

Kyrgyzstan faces a growing need for psychologists, including among the Kyrgyz-speaking people. However, the country is lacking specialists who are fluent in the state language.

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### [Кыргызча На русском](#)

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A visit to a psychologist in Kyrgyzstan varies from 250 to 4,000 soms. The low margin means you will visit a novice specialist and if a problem is not very serious, they can help you. Novice psychologists have a certain skill of listening and it will have a curative effect on a patient.

A psychologist's fee is composed of the rent of the premises, a patent payable on a monthly basis. Also, psychologists regularly improve their skills at various trainings, which cost 3 thousand soms to 300 dollars; they visit their supervisors in order to improve the quality of their work and personal therapy classes to solve their own problems.

But if Bishkek can offer a wide range of specialists, it's harder to find a psychologist in the regions.

**Elmira** is 28 years old (*all names are not real, as requested by respondents*) and she lives in a town of Dzhahal Abad oblast. Due to the lack of psychologists in the regions and distrust in them, she is going to visit a Bishkek-based specialist:

— I told my story on one of the websites and journalists published a psychologist's comment under my question, which I found to be very supportive. After that, I decided to visit a specialist and solve my problems. As I don't live in Bishkek, I will visit them as soon as I come to the city. I haven't seen psychologists in my town, and even if they are there, they might know my husband's family. But my problem is in our relations with my husband and his relatives.

When our son was born, I was a twenty-year-old student. Despite that, I took care of my child, but my mother-in-law insisted on giving my son to her so that I could study. My husband supported her and said that his parents were alone and the child would entertain them and it would be easier for us. So they coerced me to give my son to husband's parents.

In a few years, we moved to their town and started living together in the mother-in-law's house. That's when my nightmares became real. She was jealous of my son over his mother and started a quarrel if I hugged and kissed him. And if my son was acting out and doing something wrong, I didn't let her punish him and was just talking to him.

During our quarrels, my husband always emphasises that I cannot even bring up children. How can I bring him up, when my parental authority is totally undermined? My child doesn't accept me and complains to his grandmother. I cannot even kiss my son, hug him and talk to him heart to heart. So I want to start going to a psychologist to solve this issue and become a good mother to my children.



Photo: kidskunst.info

The data on how many Kyrgyzstanis seek psychological help is unavailable. Specialists generally run their private practice and never report on the number of clients and sessions. According to practicing psychologist **Ildar Akbutin**, more people seek his help:



Ildar Akbutin. Photo: ru.sputnik.kg

— Clients with issues in family relationships, children-parent crises and hardships in marriage come first. On the second place are depressive positions, issues rooted in early childhood experiences. And on the third place are clients with phobias, panic attacks and other difficulties related to fear.

Violence in various forms is present in all three categories, but few people seek help regarding violence. It is taken for granted, especially violence against children.

## Online psychologist

Due to the lack of psychologists in the regions, psychological help via a video call becomes more relevant in the regions. However, this option is good only for those who live in areas with good internet coverage.

**Aisuluu** consulted a psychologist via WhatsApp when she was on the verge of despair despite her little children and sick parents:

— My husband used to cheat on me regularly, but I was afraid to leave him. The whole village felt sorry for me, and I stopped going outside or socialising with anyone.

Once I, in tears, called my friend in Bishkek and told her about my situation. She advised me to consult a psychologist and work with him online. I cannot say I solved all my problems, but now I don't think about committing a suicide.

The psychologist taught me not to dodge the problem, but solve it. After that, I wondered how many people could be saved from suicide if they were provided timely psychological help or someone could just listen to them.

## Relatives and friends cannot be your psychologist

Clients say that people around them don't understand and don't support those who consult psychologists. They think one doesn't have to waste time and money because they can talk to their relatives and share their problems with them.

**Alina** has also encountered negative attitude of relatives:

— My relatives reacted negatively to my visit to a psychologist. Kyrgyzstanis see a visit to a psychologist as a desperate move. [They thought] I was going mad, I had deep depression and couldn't control myself.

But there are things we cannot tell to our friends and relatives. Sometimes it's easier to disclose oneself to a stranger who can listen to you and support you.

My inner condition led me to visit a psychologist. I couldn't figure out the reason of my anxiety. Everything seemed fine, but inside I felt anxious. I couldn't cope with it on my own.

The first time I visited a woman, but she just listened to me and didn't write any prescription. Then I decided not to visit her and other psychologists, as well.

But then I heard more often that I needed professional help and many people recommended my current psychologist to me. So, I visited him. We haven't solved my problem yet, but we've managed to eliminate my anxiety and after his session I felt myself relaxed. He wrote a prescription to me and taught me how to look at a situation at different angles.

**Асель Баимбетова**, практический психолог, гештальт-терапевт:



*Asel Baimbetova. Фото из личного архива*

— A psychologist must have a diploma. No certificate can replace fundamental

education in psychology. Moreover, he must have a specialisation, where his internship is described in detail. Client feedback should be considered because psychologists can write about themselves on the internet for marketing purposes only.

You should feel yourself comfortable with a psychologist. He should not cause any negative feelings or resistance and anger inside you and you should see he's not wheedling.

### **No certificate can replace fundamental education in psychology.**

A competent psychologist should not reassure his client in anything, or give extra advices, should not attach labels, estimate something as good or bad, and must hear his client.

For example, people often come and ask: should I get a divorce or not? And if a psychologist says: yes, get a divorce or no, don't get a divorce, this psychologist is unprofessional. He has no right to tell such things and to adjust the client's life, particularly during the first or second session.

### **What about going to a psychologist? No, I am normal**

Psychologists say, the number of men seeking their help has increased in recent years. Including those who voluntarily come to family counselling. However, this indicator is still very low.

#### **Mirlan, 35 years old:**

— When I was a student, I went in for psychology. Then my wife and I visited a family psychologist when we had difficulties in our relations. Later on I attended two six-month trainings in gestalt therapy. Both times I was the only male in a group.

### **I am not ashamed of visiting a psychologist. It affects the quality of my life and I feel support.**

I am not ashamed of visiting a psychologist. It affects the quality of my life and I feel support. But I can't help wondering why men overreact to the advice on visiting a psychologist.



For example, friends or acquaintances share their problems with each other sometimes. When I suggest they should go to a psychologist, they say something like, “I am normal”, “why would a man need a psychologist”, or “only psychos go to psychologists”. This is the result of stereotyped thinking and the society will hopefully understand the value of psychologists’ work.

**Ildar Akbutin:** *“In my practice, I have about 15 per cent of men. And I see a rapid increase in this trend - this indicator didn’t exceed 5 per cent just a couple of years ago. Most often, men want to solve issues related to their personality problems. The leading requests are anxiety and panic attacks followed by depressed clients. Male clients with family problems are the fewest. Women often come with family issues”.*

### Shortage of Kyrgyz-speaking psychologists

The number of Kyrgyz-speaking clients keeps going upward along with the overall growing demand for psychological help. But it’s not that easy to find specialists fluent in Kyrgyz. All university curricula for psychologists, speech pathologists and speech therapists are conducted in Russian only.

Therefore, Kyrgyz-speaking population prefers going to the so-called *tabyp* or *bakshy*. There are not direct equivalents to these terms in the English language, they are traditional practitioners who not only offer treatment to people, but also give advices in difficult situations.

Such traditional practitioners are very popular in the regions, but in the capital they are in high demand, as well. At one time, there was a range of such “specialists” in Osh market. They can make a good luck spells, health spells, or something else, listen to you and give an advice.

One of such traditional practitioners, **Nurila Zhorobekova**, rents a house in Bishkek especially for her clients:

— Among all my clients, 80 per cent are women. 90 per cent of them come to talk about their family problems. They ask questions like, “I don’t want to live with my husband anymore, what should I do?”, “Mother-in-law intervenes into our life, what to do?”, “My husband left me, why?”

Some clients ask to help them with work, business: things aren’t too good, no job, bankruptcy - what to do?

They think I’ll solve all their problems like a fairy. But I explain to them that it’s not only one to blame for family conflicts. You might be making some mistakes, too. Pay

attention to yourself, your behaviour, your temper. After that, they start thinking about it.

But they don't want to change. They say, "this is who I am", or "I can't change myself". They take their temper as something valuable, untouchable. But it's impossible to change your life and situation in which you happen to be without changing yourself, your attitude.

People follow my advices and say they feel much better, or the situation becomes clear and now they understand why it has happened.

Specialist say such traditional healers might have sufficient psychological training to make a client open up, share his issues and speak out. But the effect of this kind of "therapy" will be temporary.

**Ildar Akbutin, psychologist:**

"Fortune-tellers don't solve problems fundamentally; they are just a "first-aid", which will be needed if the situation happens again. However, a good psychologist cares about making a client cope with their problems on their own and become a mature adult who accept responsibility for the challenges in life. However, it's not always easy, and it's easier to go to a fortune-teller."

Bilesinbi.kg is a youth educational project that provides help to the Kyrgyzstanis, including psychological help. However, the latter comes with language problems, said **Asel Zholdoshbek kyzy**, a project journalist.

Our audience is totally Kyrgyz-speaking. Often we cannot find Kyrgyz-speaking psychologists for our question-and-answer section, where we have questions from our readers with psychological issues. Therefore, we translate our readers' questions from Kyrgyz into English and send them to the psychologist, and then we translate the answer into Kyrgyz for our readers.

Psychologist **Asel Baimbetova** started attending Kyrgyz language classes ten years after she started her practice. According to her, more Kyrgyz-speaking clients come to her now, and her proficiency in the national language didn't allow her to work with them steadily.

Psychologist **Saadat Sydykova** works with her clients both in Russian and Kyrgyz. She noted that basic knowledge of Kyrgyz was not enough for her work:

"I don't see any difference between Kyrgyz-speaking and Russian-speaking clients in terms of therapy. I see their pain and feel they are making useless efforts to change their life because they don't see their "blind spots". I admire Kyrgyz-speaking psychologists because their good knowledge of language and psychology make them provide quality therapy to clients."

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