

Effects of Psychoeducational Group on Muslim Spouses' Communication

(Kesan Kelompok Psikopendidikan terhadap Komunikasi Pasangan Beragama Islam)

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Abstract

Statistics released by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) shows that the marital conflict and divorce rates among Muslim increases every year. There are a range of factors associated with marital conflict and divorce. In present study communication is highlighted as the factor that contribute to marital conflict and divorce among Muslim spouses. In an effort to help spouses manage and overcome marital conflicts, Muslim spouses need for an Islamic base according to the religious perspective. For that purposes this article is an attempt to examine the effects of psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) on communication among Muslim husbands and wives at Felda in Kedah. A psychoeducational group is a systematic effort to help improve the functioning of Muslim spouses' communication through education and preventative means which widely used in guidance and counseling services. It is a group approach conducted by marriage counselors to educate and disseminating knowledge and skills related to marriage relationships. The randomized controlled trials (randomized control group design with pretest, posttest and follow up test) was used in this study. The experimental and control group of this study was totally composed of 76 participants, 38 in experimental group and 38 in control group. Participants in experimental group received a treatment of MP-SI for 6 weeks (2 hours per week). Marital Communication Inventory (MCI) was utilized to obtain the data for communication in three times (pretest, posttest, and follow up). A Mixed Between-Within Subjects ANOVA was used to see the differences between the mean scores of pretest, posttest, and follow up test within both experimental and control group. The results from mixed between-within subjects ANOVA showed that there were a statistically significant main

effect of time and group for communication. Participants in the experimental group showed improvement in communication compared to the control group over the three time periods. These findings demonstrated the MP-SI conducted in this study had a higher impact on the experimental group and the effect was similar on the male and female participants. These results reveal valuable information that an Islamic psycho-spiritual approach that emphasizes the spiritual practices and element of nafs (soul), aql (intellect), qalb (heart), and ruh (spirit) help improve Muslim spouses' communication.

Keywords: *Psycho-spiritual, Communication, Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI).*

Abstrak

Statistik yang dikeluarkan oleh Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) menunjukkan kadar penceraian dalam kalangan pasangan beragama Islam meningkat pada setiap tahun. Konflik perkahwinan dan penceraian ini disebabkan oleh pelbagai faktor. Dalam kajian ini komunikasi diberi penekanan sebagai faktor yang menyumbang kepada berlakunya konflik perkahwinan dan penceraian dalam kalangan pasangan beragama Islam. Dalam usaha untuk membantu pasangan suami isteri mengurus dan mengatasi konflik perkahwinan, pasangan beragama Islam memerlukan asas berdasarkan pendekatan agama. Untuk tujuan tersebut, artikel ini membincangkan kesan IP-SP terhadap komunikasi dalam kalangan pasangan beragama Islam di Felda Kedah, Malaysia. Kelompok psikopendidikan dilihat sebagai intervensi yang sistematik dalam membantu meningkatkan kefungsiiaan perkahwinan pasangan beragama Islam iaitu melalui pendekatan pendidikan dan pencegahan yang digunakan secara meluas dalam perkhidmatan bimbingan dan kaunseling. Kelompok ini dikendalikan oleh kaunselor perkahwinan untuk mengajar dan memberi pendedahan tentang pengetahuan dan kemahiran dalam perkahwinan. Reka bentuk rawak (praujian, pasca ujian, ujian susulan, dan kumpulan kawalan digunakan dalam kajian ini. Kelompok kawalan dan rawatan kajian ini terdiri daripada 76 peserta, 38 peserta dalam kelompok rawatan dan 38 peserta dalam kelompok kawalan. Peserta dalam kelompok rawatan menerima intervensi IP-SP untuk tempoh selama 6 minggu (2 jam setiap minggu). Inventori Komunikasi Perkahwinan digunakan untuk tujuan pengumpulan data pra ujian, pasca ujian dan susulan. Mixed Between-Within Subjects ANOVA digunakan untuk melihat perbezaan skor min pra ujian, pasca ujian dan susulan antara kelompok rawatan dan kelompok kawalan. Keputusan mixed between-within subjects ANOVA menunjukkan terdapatnya kesan masa dan kumpulan yang signifikan komunikasi. Peserta dalam kelompok rawatan menunjukkan perubahan yang positif berbanding peserta kelompok kawalan dalam tempok tiga masa. Dapatan ini menunjukkan IP-SP yang dilaksanakan

dalam kajian ini mempunyai impak yang besar terhadap kelompok rawatan dan kesannya sama bagi peserta lelaki dan peserta perempuan. Hasil kajian ini memberi maklumat yang bermanfaat bahawa pendekatan psikospiritual Islam yang menekankan amalan spiritual dan elemen seperti nafs, aql, qalb, dan ruh membantu memperbaiki komunikasi pasangan beragama Islam.

Kata kunci: *Psikospiritual, Komunikasi, Intervensi Psiko-Spiritual Perkahwinan (IP-SP).*

Introduction

Marriage is a great institution. It was recognized by every major religion in the world as a sacred relationship and a fundamental part for the survival of generations. Studies have shown that married couples have a positive psychological well-being (Williams, 2003; Simon, 2002) and they have an opportunity to achieve exceptionally high level of intimacy, trust, support, and meaningful life. However, issue of marital conflict and marital dissolution is inevitable. The divorce rate has increased throughout the world. In Asian countries, the divorce rate has increased quite dramatically especially in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (Huang, 2005). In Malaysia, even though the divorce rate seems small compared to other countries such as United States, Australia and Canada (Chan & Mohamad Sharif Mustaffa, 2008), divorce rates among Muslim married couples increase every year. According to the statistic released by Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), the divorce rates among Muslim couples has increase to 28 035 cases in 2010 (JAKIM, 2012). In 2009, it was reported that Muslim couples get divorced every 15 minutes (Berita Harian, March, 2011). This report is quite alarming and should be addressed by all parties.

There are many factors that lead to marital distress and divorce. Studies have shown that the marital distress and divorce was associated with various factors such as couples' personality (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002), communication (Gottman & Silver, 1994), conflict resolution skills (Russell-Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001), interpersonal processes such as forgiveness and sacrifice (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007), and also today's rapid growth and urbanization (Huang, 2005). In western countries, several approaches have been made to overcome marital conflict and marital dissolution. There are explosions of interest in an attention to marriage enrichment programs for couples to address marital distress in preventive manner. A variety of marriage enrichment program with regard to improvements of marital quality and marital skills among couples was developed such as Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Relationship Enhancement (RE), Couple Communication Program, and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment

(Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004). There are also faith-based marriage enrichment programs such as SANCTUS (Sager & Sager, 2005), and Recovery of Hope (Giblin & Combs as cited in Sager & Sager, 2005). Studies have shown that these programs demonstrated efficacy in increasing marital adjustment (Kalkan, & Ersanli, 2008), improving marital satisfaction and married couples' psychological well-being (Pihet, Bodenmann, Cina, Widmen, & Shantinath, 2007).

Taking into account the effectiveness of marriage enrichment program in western countries in enhancing marriage relationship and might reduce the rate of divorce, there is a need for the marriage enrichment program in effort to help Muslim couples in Malaysia as well. However, for Muslim where religion and spiritual is an important dimension, there is a need for the programs that applying psycho-spiritual approach in effort to strengthen marriage relationship (Siti Aishah Hassan & Maznah Baba, 2008; Siti Aishah Hassan, 2011). Hence, this study proposed the marital intervention namely Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI). It is an intervention that emphasizes the importance of practicing the knowledge in the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet SAW in order to enhance the Muslim couples' relationship. Through this intervention, husbands and wives were taught with topic related to marriage relationship such as the goal of Islamic marriage, *tazkiyatun nafs* (the process of purification of soul), communication according to Islamic perspective, conflict resolution, and elements of peace, tranquility and loves in marriage.

The MP-SI conducted in this study are expected to help Muslim husbands and wives improving the quality of communication, which is the pertinent element in relationship satisfaction (Egeci&Genco, 2011; Burchard, Yarhouse, Kilian, Worthington, Berry, & Carter, 2003; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Even though, this element is seen as a vehicle for understanding, loves, help, and entertainment between husbands and wives, it's also has been cited as a leading cause of relationship dissolution among married couples (Burchard et al. 2003). Usually, the negative interaction lead to decreased intimacy, weaker relationships, and ultimately divorce (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). As might be expected, positive communication is associated with satisfaction and negative communication with dissatisfaction. This expectation was proven with research conducted by Christensen, Eldridge, Catta-Preta, Lim and Santaga in 2006 which their finding shows that constructive communication did significantly predict satisfaction while the demand withdraw interaction pattern is associated with relationship dissatisfaction. The findings of these studies signify that relationship satisfaction and stability in marriage are closely tied to the quality of couples' communication. Every married couples should aware that an effort to learn effective skill of communication is noteworthy and marriage intervention such as MP-SI is a platform to help them improve

the quality of communication. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of psycho-educational group known as MP-SI in improving communication among Muslim spouses.

Research Method

Research Design

The research design used in this study was experimental design (randomized control group design with pretest, posttest and follow up). In this study, participants were assigned into two groups (experimental and control) through process of randomization. The independent variable or the treatment for this study is in the form of MP-SI. A pretest was conducted before the experiment to determine the scores of communication for both groups prior to the treatment. The experimental group was received a treatment for a period of 6 weeks, while the control group did not receive a treatment. Both groups were given a posttest, two weeks after the treatment. Then after two months, a follow up test was carried out to control group and experimental group.

Population and Sampling

The target population of this study is the husbands and wives in 15 FELDA in Kedah. This is the population which the results of the study are intended to generalize. However, this target population is rarely available (Frankel & Wallen, 2006). Therefore, the researcher used the accessible population among husbands and wives who lives in one FELDA.

Determining the Sample Size

For this study, the sample size was determined based on the factors that proposed by Cohen (1988). According to Cohen (1988), the concept of power analysis which is defined as the probability of rejecting a false-null hypothesis is an important in determining sample size. Conventionally, the power of statistical test is .80 (which means correctly reject a false-null hypothesis 80% of the time). The power of statistical test is determined by the alpha level, the sample size, and the effect size. These three factors are related. The sample size can be determined after the power, alpha level, and the effect size is known. For this study, the power is set at .80, an alpha level is .05, and the expected effect size is large. Based on the sample size table (Cohen, 1988, Table 8.4.4, p. 384), the number of participants needed in this study for expected large effect size at recommended power of .80 and alpha level .05 is 26 for each group. In this study, the researcher used 38 participants for each groups and the total participants are 76 as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Size

| Group | No. of Participants | | Total |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Male | Female | |
| Experiment | 19 | 19 | 38 |
| Control | 19 | 19 | 38 |
| Total | 38 | 38 | 76 |

Screening and Selection of Participants

The screening and selection of participants in this study was conducted before the treatment begins. The participants were screened based on certain criteria such as the aged is 25 years and above, level of education at least up to primary six and live together with the spouse at the time of their participations in the study. The participants who met these criteria were asked to respond to the two questionnaires; Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) and Marital Communication Inventory (MCI). The UPI was used to assess the level of participants' personality from the Islamic psycho-spiritual dimension, while MCI to measure participants' communication. The participants who have achieved moderate score in UPI were selected to participate in the study whereas participants who either have achieved the lowest score or the highest score were excluded. The purpose of this screening process is to avoid offering the treatment of MP-SI to the participants who have poor personality especially in Islamic psycho-spiritual dimension.

*Measurement**Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI; Noraini Othman, 2011)*

The Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) was developed by Noraini Othman (2011). The UPI has 69 items. Each items is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (usually). This instrument was developed for measuring and assessing Muslim personality from the Islamic perspective. The items were constructed based on the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This instrument is differing from other instrument personality in terms of using psycho-spiritual dimension. The term *ummatic* personality refers to "the characteristics of an individual that are in accordance with Islamic spirituality, as described in the Quran and the *Sunnah*" (Noraini Othman, 2011, p. 38). There are three constructs in UPI. The constructs are worship, trust, and knowledge.

Marital Communication Inventory (MCI; Bienvenu, 1970)

Communication in this study was measured by the Marital Communication Inventory (MCI). The MCI was developed by Bienvenu in 1970. This inventory is widely used in evaluating marriage enrichment program because the content of most of these programs focuses on communication which is evaluated in the MCI (Anderson, 1984). This instrument measures the communication couples' behaviors and attitudes. Some items refer to the behavior of the subject, some to the behavior of the subject's spouse, and others to the behavior of the couple as a unit. This instrument is a self-report questionnaire with separate forms for husbands and for wives. Form F for females and form M for males. The forms differ only in the use of the term "husband" and "wife" when referring to the subject's spouse. The MCI has 46 item self-inventory. Each item is rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (usually). The MCI is scored by summing the raw scores to obtain total score which may range from 0 to 138. The higher score indicating good communication.

Procedure

The research procedure for this study consists of three phases; pretreatment, treatment, and post treatment. During the phase of pretreatment, the screening process of participants, administration of pretest, and assigning participants into groups was carried out. Then it's followed by phase of treatment whereby the intervention of MP-SI was conducted and lasted with phase of post treatment which is the post test and follow up test was administered. A brief research procedure was explained as follow:

In phase of pretreatment, the researcher selects the participant to be included in this study based on certain criteria which is the age of participant is 25 years and above, have an educational level at least up to primary six and live together with respective spouses at the time of participations in the study. Those who met these criteria were asked to respond to a set of questionnaire which consists of UPI and MCI. These questionnaires measured participants' personality and communication. Only the husbands and wives who achieved moderate score of UPI were selected to be included in this study.

The selected participants then were assigned into group through the process of matching of participants and random assignment. The participants were matched based on the moderate score of UPI. After the process of matching, the participants were assigned randomly into control and experimental groups equally. Only the participants in experimental group received the treatment whereas the control group did not receive the treatment. The treatment to the participants in control group was given after the administration of follow up test.

The treatment was conducted in this study is MP-SI. This treatment was carried out for 6 weeks. The participants of experimental group were met for 2 hours regularly once a week. After two weeks the treatment ended, a posttest was given to both groups to measure participants' communication. Then, two months after the administration of posttest, the researcher administered a follow up test. The same instruments were used in pretest, posttest and follow up test. The scores of these instruments were compared to examine the effectiveness of the treatment on communication among participants in both groups

Treatment

A psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Interventional (MP-SI) is a treatment used in this study. It is a psychoeducational group that emphasizes the importance of religious and spiritual practices in the Muslim marriage relationship. It is an approach that integrates knowledge and skills in enhancing marriage relationship. This intervention specifically developed to help Muslim couples build a good relationship with God, with themselves, and with their respective spouses.

The knowledge of the Holy Quran and the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad SAW was highlighted in MP-SI to increase spiritual development among Muslim couples to become a good husband and a good wife. The content of this intervention takes into account the views of Holy Quran on the fact of man's creation which consists of four importance elements, *nafs* (soul), *aql* (intellect), *qalb* (heart), and *ruh* (spirit). These elements were emphasized in the MP-SI in context of producing good husbands and good wives according to Islam.

The participants of this psychoeducational group were taught specific skills and knowledge to strengthen marriage relationship. Rather than teach particular forms of couple communication, conflict resolution skill, this psychoeducational group teach couples on how Islamic spiritual can help husbands and wives to be a good Muslim couple as well.

This intervention is a structured format. In each session, the participants were exposed with the knowledge of Islamic marriage, the skills to communicate effectively, work as team to work as team to resolve conflicts, manage conflicts without damaging closeness, preserve and enhance marriage relationship through forgiveness, *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love with passion), and *rahmah* (mercy).

Each session begins with a follow up discussion on the topics from previous session. Then, new topics were introduced and were explained followed by participants' discussion on the topics. The topics and the contents delivered for each session in this psychoeducational group are briefly described in Table 2.

Findings

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in communication between pretest, posttest, and follow up test

In order to examine the effectiveness of MP-SI on communication across three periods of times, a Mixed between-Within Subjects ANOVA was conducted. Before proceeding with the analysis for hypothesis, the preliminary assumption testing was conducted to determine there is no violation for normality, homogeneity of variance and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. Based on the output, there was no violation noted.

The findings showed a significant main effect of time, $F(2, 73) = 32.31, p < .05$, indicating higher follow up ($M = 87.38$) than posttest ($M = 83.82$), and pretest ($M = 79.03$) scores. This result indicates that there was a change in communication scores across the three different time periods. The effect size for time was .47. It is suggesting the large effect size which is it represent 47% of the variance in scores of communication explained by time.

Table 2

Content of Psychoeducational Group - MP-SI

| Session | Topic |
|---------|---|
| 1 | Introduction to the program and its structure; issues in marriage relationship and factors of divorce. |
| 2 | The Islamic marriage. The concept of Islamic marriage; role and responsibility of husband and wife as prescribed by Islam; purpose of marriage in Islam |
| 3 | The importance and relationship between knowledge, practice, and faith. |
| 4 | The importance role of <i>qalb</i> (heart) in human personality development. |
| 5 | The concept of <i>tazkiyatun nafs</i> (purification of soul) in marriage relationship and its practical means. |
| 6 | The meaning of communication and its importance in marriage. |
| 7 | Prevention of the ways in handling negative communication. |
| 8 | The importance of non-verbal communication. |
| 9 | An Islamic perspective regarding on conflict in marriage. |
| 10 | Steps and skills in handling conflict based on Islamic conflict perspective. |
| 11 | A concept of Islamic forgiveness and a frame work for working through grudges and resentment. |
| 12 | Tranquility, love with a passion, and mercy: An importance elements highlighted in the Holy Quran. |

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in communication between experimental group and control group across three periods of time

This hypothesis is to assess whether there was a statistical significant difference in the communication scores between the two groups (experimental and control groups). The findings indicate that there is a statistically significant effect for group; $F(1, 74) = 15.37, p < .05$. This result shows that mean score of experimental group ($M = 87.73$) is higher than control group ($M = 87.73$). This result suggesting that the participants in experimental group had improved their communication compared the participants in control group. The partial eta squared value for group in this study was .17. Its suggesting a small effect size for group which is it represents 17% of the variance in communication scores explained by group.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference interaction effect between time and group for the mean scores of communication.

This hypothesis is to determine whether the change in communication scores over time is different for the experimental and control groups. The findings suggest that there is a statistically significant interaction effects for time and group, $F(2, 73) = 22.75, p < .05$. This result implied that the treatments gave different effect to groups across time. The effect size for interaction effects was .38, which is closest to large effect size. It represents 38% of the variance in communication scores as explained by the group and time. The finding suggests that the treatment gave an impact on communication among participants in experimental group. Figure 1 show the estimated marginal means of communication for experimental and control groups across the three period of time. The directions of line demonstrated the progress from the pretest to posttest and follow up for both groups. This figure revealed that the mean scores of communication for experimental group are higher than control group across the three period of time. This suggests that the treatment gave an impact on communication among participants in experimental group.

Discussion, Implication and Suggestion

Results showed that there was a significant treatment effect of MP-SI on communication among participants in this study. The findings revealed that the communication among participants in experimental group significantly improved compared to the participants in control group. This finding is consistent with study conducted by Alqashan in 2008 through experimental studies that show the participants were taught with communication skills, techniques of problem solving, and elements of loving relationship could improve marital communication among Kuwait couples. Additionally, this

finding was also supported by Stanley, Markman, Prado, Olmos Gallo, and St. Peters (2001) that study on the effect of PREP. They found that when couples were taught with specific and very structured models for effective communication and problem solving namely as "The Speaker-Listening Technique", the couples' communication skills has increased.

Limitation and Recommendation for Future Research

This study provides several recommendations that should be addressed in future studies to get clearer understanding on how MP-SI could help Muslim husbands and wives improved the quality of communication. The recommendation was viewed in the contexts of the limitation of this study which is the number of the participants was relatively small ($n = 76$). Thus, generalizing the finding beyond the representative sample to other population in Felda would be inconclusive. This requires further studies to be conducted which utilizes a larger sample size with more diversity of participants' demographic such as differences in location, length of married, age, level of education, number of children and socio-economic.

In this study, participants are among the husbands and wives who scored moderately communication and they also have no serious problem in their marriage relationship. This raises the question whether the intervention conducted in this study can also benefit for those couples with low score or experiencing low marital quality. Hence, it is recommended for future study, couples with low marital quality could be included in marriage intervention to evaluate the effectiveness of MPSI. It's because, it was proven in other studies (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001) couples that are more distress can also benefit from marriage intervention.

In addition, it is also important to conduct a study in various stages of marriage to assess when this kind of intervention might be most effective. For example, future study can be conducted on newlywed couples as well. Providing the newly married couples (5 month or less) with MPSI may produce positive results as they are just beginning to adjust to the marriage relationship and beginning to form ways of relating and communicating to each other. Future researcher also can only utilize middle aged couple in the intervention and then make a comparison which couples do and do not benefit from the intervention depends on the length of marriage. This kind of research would add more findings for the effectiveness of MPSI in improving couples' communication.

Conclusion

MP-SI is an alternative intervention in the form of psycho-educational approach to help husbands and wives strengthening marriage relationship according to Islamic way. The knowledge pertaining to marriage relationship that derived from Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad SAW that taught in MP-SI could help Muslim husbands and wives prevent their relationship from various marital conflict.

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