**7Cups' Support Services: A Critical Examination of the
Risks and Ethical Concerns**

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7Cups

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Introduction

Mental health is a significant concern in today's society, with millions of people worldwide seeking support and guidance to manage their emotional well-being. With the rise of technology and online platforms, mental health services have become more accessible to the public. One such platform is 7Cups, which offers online emotional support to individuals globally. 7Cups claims to provide an anonymous, online platform where individuals can connect with "trained listeners" for emotional support, including depression, anxiety, relationship issues, LGBTQ issues and many more.

However, this report will bring attention to the potential harm that 7Cups can cause to its users. As a verified 7Cups listener with the pseudonym MentalOctopie9, I have firsthand experience with the platform and have witnessed some of the issues raised in this report. The harm discussed in this report includes inadequate listener training, unreliable safety protocols, incompetent monitoring of chat rooms, facilitation of gender transition treatments and inadequate management of listener behavior. These issues can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and potential harm to users who seek emotional support.

Furthermore, as a verified listener with over 70 hours of chat time, a 5-star rating, enrolled in the internship program, enrolled in the group leadership and dynamics program, and a peer supporter, I have also experienced some of the challenges on the 7Cups platform. The challenges range from dealing with difficult users, and the absence of effective training in handling complex emotional and mental health situations in other listeners/moderators.

This scientific report aims to bring to light the potential harm that 7Cups can cause to its users and the challenges faced by listeners in providing effective emotional support on the platform. The report will examine the issues raised in the essays and provide a comprehensive

analysis of the challenges faced by listeners in providing emotional support to users. The report will not provide recommendations for improving the issues raised, however, I would be delighted to assist the leadership team in resolving the issues if invited. The report aims to provide valuable insights into the potential harm of online emotional support platforms such as 7Cups, as well as acting as a facilitator to improving the safety and effectiveness of these platforms.

The Risks of 7Cups' Facilitation of Gender Transition in Teens

7Cups is an online platform that provides mental health support to individuals through chat rooms and listeners. One of the rooms available on the platform is the LGBTQ/MOGII support room, which aims to support individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, or from marginalized orientations, genders, and intersex groups. While 7Cups supports gender transition through rooms like LGBTQ/MOGII support, there are concerns that it may do more harm than good.

A study by Zucker (2019) highlights the dangers of facilitating gender transition during adolescence. Zucker argues that gender dysphoria can be a complex issue, and that individuals who experience it may not always require or benefit from transition-related treatments. Furthermore, he notes that adolescents are already in a vulnerable period of development, and adding the complexity of gender confusion to their lives can exacerbate their sense of confusion and distress.

An additional study conducted by Dr. Kenneth Zucker (2017), it was found that up to 80% of gender dysphoric teens will settle into their natal sex by early adulthood if not subjected to

transition-related treatments. The study also found that a majority of gender dysphoric teens were homosexual (Zucker, 2017). These findings further highlight the complexity of gender dysphoria and the need for careful evaluation and treatment of individuals experiencing this condition. It is important to consider all options and potential risks before embarking on a path towards gender transition, particularly during adolescence (the target audience for 7Cups).

In light of the findings from the study conducted by Zucker, the wrongdoings of 7Cups in promoting gender transition without proper evaluation and consideration of alternatives is alarming. One of the concerns with 7Cups' affirming approach to gender dysphoria is that it may lead to hasty and inappropriate recommendations for gender transition, which can be particularly problematic for adolescents who may already be struggling with identity issues and vulnerability. As Dr. Zucker notes, careful evaluation and treatment of individuals experiencing gender dysphoria is necessary, and a one-size-fits-all approach may not be appropriate for all cases. Adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria may not necessarily require or benefit from transition-related treatments, and subjecting them to such treatments without proper evaluation can cause more harm than good. Furthermore, the fact that a majority of gender dysphoric teens were homosexual raises concerns about 7Cups potentially overlooking this important factor in their approach to gender dysphoria. It is crucial for organizations such as 7Cups to prioritize the well-being and safety of their users and to ensure that their actions align with best practices and ethical guidelines in the field of mental health.

Please note: The conclusion that 7Cups has a one-size-fits-all approach was reached after a careful evaluation of their services and policies. It was observed that 7Cups provides a uniform set of resources and support groups for all mental health issues, without taking into account the individual needs and complexities of each issue. This approach fails to recognize that gender dysphoria is a complex and unique issue that requires individualized evaluation and treatment. The lack of specialized support groups or resources for gender dysphoria on 7Cups further reinforces the one-size-fits-all approach, and suggests a disregard for the specific needs of individuals experiencing gender dysphoria. Additionally, the affirming nature of 7Cups may contribute to its one-size-fits-all approach when dealing with gender dysphoric teens. By assuming that all individuals experiencing gender dysphoria require affirmation and support for transitioning, 7Cups may be failing to consider the nuances and complexities of each individual case, potentially putting vulnerable teenagers at risk. This approach could also perpetuate the idea that gender dysphoria is a problem that can be solved through transition-related treatments alone, rather than acknowledging the need for comprehensive and personalized evaluation and treatment.

According to a study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the prevalence rates of substance use disorder (SUD) in the United States are estimated to be around 7% (SAMHSA, 2020). In contrast, LGBTQ/MOGII (Marginalized Orientations, Gender Identities, and Intersex) issues have a prevalence rate of around 5.2% in the US population (Institute of Medicine, 2011), these prevalence rates are recorded among individuals seeking mental health support. Despite the higher prevalence of SUD, there are no support groups centered around this issue on 7Cups or other mental health platforms, which raises concerns about the prioritization of certain mental health issues over others and further affirms my claim that 7Cups is facilitating gender transition in teens.

An experiment was conducted to determine the prevalence of individuals identifying as something other than their natal sex in 7Cups, an online mental health platform. The author logged into 7Cups 10 times at different times over several days. This created 10 different groups (ranging between 25-35 users per group) on 7Cups, the author recorded the presence of transgender individuals within the group space, excluding the "LGBTQ/MOGII support" group.

The study found that at least one person in each of the 10 groups identified as a gender other than their natal sex. This identification was determined by checking users' biographies, where they may have indicated their preferred pronouns or gender identity. This included individuals who identified as a gender that could not be assigned at birth or had pronouns set to they/them. To avoid bias, the study excluded individuals who had already been identified in another group. Thes odds of this study is generous towards 7Cups as finding individuals who did not identify as male or female were calculated based on the odds of someone seeking support for

LGBTQ/MOGII issues, furthermore, there were often multiple individuals identifying as a gender other than their natal sex.

To determine the probability of finding at least one person identifying as something other than their natal sex in all 10 groups, we calculated the probability of not finding any such individuals in a group of 25-25 people to be 0.22. Using this value, the probability of not finding any groups without transgender individuals in all 10 groups is 0.22^10, which is approximately 0.029, or 2.9%. This means that the probability of finding at least one transgender person in all 10 groups is 2.9%, this is a statistic that would presume that 7Cups was not attracting gender dysphoric individuals. Therefor it is statistically very probable 7Cups is attracting these individuals, therefor, facilitating gender transition.

There are obviously many variables that challenge the findings of the study, however, when considering the generosity towards 7Cups and the extraordinarily high "97.1%" the study should be considered as evidence.

The issue of providing mental health support to individuals experiencing gender dysphoria during adolescence is a complex one, as it involves navigating various ethical and philosophical considerations. One of the key challenges in this area is the tension between affirming an individual's gender identity and ensuring that they receive appropriate and evidence-based treatment. While affirming an individual's gender identity can be important for their well-being and self-esteem, it is important to also consider the potential harms that may arise from inappropriate or premature gender transition.

Moreover, the provision of mental health support must also be tailored to the individual's specific needs and circumstances. This requires a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between an individual's gender identity, their mental health status, and their social and cultural context. Listeners 7Cups do not have the necessary expertise to provide such tailored support, which can further exacerbate the risks associated with gender dysphoria in adolescents.

Facilitating gender transition during adolescence without appropriate expertise and guidance can lead to significant harm, and untrained listeners on 7Cups may not have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide appropriate support for gender dysphoric teens. 7Cups' affirming nature may reinforce harmful beliefs and behaviors that could lead to the wrong treatment path for individuals. These issues demonstrate the need for mental health providers to prioritize evidence-based and individualized care for those experiencing gender dysphoria. 7Cups' failure to do so poses a significant risk to vulnerable individuals seeking mental health support on the platform.

7Cups' promotion of its ability to support individuals with gender dysphoria and related issues raises ethical concerns regarding the organization's duty to provide competent and effective care. While the organization may provide training manuals, the complex and sensitive nature of gender dysphoria requires specialized expertise and training that may not be realistically attainable for volunteer listeners on the platform. The potential harm that could result from providing inadequate or inappropriate support to individuals with gender dysphoria cannot be ignored, particularly given the high rates of suicide and self-harm among this population. Therefore, 7Cups has an ethical responsibility to be transparent about the limitations of its services and to ensure that individuals seeking support for gender dysphoria are directed to appropriate resources.

The prioritization of support groups for LGBTQ/MOGII issues over other mental health issues, such as substance use disorder, raises additional ethical concerns regarding 7Cups' commitment to providing comprehensive and equitable mental health services. While it is important to address the mental health needs of LGBTQ/MOGII individuals, the absence of comparable support for other mental health issues suggests a potential bias that undermines the

organization's stated commitment to providing impartial and nonjudgmental support. Given the substantial harm caused by substance use disorder, the failure to provide support groups for this issue in proportion to its prevalence is particularly troubling. This raises ethical questions about the organization's motivations and priorities, and underscores the need for greater transparency and accountability in its provision of mental health services.

As for potential counterarguments, one may argue that 7Cups is a free platform that is not obligated to provide comprehensive mental health support, and that any support is better than none. However, this argument ignores the potential harm that can result from providing inadequate or inappropriate support, particularly in the case of gender dysphoria. Additionally, it is the responsibility of mental health providers, whether paid or volunteer, to provide competent and effective care to the best of their abilities. Failing to do so constitutes a breach of their ethical duties and can result in harm to vulnerable individuals. Therefore, while 7Cups may be a free platform, it still has an ethical responsibility to provide effective and nonharmful mental health support.

In conclusion, while 7Cups aims to provide mental health support to individuals, the potential harm it may cause by facilitating gender transition in teens cannot be ignored. There is a need for more research and evaluation of the support provided by 7Cups to ensure that it is safe and effective for all individuals, and until research states otherwise, 7Cups should not operate in this manner.

The Potential Issues with Group Chat Rooms on the 7Cups Platform

In addition to the individual counseling offered on 7Cups, the platform also provides group chat rooms where individuals can connect with others who are experiencing similar challenges. However, these group chat rooms may have several potential issues that can lead to harmful consequences for users.

One issue is the lack of proper moderation and supervision in these group chat rooms. Research has shown that group therapy, when done correctly, can be an effective form of treatment for mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety. However, the effectiveness of group therapy is highly dependent on the proper training and supervision of the group facilitator(s) (McRoberts et al., 2018). Without proper moderation and supervision, group chat rooms can easily become dominated by individuals who may not have the necessary training or expertise to provide proper emotional support. This can lead to harmful advice, support or guidance being provided.

Additionally, research has shown that online group chat rooms can often lack the level of expertise and training necessary to provide effective emotional support. This can lead to situations where individuals may not receive the proper guidance and assistance they need to manage their mental health. While 7Cups does provide training for their listeners, the complex nature of group therapy requires a higher level of expertise and experience that may not be available in these chat rooms. This lack of professional support can have detrimental consequences for individuals seeking help, particularly those who may be dealing with more serious mental health issues.

The group chat rooms may not align with the needs of all users. Some individuals may prefer a one-on-one counseling experience, while others may prefer the support of a larger group. However, the specific needs of each individual may not be met in the group chat rooms, as the

topics and dynamics of the group are often determined by the users present. This can lead to individuals feeling as though they do not belong or that their specific concerns are not being addressed.

According to anecdotal evidence, users in 7Cups group chat rooms have expressed dissatisfaction with some of the listeners on the platform, indicating that they are using the platform for social needs rather than receiving emotional support. This can be concerning, especially for vulnerable teenagers who may be seeking guidance and advice during difficult times.

Adolescents who struggle with social skills may be drawn to 7Cups group rooms because of the perceived anonymity and lack of real-life consequences. The online platform may offer a sense of safety and protection that is not present in face-to-face interactions. Additionally, the non-judgmental and welcoming environment in the group rooms may be appealing to those who have experienced rejection or social isolation in offline settings. These individuals may feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in the online community, which can be a powerful motivator for continued participation. However, while the platform may provide temporary relief for social difficulties, it may also perpetuate a cycle of avoidance and hinder the development of crucial social skills.

One of the potential issues with relying on 7Cups group chat rooms for social interaction is that it may not provide a realistic model for social dynamics. In these chat rooms, users can interact anonymously and without any real consequences for their actions, which can lead to a lack of accountability and a disregard for appropriate social behavior. This can be particularly harmful for young people who are still developing their social skills and may not have a clear understanding of what is appropriate or not.

Research has shown that social skills are crucial for healthy development and well-being in adolescence (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). In fact, deficits in social skills have been associated with various negative outcomes such as social rejection, mental health problems, and lower academic achievement (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Therefore, relying solely on 7Cups group chat rooms for social interaction can potentially rob young people of the opportunity to develop realistic social skills and learn how to navigate true-to-life social dynamics in a healthy way. While it is understandable that these chat rooms may provide a sense of community and belonging for individuals who may be struggling with social isolation, it is important to remember that they do not provide a complete and accurate representation of real-world social dynamics.

Moreover, the lack of accountability and anonymity in online group chat rooms may also contribute to the formation of toxic behaviors and social hierarchies (In 7Cups this can often present itself in cliques) . Users may feel the need to conform to the dynamics of the room in order to fit in and avoid being ostracized or bullied. This can be detrimental to their mental health and well-being, especially if they are already struggling with issues related to social isolation and rejection.

Research has shown that social support is a key protective factor for mental health and well-being (Taylor, 2011). However, it is important to note that not all forms of social support are equal. In fact, some forms of social support may even be harmful if they are not provided in a safe and appropriate manner. For example, a study by Rook and colleagues (1992) found that negative interactions with social network members were associated with poorer health outcomes, while positive interactions were associated with better health outcomes.

If In examining the potential issues with 7Cups group chat rooms, one must consider the ethical implications of the platform's lack of proper moderation and supervision. Without adequate training and expertise, listeners in these chat rooms may provide harmful advice or guidance to vulnerable individuals seeking emotional support. This raises ethical concerns regarding the duty of care owed by 7Cups to its users, particularly those who may be dealing with more serious mental health issues. Furthermore, the lack of individualized attention in group chat rooms may lead to a failure to recognize and respond to the unique needs and circumstances of each user. This highlights the importance of upholding the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for autonomy in providing mental health services to individuals. Failure to do so may not only be ethically problematic but also detrimental to the mental health and well-being of those seeking help on the platform.

The Inadequacies of 7Cups Listener Training

Becoming a listener on 7Cups is a simple process, but it comes with many problems for the 7Cups model. One of the most significant issues is the lack of accountability and oversight for those who become listeners. As the assessment process for becoming a listener is designed to ensure that individuals are capable of providing emotional support and guidance, it is not designed to identify those who may not be able to adhere to the platform's guidelines. Furthermore, the assessment process is structured in such a way that individuals are not able to "fail" the assessment, as they are given multiple opportunities to correct their answers, therefore, it cannot verify the actual competence of the listener. This lack of accountability can have serious consequences for the individuals who seek support on the platform.

The dangers of trusting teens to adhere to the guidelines provided by 7Cups cannot be understated. While the platform provides detailed guidelines for listeners, including requirements to report any concerning behavior or statements made by users, there is no way to guarantee that all listeners will follow these guidelines. In particular, the anonymity provided by the platform can protect individuals who may not be following the guidelines from any real form of punishment.

Studies have shown that anonymity can lead to a lack of accountability and increased deviant behavior online (Joinson, 2003). In a study of online communities, Joinson found that anonymity was associated with a lack of responsibility for one's actions, and that this lack of responsibility led to an increased likelihood of deviant behavior. This is particularly concerning when it comes to providing emotional support and guidance to vulnerable individuals, as the potential for harm is high.

Moreover, teenagers, in particular, are susceptible to peer pressure and may be more likely to deviate from guidelines when they are in a group setting. Group dynamics can be powerful and may lead to individuals feeling pressure to conform to the expectations of the group, even if those expectations are not aligned with the guidelines provided by 7Cups. This can lead to harmful advice or support being provided, which can have serious consequences for the mental health and well-being of the individuals seeking support on the platform.

While the platform does provide training for listeners, it is important to remember that emotional support and guidance is a complex and nuanced field, while also one sensitive to errors. The training provided by 7Cups may not be enough to prepare individuals for the wide range of issues that they may encounter when providing emotional support and guidance to others. Moreover, even with the training provided, it can be difficult to know how to respond in a

given situation without the proper experience and expertise. This lack of professional support can have detrimental consequences for individuals seeking help, particularly those who may be dealing with more serious mental health issues.

Although 7Cups does offer the ability to receive assistance from other listeners during chats, research suggests that people often avoid seeking help due to the fear of stigmatization and negative evaluation by others (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). This fear of negative evaluation may be heightened in younger populations, such as teen listeners, who may have an egocentric nature and a heightened sense of self-consciousness (Cicchetti, 1990). As such, it is possible that teen listeners on 7Cups may be hesitant to seek support from other listeners during chats due to the perceived shame and incompetence that may be associated with doing so. This is supported by a study conducted by Vogel et al. (2007) which found that people who fear negative evaluation are less likely to seek help when experiencing psychological distress. Therefore, even though listeners have the option to seek support from other listeners, it is important to recognize that they may be unlikely to do so due to the fear of being viewed as incompetent or weak.

To add to this, the reluctance to admit or realize one's own incompetence can also contribute to the hesitancy to seek help from others. This is known as the Dunning-Kruger effect, where individuals with low levels of competence tend to overestimate their abilities and are less likely to seek help or feedback (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). In the case of teen listeners on 7Cups, their lack of experience and training in providing emotional support may lead to overconfidence in their abilities, which can make them less likely to seek help or guidance from other listeners. The fear of negative evaluation and the Dunning-Kruger effect can work together to create a barrier for listeners to seek support from others, which underscores the importance of proper

training and supervision to ensure that listeners are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide effective emotional support.

Incompetent support can have detrimental consequences for individuals seeking help. A lack of proper training or expertise can result in ineffective or even harmful support. For example, if a listener is not trained to handle certain types of crises (although this is addressed in the 7Cups guideline, listeners are susceptible to fail to identify a crisis and may not take necessary action when they do) or mental health conditions, they may inadvertently provide harmful advice or further exacerbate the individual's condition.

Incompetent support can also lead to individuals feeling misunderstood or invalidated. If a listener is not adequately trained to empathize with and understand the individual's experiences and feelings, they may unintentionally make the individual feel worse or dismissed.

Furthermore, incompetent support can perpetuate harmful stereotypes or biases. For instance, if a listener is not trained to recognize and challenge their own biases, they may perpetuate harmful stereotypes about certain groups of people. This can further marginalize already vulnerable individuals and perpetuate systems of oppression.

Studies have shown that incompetent support can have serious consequences for mental health. A study published in the Journal of Counseling Psychology found that individuals who received ineffective counseling were more likely to experience increased symptoms of depression and anxiety (Laska, Gurman, & Wampold, 2014). Another study published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology found that individuals who received inadequate support were less likely to seek help in the future (Kazdin & Blase, 2011).

Overall, it is crucial that listeners on 7Cups and other support platforms are adequately trained and equipped to provide effective support. Incompetent support can have serious

consequences for individuals seeking help and perpetuate harmful stereotypes and biases. It is essential that the mental health community continues to prioritize the importance of proper training and education in supporting individuals in need.

Conclusion

The 7Cups platform offers emotional support to individuals who may not have access to mental health services. However, the three conclusions drawn from the platform's evaluation raise significant concerns about the quality and safety of the support provided.

Firstly, the platform's facilitation of gender transition in teenagers without proper evaluation and consideration of alternatives is worrying. The complex nature of gender dysphoria and the vulnerability of adolescents call for a personalized and comprehensive evaluation and treatment approach. The lack of specialized support groups for gender dysphoria and the one-size-fits-all approach adopted by 7Cups may lead to hasty and inappropriate recommendations for gender transition, putting vulnerable teenagers at risk. The findings suggest the need for a more thoughtful and personalized approach that takes into account individual differences in gender dysphoria experiences.

Secondly, the lack of proper moderation and supervision in group chat rooms on the 7Cups platform raises concerns about the quality and effectiveness of emotional support provided. Inadequate training and expertise, failure to meet individual needs, and perpetuation of avoidance of real-life social skills are potential issues that may arise in online group chat rooms. The anonymity provided by the platform may also lead to the formation of toxic behaviors and social hierarchies, contributing to poorer mental health outcomes. The ethical implications of

inadequate moderation and supervision call for upholding ethical principles in providing emotional support.

Finally, the lack of accountability and oversight for 7Cups listeners can have serious consequences for individuals seeking emotional support and guidance. The anonymity provided by the platform may lead to a lack of responsibility and increased deviant behavior, particularly among teenagers. Proper training and supervision are necessary to ensure that listeners are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide effective emotional support. Incompetent support can have detrimental consequences for mental health, perpetuate harmful stereotypes or biases, and lead to individuals feeling misunderstood or invalidated.

In summary, the evaluation of the 7Cups platform highlights the potential dangers of inadequate emotional support and the need for a more thoughtful and personalized approach to mental health care. The three conclusions drawn from the platform's evaluation raise concerns about the quality, safety, and ethical practices of the support provided. It is essential to recognize the potential dangers of inadequate emotional support and to take action to ensure that individuals seeking support on the platform receive safe, effective, and compassionate care.

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