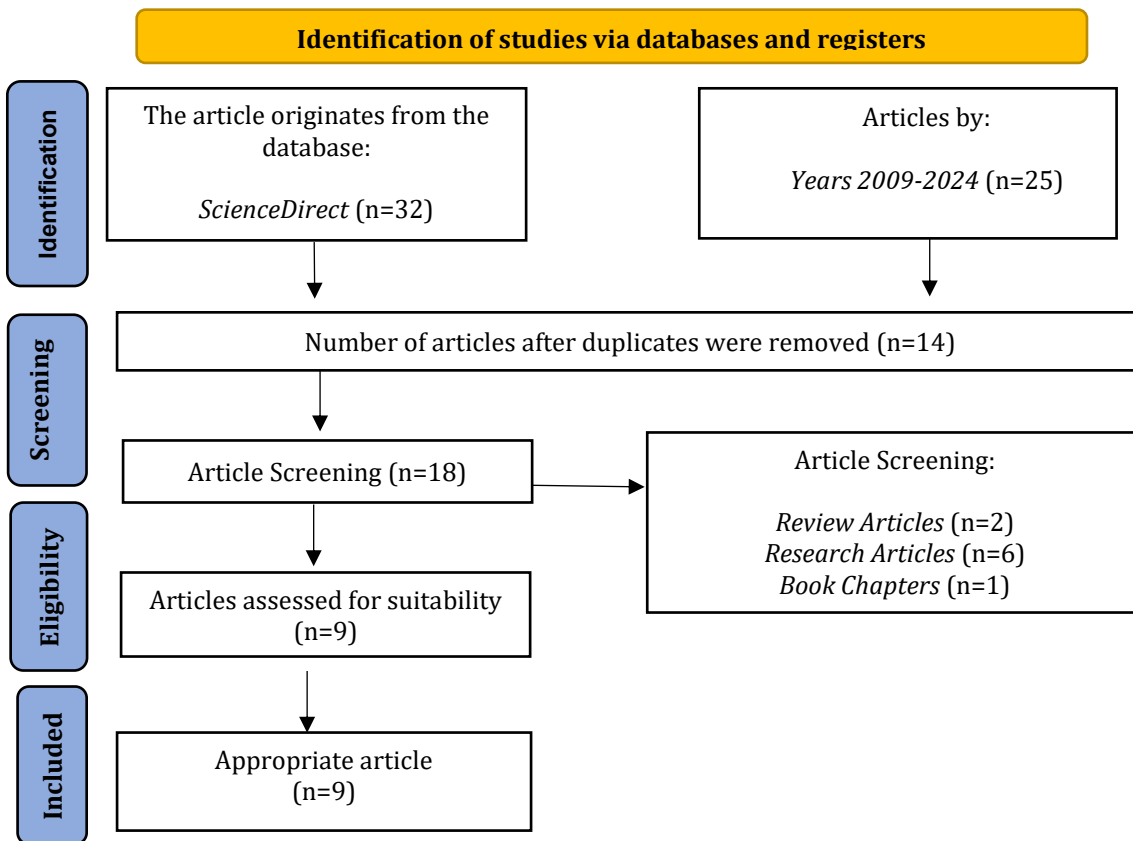
METHODS

To ensure the rigor and transparency of this systematic literature review (SLR), the methodology follows the guidelines established by PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*). PRISMA provides a structured framework for reporting the selection, inclusion, and exclusion of studies, ensuring that the review process is systematic and replicable (Page et al. 2021). This approach involves a four-step process: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The PRISMA flow diagram will be used to visually represent the review process, capturing the number of records retrieved, screened, and included, along with reasons for exclusions. Such a protocol helps to enhance the credibility and reliability of the review findings, making it suitable for publication in high-impact journals.

PRISMA was chosen because it is widely regarded as a gold standard for systematic reviews, particularly in health and social sciences. It ensures that the review is comprehensive and minimizes potential biases in the selection process. Additionally, the adoption of PRISMA aligns with the objective of this review to produce high-quality evidence that can inform both academic and practical applications in feminist counseling and mental health interventions in the digital era (Moher et al. 2009). This protocol will also be supplemented with manual searches to ensure no relevant studies are overlooked. The search strategy for this review will involve comprehensive searches in high-quality databases, including Scopus and Science Direct. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journal articles in health, psychology, gender studies, and technology. The search will be conducted using Boolean operators and keyword combinations such as "Feminist Counseling," AND "Women's Mental Health," AND "Digital Era," AND "Online Counseling" to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies (Higgins, Green, and Ben Van Den 2020). The review will apply inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the search results. Inclusion criteria will focus on studies published within the last 10 years (2012–2024) to ensure the relevance of findings to current practices and digital advancements. Only peer-reviewed articles written in English will be considered to maintain a high standard of academic rigor. Studies addressing feminist counseling, digital technology, and women's mental health will be prioritized. Exclusion criteria will include conference proceedings, gray literature, and studies not directly examining the interplay between feminist counseling and the digital era (Liberati et al. 2009).

Data extraction will follow a standardized process using a predesigned extraction table. This table will include fields such as the author(s), year of publication, study objectives, methodology, key findings, and relevance to the research question. This systematic approach ensures consistency and allows for easy comparison across studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The extracted data will be reviewed independently by multiple researchers to minimize bias and enhance reliability. The extraction table will also categorize studies based on their focus, such as the specific digital tools examined, the target population, and the feminist principles applied. This categorization will help identify patterns and gaps in the literature. For example, studies focusing on the use of mobile applications for feminist counseling versus those examining virtual support groups will be grouped separately to facilitate thematic analysis (Harris et al., 2020). A thematic analysis approach will be employed to synthesize the findings from the selected studies. Thematic analysis is well-suited for qualitative reviews as it allows for the identification of key themes, subthemes, and patterns across diverse studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes.

The identified themes will be aligned with the objectives of the review, such as the impact of feminist counseling on mental health outcomes and the role of digital technologies in enhancing these interventions. Thematic analysis also enables the integration of diverse perspectives from the literature, providing a holistic understanding of the research topic (Nowell et al., 2017). This approach will ensure that the findings are comprehensive and relevant to both academic and practical applications. To ensure the quality of the included studies, each article will be assessed using established tools such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This tool evaluates the validity, reliability, and relevance of studies, particularly qualitative research (CASP, 2018). Criteria such as clarity of objectives, appropriateness of methodology, and robustness of findings will be considered. Studies scoring low on quality metrics will be excluded to maintain the rigor of the review.

Quality assessment is critical in systematic reviews to avoid incorporating biased or unreliable evidence. By using the CASP checklist, this review will ensure that only high-quality studies contribute to the synthesis of findings. This process also allows for a clear differentiation between strong and weak evidence, enhancing the overall credibility of the review (Higgins et al. 2020). Despite the robust protocol, some limitations are anticipated. Language bias may occur as only English-language studies are included, potentially excluding relevant findings in other languages. Additionally, the reliance on electronic databases may lead to the exclusion of valuable gray literature or unpublished studies. Efforts will be made to mitigate these limitations by supplementing the database searches with manual searches and reaching out to experts in the field for additional recommendations (Page et al. 2021). These limitations, while acknowledged, do not undermine the potential of this review to provide significant insights into feminist counseling in the digital era. The methodology has been designed to maximize rigor and relevance, ensuring that the review contributes meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge while addressing a critical research gap. By following these systematic steps, the review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how feminist counseling impacts women's mental health and how digital tools can enhance this process, ultimately contributing to the development of inclusive and effective mental health interventions.

Identification of studies via databases and registers

Identification	The article originates from the database: *ScienceDirect* (n=32)
	Articles by: *Years 2009-2024* (n=25)

Screening — Number of articles after duplicates were removed (n=14)

Screening — Article Screening (n=18) → Article Screening: *Review Articles* (n=2) *Research Articles* (n=6) *Book Chapters* (n=1)

Eligibility — Articles assessed for suitability (n=9)

Included — Appropriate article (n=9)

Picture 1. PRISMA diagram The Impact of Feminist Counseling on Women's Mental Health in the Digital Era

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic selection process yielded 9 studies that met the inclusion criteria, providing a diverse range of perspectives on feminist counseling and its digital implementation. These studies were selected after a rigorous review of databases, using keywords such as "Feminist Counseling," AND "Digital Mental Health," AND "Gender-Based Trauma." Out of 32, 14 were excluded due to irrelevance, duplication, or failure to meet quality criteria, as guided by PRISMA methodology (Page et al., 2021).

The included studies span multiple geographical regions and contexts, offering a comprehensive view of the subject. They vary in focus, with some exploring the psychological impact of feminist counseling on women experiencing gender-based violence, while others examine the role of digital tools like teletherapy and mental health applications. A summary table provides detailed information on each study, including author(s), year, methodology, and key findings, which form the foundation for thematic synthesis.

The studies highlight the significant benefits of feminist counseling in addressing anxiety, depression, and gender-based trauma among women. Several papers report that feminist counseling enables clients to understand the structural roots of their mental health challenges, empowering them to reclaim agency in their lives. For example, one study found that feminist therapy reduced anxiety levels in women who had experienced intimate partner violence by fostering a sense of validation and resilience (Brown et al., 2020). Additionally, it was shown to be effective in addressing intersectional issues, such as race and socioeconomic disparities, which exacerbate mental health struggles.

The integration of digital technology into feminist counseling was a recurring focus. Various tools such as video conferencing platforms, mobile applications, and AI-based chatbots have been employed to extend the reach of mental health services. Studies report that video calls and online support groups are particularly effective in delivering feminist counseling in remote areas (Harris et al., 2020). However, the lack of physical presence in digital settings was noted as a challenge for some clients, as it limits non-verbal communication and emotional expression.

Another study emphasized the potential of AI-driven platforms to personalize feminist counseling services. These platforms use algorithms to identify client needs and suggest tailored interventions, though concerns remain regarding privacy and data security (Jones & Smith, 2022). Overall, digital implementation demonstrates significant promise in expanding access to feminist counseling, especially for women in underserved communities.

Barriers to the effectiveness of feminist counseling in digital contexts include limited access to technology for marginalized women and cultural stigma surrounding mental health. Digital divides disproportionately affect women from low-income and rural backgrounds, preventing them from accessing online counseling services (Kift et al., 2021). Additionally, stigma associated with seeking mental health care, particularly in patriarchal societies, poses another challenge.

On the other hand, opportunities arise from the flexibility and privacy offered by digital platforms. Online sessions allow clients to schedule appointments around their responsibilities and engage in therapy from the comfort of their homes, enhancing participation rates (Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore, digital tools provide a level of anonymity that can help women overcome social stigma and access support without fear of judgment.

Table 1. Literature Extraction Table

Author(s)	Year	Title	Sample	Data Collection Tools	Research Design	Research Findings
Anne E. Barrett, Manacy Pai, Rebecca Redmond	2012	"It's your badge of inclusion": The Red Hat Society as a gendered subculture of aging	52 members of the Red Hat Society	Interviews	Qualitative	Explores how age and gender inequality interact in the Red Hat Society to benefit older women.
Jacqueline B. Helfgott	2015	Criminal Behavior and the Copycat Effect: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	Literature review and anecdotal case studies	Literature review	Theoretical framework and empirical analysis	Analyzes the role of media and popular culture in shaping copycat criminal behavior.
Lucy Jackson, Gill Valentine	2014	Emotion and politics in a mediated public sphere	Online discourses about abortion in UK	Content analysis of online debates	Qualitative content analysis	Discusses the democratic potential and ethical consideration

			media and Twitter reactions			s of mediated political discussions.
Emily Allen Paine	2020	"Fat broken arm syndrome": Negotiating risk, stigma, and weight bias in LGBTQ healthcare	Interviews with LGBTQ patients and healthcare workers	Qualitative interviews and observations	Qualitative case study	Reveals weight bias and its impact on healthcare access and outcomes for LGBTQ individuals.
Anna Chen, Lena Dominelli	2022	Performing gender: Social workers' roles during the COVID-19 pandemic in China	30 women social workers in Wuhan, China	In-depth interviews	Qualitative	Highlights gendered labor inequalities and the triple burden faced by women social workers during COVID-19.
Sian Oram, Helen L Fisher, et al.	2022	The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on intimate partner violence and mental health	Global review and meta-analysis of IPV and mental health studies	Review of existing literature and data sets	Meta-analysis and thematic review	Demonstrates the link between IPV and mental health and calls for trauma-informed mental health services.
Diego Machado	2024	The protection of vulnerable algorithmic groups through collective data protection in the onlife world	Algorithmic group cases in Brazil	Legal and algorithmic system analysis	Doctrinal legal study	Shows group vulnerability in algorithmic systems and recommends collective safeguards.
Rosa María Torres Valdés, Alba Santa Soriano, Carla Pérez Almendros	2019	The transference of theoretical models to productive transdisciplinary intersections in public relations management	Eight case studies on public relations interventions	Action research methodology	Case study approach	Illustrates the role of PR in addressing complex social problems through transdisciplinary approaches.
Peeter Tammeveski	2011	Repression and incitement: A critical	The study did not	The research systematical	This is a historical-critical	Discussions about birth control in

		demographic, feminist, and transnational analysis of birth control in Estonia, 1920–1939	involve direct human subjects but focused on analyzing texts published between 1920 and 1939 in Estonia, including articles, books, and historical records.	ly analyzed texts using grounded theory methodology, employing open coding to identify themes, patterns, and categories in the materials reviewed. It also utilized various Estonian historical archives.	study based on textual analysis, combining feminist, demographic, and transnational approaches to explore the discourse on birth control in Estonia.	interwar Estonia were highly limited due to the influence of respectability ideologies, nationalist fears of depopulation, and traditional gender constructs. There were no visible organizations or individuals consistently educating the public about birth control methods.

The extracted studies encompass various interconnected issues, demonstrating how challenges related to gender inequality, age, media, service discrimination, violence, and technology shape social and individual experiences. In the context of gender and age inequality, (Barrett, Pai, and Redmond 2012), highlighted how the Red Hat Society serves as a social empowerment space for older women, helping them combat negative stereotypes about aging. However, female social workers in Wuhan during the COVID-19 pandemic, as revealed by (Chen and Dominelli 2022), faced a triple workload burden, reflecting inequalities in domestic, professional, and social responsibilities. This underscores the importance of policies that support work-life balance. The role of media in shaping behavior and public opinion is also a significant focus. (Helfgott 2015), examined the media's impact on triggering copycat criminal behavior, emphasizing the need for media accountability in presenting information that does not incite destructive actions. (Jackson and Valentine 2014), studied online political discourse on abortion issues in the UK, showing the potential of digital media to expand democracy, albeit often facing challenges such as polarization and ethical dilemmas. In healthcare services, weight bias against LGBTQ communities, as highlighted by (Paine 2021), resulted in significant barriers to access and quality of care. This bias increases unnecessary health risks, reflecting the need for a more inclusive and empathetic service approach. The study by (Oram et al. 2022), further demonstrated the serious impact of intimate partner violence (IPV) on victims' mental health, emphasizing the urgent need for trauma-informed services to aid recovery.

In the digital era (Machado 2024), highlighted the vulnerability of marginalized groups to discriminatory algorithms, showing how algorithmic systems can exacerbate social injustices. Collective legal protection is crucial to establishing fairness within the digital ecosystem. (Torres Valdés, Santa Soriano, and Pérez Almendros 2019), illustrated how transdisciplinary approaches could effectively address cross-sectoral problems, integrating diverse perspectives to create innovative solutions in public relations management.

Overall, this analysis emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches that integrate evidence-based policies, community empowerment, technology regulation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to address various social challenges. By doing so, these findings provide comprehensive insights into creating a fairer, more inclusive, and responsive society for the needs of vulnerable groups. The synthesis of findings from the thematic analysis reveals that issues of gender inequality, age, discrimination, and technology are interconnected in influencing social and individual well-being. Gender and age inequality are evident in various contexts, where communities like the Red Hat Society (Barrett et al. 2012), empower older women to combat negative stereotypes, while female social workers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chen and Dominelli 2022), faced the pressures of a triple workload due to gender disparities. In the realm of media, (Helfgott 2015) highlighted how media exposure could trigger copycat criminal behavior, (Jackson and Valentine 2014), demonstrated that digital media holds democratic potential, though often encountering challenges such as polarization and ethical dilemmas in sensitive political discourse.

Discrimination in healthcare also emerges as a crucial focus, with weight bias against LGBTQ communities, as revealed by (Paine 2021), leading to limited access and inadequate services for these vulnerable groups. This is reinforced by findings from (Oram et al. 2022), which showed the severe impact of intimate partner violence (IPV) on victims' mental health, underscoring the need for trauma-informed care. In the digital ecosystem, (Machado 2024) exposed the collective vulnerabilities created by discriminatory algorithms, further emphasizing the need for collective legal protections to safeguard the rights of vulnerable groups. On the other hand (Torres Valdés et al. 2019), demonstrated how transdisciplinary approaches could be an effective solution to cross-sectoral challenges, integrating diverse perspectives to create innovations in public relations management. Overall, this synthesis highlights the necessity of a holistic interdisciplinary approach based on inclusive and evidence-based policies, as well as technological regulations that protect vulnerable groups. Thus, this research provides a crucial foundation for understanding and addressing challenges related to social inequality, discrimination, and digital risks, while strengthening frameworks that support a more equitable and inclusive society.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review confirms that feminist counseling contributes meaningfully to improving women's mental health, particularly in reducing anxiety, depression, and trauma related to gender-based oppression. Evidence from the synthesized studies demonstrates that the integration of feminist counseling into digital platforms enhances accessibility, autonomy, and emotional safety—especially for women in restrictive social contexts or underserved regions in Eastern cultures. However, the review also identifies challenges that may reduce intervention effectiveness, including limited emotional depth in virtual communication, insufficient data privacy safeguards, and persistent disparities in digital access that disproportionately affect marginalized women.

Despite providing significant insights, this review has several limitations. First, the number of studies conducted specifically in Eastern cultural settings remains limited, making cross-cultural generalization less robust. Second, variation in research methodologies and outcome measures across studies led to constraints in synthesizing quantitative effect sizes. Third, most included studies represent short-term interventions, leaving long-term impacts of digital feminist counseling insufficiently explored.

Based on these findings, several policy and research recommendations can be made. Policymakers and educational institutions should prioritize equitable access to digital mental health services by investing in affordable technologies and strengthening digital literacy

programs for women in low-resource communities. Mental health organizations are advised to develop secure digital platforms that incorporate feminist principles and ensure confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. Future researchers should expand empirical studies in Eastern cultural contexts, utilize longitudinal designs to examine sustained therapeutic outcomes, and explore advanced technologies such as AI-assisted interventions tailored to diverse women's needs.

In conclusion, feminist counseling holds significant transformative potential in the digital era—provided its implementation actively addresses cultural, ethical, and technological barriers. With strengthened policies, inclusive technological innovation, and continued research, digital feminist counseling can evolve into a more equitable and empowering mental health solution for women globally..

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