

Analysis of the Organization of Psychological Services in Central Asian Universities: Results of an Expert Survey

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Abstract: The article focuses on analyzing the issues related to the organization of psychological services in universities across Central Asia, based on the results of an expert survey conducted in 2024. The objective of the study was to conduct an in-depth examination of the current state and needs for psychological support for students and staff at universities in the region. The main focus is on assessing the necessity of establishing specialized psychological services, defining their functions and priorities, and identifying barriers hindering their effective functioning. Experts from universities in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan participated in the survey.

Keywords: Psychological service; expert survey; psychological difficulties; students; functions of psychological services; organizational issues; information technology; online counseling.

Introduction: In 2024, an expert survey was conducted to further investigate issues related to psychological support in the higher education system of Central Asia. Specialists from universities in Uzbekistan and other countries of the region were invited to answer a series of questions concerning the organization of psychological services in universities and the psychological challenges faced by students and staff. Data collection took place from August to November 2024 using a special web form via Google Forms.

The experts' opinions were provided by staff members from the psychological support departments of universities, as well as by faculty members with psychological specialization. In selecting potential experts, it was considered that a professional psychologist, even if not directly working in a university's psychological service, is still competent to assess key issues and needs in psychological support.

The study sample, which focused on examining the systems of psychological support in Central Asian universities, was primarily represented by Uzbekistan, reflecting the country's larger organizational capacity in this research. Of the 41 surveys distributed, 37 were completed by experts from Uzbekistan, which made up the majority of the sample. This is due to limited data

collection opportunities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, owing to low response rates, and the complete lack of availability of specialists from Turkmenistan and Tajikistan due to the high level of opacity in their educational systems. The sample mainly consisted of specialists who received their psychological education in Uzbekistan (80.5%), although there were some representatives from other countries as well. The gender and age structure of respondents showed a predominance of young women under the age of 34 (73.2%). The majority of the participants held faculty positions. The scale of institutions varied from small to large national universities. Despite its limited geographical coverage, the sample is sufficiently large and representative to reflect the current issues of psychological support in Uzbek universities, though caution is necessary when extrapolating results to the entire region. The study evaluated the state and challenges of psychological support in Central Asian universities. The main focus was on the need for specialized psychological services, practical experience in their activities, their functions, organizational issues, and the problems faced by students and staff. The results showed that the average rating of the need to create psychological services was 5.2 on a seven-point scale, indicating high interest in such services. A

particularly strong need was observed among experts from public universities. Regardless of whether psychological services existed in the universities, experts rated their necessity equally highly, highlighting the importance of this issue. Experts were also asked open-ended questions regarding existing psychological services and programs in their universities. It was found that most universities only have a staff psychologist, a position introduced as part of recent reforms. However, respondents were unable to name successful programs or criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of these services. These results indicate a lack of development and low awareness of psychological services in universities, even among specialists in this field, highlighting the need for further reforms and improvement of the psychological support infrastructure in the higher education system of Central Asia.

Experts were asked to rate the importance of 27 potential functions of psychological services on a seven-point scale. Based on the data, a ranking of functions was constructed, reflecting their importance according to the average rating.

The highest ratings were given to functions such as conducting scientific research, professional communication, and interaction with external sources of psychological assistance. According to experts, these functions are foundational for creating the basic conditions for the operation of a psychological service.

Priority tasks related to providing psychological support were also identified.

Special attention was given to the adaptation of students at risk, including international students and those with disabilities. Notably, group consultations were considered more important than individual ones, likely due to resource constraints.

The results of the study indicated that functions related to psychotherapy were rated higher than those aimed at regulating social relations and development. This suggests that the higher education system in the region is still underdeveloped, focusing more on social functions rather than innovative approaches. However, the importance of emergency psychological assistance was rated lower than expected, which could suggest an underestimation of real problems or a lower demand for this service among students.

Thus, the study identified key areas of activity for psychological services in Central Asian universities and outlined the main issues that need attention and further research.

It should be noted that although auxiliary functions are important, especially in the early stages of the

development of psychological services, the core role lies in providing psychological support and guidance. However, the ways of implementing these functions may vary depending on the strategies and methods used. In resource-limited environments, technology-based forms of work gain importance. Experts rated the demand for such forms of support for students and staff using the seven-point scale. The results highlighted two main directions of using information technology, which were considered the most promising: the use of video communication for individual and group counseling. This aligns with global trends where online counseling enhances the accessibility of support and reduces costs while maintaining elements of personal interaction typical of traditional counseling models.

In the context of using information technology in university psychological services, experts preferred individual counseling over group counseling. This may be because individual counseling requires confidentiality and greater flexibility, which are easier to provide in a digital environment. While it may be simpler to organize group counseling within the university, the digital space offers unique opportunities for individual work, making assistance more accessible and secure for students. Another promising direction of informatization in universities is the use of specialized software for students to address their psychological problems independently. Solutions like computer programs or mobile applications are becoming valuable resources given the limited capabilities of traditional psychological services. Fully automated solutions, while not necessarily of high quality or effectiveness, provide an important alternative in the context of a shortage of professional help. Psychological services can contribute by recommending suitable solutions available on the market or even developing their own programs tailored to the specific needs of their universities and students, adapting to the conditions of the region.

One of the demanded mechanisms in the work of university psychological services is the use of a special form for reporting psychological problems in others, primarily students. Research shows that some large universities abroad use this practice despite its limited spread. This approach allows identifying problems without relying on students' readiness to seek help, which is especially important in regions where psychological difficulties are stigmatized, as is the case in Central Asia. However, the implementation of this mechanism requires special attention to confidentiality and professional ethics, as psychological assistance is traditionally based on voluntariness.

On the other hand, experts noted the low demand for

interaction formats such as email counseling and group chats. These forms of text-based communication are limited in terms of conveying complete information and accurate diagnosis, and they do not facilitate the establishment of trust between the psychologist and the client. Moreover, they are not popular among young people and are not considered an effective channel for providing psychological assistance. Therefore, other forms of informatization of psychological help may have moderate demand and serve as auxiliary tools if there is demand from students and staff. The study also identified key barriers to creating effective psychological services. Rating the importance of various barriers on a seven-point scale revealed that, contrary to common expectations, financial resources are not the primary issue. More significant for the development of psychological services are the shortage of methodological and organizational-institutional resources, as well as underdeveloped infrastructure. These factors indicate the need for a comprehensive approach to forming psychological services, where methodology and organizational structure play a fundamental role. The lack of necessary experience and competencies is seen not only as a problem of individual universities but also of the entire region, which calls for the creation of unified standards within national education systems. Analysis of the relative significance of various problems shows interesting differences depending on whether a university has a psychological service. For universities without psychological services, infrastructure limitations, a shortage of specialists, and language barriers are perceived as more significant problems, emphasizing structural and staffing challenges in their organization. In universities with existing psychological services, the emphasis shifts toward the lack of practical experience, signaling the need to strengthen professional skills and improve the expertise of specialists. Analysis of expert responses revealed that many did not take the opportunity to indicate additional problems not covered in the main survey, which could suggest an underdeveloped methodological approach or general uncertainty in perceiving the issues. Regarding the optimal number of staff for effective functioning of psychological services, the majority highlighted a range of 3 to 5 people, which is in line with the practices of leading universities in the region with full-fledged specialized services. It is important to note that university psychological services are not the sole source of psychological support. In environments where internal structures are insufficiently developed, external sources of help, such as private and government counseling centers, gain particular significance. Experts rated their availability at 4.4 on the seven-point scale, indicating that alternative

options are available for students and university staff. Therefore, one of the key tasks of university psychological services is not only to provide support but also to inform about external resources, which could significantly expand the available help in the context of limited internal resources. In addition, experts were asked to assess the urgency of 19 different psychological problems faced by modern students. The data revealed that the most pressing issues are stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and self-regulation problems. Physical and psychological aggression, academic performance issues, self-identification, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle also occupy important places. Experts assigned less importance to social issues such as peer relationships, family problems, conflicts based on ethnicity and religion, and substance use. Despite its limitations, the conducted study provided valuable data on the state and development of psychological services in universities in Central Asia, highlighting the urgent need for their creation and development. The results emphasize the importance of focusing on low-resource forms of assistance and underscore the need for methodological and organizational support. While funding plays a significant role, the successful integration of psychological support as an independent function within universities critically depends on the accumulation of methodological experience and the development of operational standards. Problems of stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues faced by students remain central to the study, signaling a severe lack of accessible resources to address them. Independent assessments of these problems revealed important trends; however, for the validity and accuracy of such conclusions, direct psychodiagnostics research comparisons are required.

Thus, the results of the study indicate the need for a comprehensive approach to the development of psychological support in higher education institutions in the region, which includes methodological development, practical application of modern information technologies, and collaboration with external consulting resources. This will serve as a foundation for maintaining and strengthening the psychological well-being of students and university staff.

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