



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***EFFECTS OF MARITAL PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION ON  
PERSONALITY, COMMUNICATION AND ATTACHMENT AMONG  
MUSLIM SPOUSES IN KEDAH, MALAYSIA***

***ROSLIZA BINTI AHMAD***

**FPP 2015 29**



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By

**ROSLIZA BINTI AHMAD**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**July 2015**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**July 2015**

**Chairman : Siti Aishah Hassan, PhD**  
**Faculty : Educational Studies**

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, personality, communication, and attachment are highlighted as the factors that contribute to marital conflict and divorce among Muslim spouses. It is because previous studies have documented that personality has an impact on spousal interaction, marital functioning, and marital adjustment while communication was identified by JAKIM as one of the factors for marital conflict and divorce among Muslim spouses. Besides, studies have shown that Muslim reported higher levels of attachment (especially in anxiety dimension) than Chinese and Indian which were associated with lower marital quality.

In an effort to help spouses manage and overcome marital conflicts, Muslim spouses need for an Islamic base according to the religious perspective. A psychoeducational group is a systematic effort to help improve the functioning of Muslim spouses 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. For that purposes, this study proposed a psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) that focuses on teaching marriage knowledge and skills according to Islamic way.

The overarching goal of the present study is to examine the effects of the MP-SI on personality, communication and attachment among Muslim spouses in Kedah, Malaysia. The research design utilized in this study was randomized controlled trials (randomized, pretest, posttest, follow up tests, control group design). This study involved 76 participants. These participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group ( $n = 38$ ) or the control group ( $n = 38$ ). Only participants in the experimental group received treatment of the MP-SI for 6 weeks (2 hours per week).

A self-administered questionnaire containing the Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI), Marital Communication Inventory (MCI), and Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) were used for collecting data. Data were collected from participants at the baseline assessment prior to the intervention (pretest), then 2 weeks following the completion of the intervention (posttest), and follow up after 2 months (follow up test). Data were analyzed using statistical test, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and mixed between-within subjects ANOVA.

The results from mixed between-within subjects ANOVA showed that there were a statistically significant main effect of time and group for personality, communication, and attachment (avoidance dimension). The result of MANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group for the dimension of personality; worship, trust, and knowledge. 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' personality, communication and avoidance attachment.

In conclusion, the findings of this study give positive reactions on the impact of the Islamic psycho-spiritual approach on human growth. Besides, it leads to theoretical implication for guidance and counseling and a wide range of implication for practice especially for Muslim spouses, marriage counselors, religious departments, and to the public. It is recommended a psychoeducational group of the MP-SI to be used as an intervention in helping Muslim spouses.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN INTERVENSI PSIKO-SPIRITUAL PERKAHWINAN TERHADAP  
PERSONALITI, KOMUNIKASI DAN PERAPATAN DALAM KALANGAN  
SUAMI ISTERI BERAGAMA ISLAM DI KEDAH, MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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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, personaliti, komunikasi, dan perapatan diberi penekanan sebagai faktor yang menyumbang kepada berlakunya konflik perkahwinan dan penceraian dalam kalangan pasangan beragama Islam. Hal ini adalah kerana kajian-kajian lepas menunjukkan personaliti memberi kesan terhadap interaksi pasangan suami isteri, kefungsiannya perkahwinan, dan penyesuaian perkahwinan manakala komunikasi telah dikenal pasti oleh JAKIM sebagai salah satu faktor berlakunya konflik perkahwinan dan penceraian dalam kalangan pasangan beragama Islam. Di samping itu, kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa tahap perapatan khususnya bagi dimensi kebimbangan dalam kalangan beragama Islam adalah tinggi berbanding kaum China dan India dan perapatan ini dikaitkan dengan kualiti perkahwinan yang rendah.

Dalam usaha untuk membantu pasangan suami isteri mengurus dan mengatasi konflik perkahwinan, pasangan beragama Islam memerlukan asas berdasarkan pendekatan agama. Kelompok psikopendidikan dilihat sebagai intervensi yang sistematik dalam membantu meningkatkan kefungsiannya 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. Untuk tujuan tersebut, kajian ini mengutarakan kelompok psikopendidikan yang dikenali sebagai Intervensi Psiko-Spiritual Perkahwinan (IP-SP) yang memberi tumpuan kepada pendidikan tentang pengetahuan dan kemahiran perkahwinan berdasarkan agama Islam.

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menerangkan kesan IP-SP terhadap personaliti, komunikasi, dan perapatan dalam kalangan pasangan beragama Islam di Kedah, Malaysia. Reka bentuk kajian yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah rawak, praujian, pasca ujian, ujian susulan, dan kumpulan kawalan. Kajian ini melibatkan 76 peserta. Peserta ini dibahagikan secara rawak kepada kumpulan eksperimen ( $n = 38$ ) dan kumpulan kawalan ( $n = 38$ ). Hanya peserta dalam kumpulan eksperimen menerima intervensi IP-SP untuk tempoh selama 6 minggu (2 jam setiap minggu). Inventori Personaliti Ummatik, Inventori Komunikasi Perkahwinan, dan Inventori Perapatan Dewasa digunakan untuk tujuan pengumpulan data. Data dikumpul daripada peserta sebelum intervensi bermula (praujian), kemudian dua minggu selepas intervensi tamat (pascaujian), dan dua bulan selepas pascaujian (ujian susulan). Data dianalisis menggunakan ujian statistik, *multivariate analysis of variance* (MANOVA) dan *mixed between-within subjects ANOVA*.

Keputusan *mixed between-within subjects ANOVA* menunjukkan terdapatnya kesan masa dan kumpulan yang signifikan terhadap personaliti, komunikasi, dan perapatan (dimensi mengelak). Keputusan ujian MANOVA pula menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan bagi dimensi personaliti iaitu ibadat, amanah, dan ilmu. Dapatan ini memberi maklumat yang bermanfaat bahawa pendekatan psiko-spiritual Islam yang menekankan amalan spiritual dan elemen seperti nafs, aql, qalb, dan ruh membantu memperbaiki personaliti, komunikasi, dan perapatan pasangan beragama Islam.

Sebagai kesimpulannya, dapatan kajian ini memberi reaksi positif tentang kesan pendekatan psiko-spiritual terhadap perkembangan manusia. Kajian ini memberi informasi yang berguna bahawa kelompok psikopendidikan ialah intervensi yang efektif dalam memperbaiki personaliti, komunikasi, dan perapatan (dimensi mengelak) pasangan beragama Islam. Selain itu, dapatan kajian ini memberi implikasi teori kepada bimbingan dan kaunseling, dan pelbagai implikasi untuk praktis khususnya kepada pasangan beragama Islam, kaunselor perkahwinan, jabatan agama dan seterusnya kepada orang awam. Oleh yang demikian, kelompok psikopendidikan IP-SI boleh digunakan sebagai salah satu intervensi perkahwinan dalam membantu pasangan beragama Islam.

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## APPROVAL

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on \_\_\_\_\_ to conduct the final examination of Rosliza binti Ahmad on her thesis entitled “**Effects of MP-SI on personality, communication and attachment among Muslim spouses in Kedah, Malaysia**” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the students be awarded the degree of Doctoral Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APIM	Action Partner Interdependence Model
DV	Dependent Variable
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
IP-SP	Intervensi Psiko-Spiritual Perkahwinan
JAİK	Jabatan Agama Islam Kedah
JAKIM	Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia
LPPKN	Lembaga Pembangunan Penduduk dan Keluarga Negara
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MCI	Marital Communication Inventory
MP-SI	Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
PREP	Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program
RAAS	Revised Adult Attachment Scale
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia
SWT	Subhānahu wa ta'āla
UNESAPD	United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Population Division
UPI	Ummatic Personality Inventory

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, general and specific objectives, research questions, hypotheses, significance of the study, and limitations of the study. Also discussed are the main variables of this study, defined conceptually and operationally.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

Marriage is a great institution. It is recognized by all major religions in the world as a sacred relationship and a fundamental part of the survival of generations. Through this relationship, individuals have an opportunity to achieve an exceptionally high level of intimacy, trust, support, and meaningful life. Moreover, marriage gives a positive impact on the psychological well-being of men and women (Williams, 2003; Simon, 2002). Besides, marriage is also related to the advantage of the public, for example reduced probability in committing crimes (Sampsons, Laub, & Wimer, 2006).

Even though marriage provides a lot of benefits to individuals, issues of marital conflict and marital dissolution are inevitable. Currently, divorce rates have increased throughout the world. In a number of developed countries, including the United States and in most developing countries, the divorce rates are high (UNESAPD as cited in Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008). The same situation occurs in many Asian countries whereby the pattern of marriage has changed and the divorce rates have increased quite dramatically, especially in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (Huang, 2005). This issue should be considered because it indicates marriage institutions are declining which could diminish family bonding and community stability.

Research has been conducted and it has been well documented that marital distress and divorce have been linked to higher rates of depression especially among wives (Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003). Commonly, couples who are distressed and involved in marital dissolution face hardships in life. This happens because the feeling of distress will affect husbands' and wives' physical and psychological well-being, resulting in chronic fatigue, sleep problems, changes in appetite and finally affects the couples' thoughts, interactions, and decision making. Studies have revealed that couples who experience poor mental health have a greater chance of experiencing marital dissolution (Butterworth & Rodgers, 2008).

Due to the consequences arising from these problems on couples, families, and the communities, studies have been conducted to explore marital distress and divorce. There are a range of factors such as the couple's personality (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002), communication (Gottman & Silver, 1994), conflict resolution skills (Russell-Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001), and interpersonal processes such as forgiveness and sacrifices (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007) which are associated with marital distress and divorce. In addition, today's rapid growth and urbanization are also identified as the factors that influence the pattern and process of marriage and divorce especially in the Asian countries (Huang, 2005).

There are several approaches have been used to overcome marital conflicts and marital dissolution. One of the approaches is marriage counseling. The purpose of marriage counseling is to help couples to reintegrate and to bring closure to hurtful things that have happened. It helps couples to resolve conflict effectively and learn how to support, love, and nurture each other. It is a short-term therapy that may take only a few sessions to work out problems in the relationship. It can be conducted either in individual or group counseling. Individual and couples refer themselves to a range of issues such as distress, sexual problems, infertility, and divorce. Commonly, effective marriage counseling responses to couple's relationship problem dependent upon the couple's willing collaboration. There are a number of situations in which one is enthusiastically motivated for counseling, and the other is likely to be as enthusiastically ambivalent.

In western countries, there is an increased attention given to marriage enrichment programs for couples to deal with marital distress in a preventative manner. A variety of marriage enrichment programs with the aim to enhance marital quality and marital skills among couples were developed. The most efficacious programs are Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Relationship Enhancement (RE), Couple Communication Program, and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment (Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004). In addition, faith-based marriage enrichment program such as SANCTUS (Sager & Sager, 2005) has also been introduced to improve the marital quality and skills among couples. These programs are seen as alternatives to assist couples in monitoring early warning signs of relationship difficulties and to engage in prevention skills before severe distress develops.

These marriage enrichment programs use psychoeducational group which is one of the various types of group settings used by counselor that widely used in guidance and counseling services. It focuses on educating and usually presenting information to the group members. Halford, Markman, Stanley, and Kline (2003) reported that marriage enrichment programs conducted in western countries focuses on educating and training couples on relationship knowledge, attitude, and skills especially communication and conflict resolution. The programs are conducted with the purpose of helping couples to enhance marriage relationship (Bowling, Hill, & Jencius, 2005), to reduce negative couple communication, and to prevent destructive conflict (Halford et al., 2003).

The effectiveness of this psychoeducational group in helping western married couples is likely to be beneficial to the Asian couples, especially for Muslim spouses in Malaysia. Even though divorce rates in Malaysia seem small if compared to the United States, Australia, and Canada (Chan & Mustafa, 2008), divorce rates among Muslims in Malaysia are despondently increasing every year. According to the statistics, the divorce rates among Muslims have increased from 28 035 cases in 2010 to 29 232 cases in 2012 (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia [JAKIM]*, 2013). Commonly, marital conflict happens due to various factors. Recently, failure to perform *solat* (prayer) five times a day was identified as a factor for the increasing divorce rates among Muslims in Malaysia (Shahizatul Farha S Rosli, Sinar Harian, 29 Ogos, 2012). This factor relates to the spiritual knowledge and practices which were mentioned by Kabbani (2008) whereby most of the problems faced by people today are due to their lack of spiritual knowledge and practices.

With this regard, the issues of marital conflict and marital dissolution among Muslims nowadays may be due to the lack of spiritual knowledge and practices. If the elements of affection, compassion, and mutual understanding do not exist in Muslim marriage relationships, Muslim spouses need to look into their Islamic spirituality and completeness of their *ubudiyah* (slavery and complete worship) to Allah SWT. Accordingly, they may have to go back to the Islamic psycho-spiritual approach. Studies conducted in western countries have shown that spiritual practices have a positive impact on marriage relationships (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Even though there is no empirical study conducted in Malaysia to assess whether religious and spiritual practices have a positive impact on marriage relationship among Muslims or not, but it has been stated in the Holy Quran (30: 21) which was mentioned that marriage relationships is a platform for Muslims to live in peace and tranquility.

*“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.” (30: 21).*

A peace and tranquility in marriage only can be achieved when the Muslim spouses do not take marriage as one of the needs of life, but as a form of *ibadah* (worship) to Allah SWT. In Islam, worship to Allah SWT is an obligatory duty as the vicegerent of Allah SWT which is the main reason for human creation as stated in the Holy Quran (51:56), *“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me”*. Marriage in Islam is also declared to be one half of one’s faith. This has been stated in the hadith, *“When the servant of Allah marries, he has fulfilled half the (responsibilities laid on him by the) faith; so let him be God conscious with respect to the other half”*, (Abd. Jalil Mohd Hassan, 1993). Accordingly, Muslim spouses should know, understand, and realize the purpose of human life and marriage in the context of the religion. They need to be convinced of the importance of collaboration efforts between husbands and wives in which both partners are dedicated to improve themselves as individuals and as spouses. In addition, Muslim spouses should realize that marital conflicts can be prevented and marital life can be enhanced by learning and implementing the teachings in Islam.

Taking into consideration the effectiveness of psychoeducational approach conducted in western countries, an intervention to help Muslim spouses in Malaysia needed as well. There are significant evidence that psychoeducational approach conducted in those programs demonstrated efficacy in increasing marital adjustment (Kalkan & Ersanli, 2008), and improving marital satisfaction and couples' psychological well-being (Pihet, Bodenmann, Cina, Widmer, & Shantinath, 2007). In addition, Yalom (2005) examined that the therapeutic factors that operating in counseling and therapy groups such as imparting of knowledge, altruism, group cohesiveness, and interpersonal learning makes the group's participants productive and successful. Because of its flexibility and efficiency, psychoeducational groups is a systematic approach in helping Muslim spouses gain knowledge and skills related to marriage relationships.

Besides, the group dynamic and therapeutic that occurs in the psychoeducational group that brings changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of spouses are in line with the goals of guidance and counseling services. According to Lukens and McFarlane (2004), psychoeducation is the most effective evidence-based practices that have emerged in both clinical trial and community settings. In psychoeducational groups, cognitive and behavioral skill developments were emphasized in order to teach certain skills and knowledge. This group is oriented more on guidance and focused specifically to delineated goals. Attention is directed at current life situation and interactions within the group related to the group theme (Gibson & Mitchell, 2003).

A psychoeducational group has been used successfully in marriage enrichment program in western countries as a part of a strategic program for prevention. However, there is a lack of attempt to examine the psychoeducational group especially for spouses in other setting such as in Malaysia. Therefore, this study propose a psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) as one of group type that can be conducted through guidance and counseling services. This psychoeducational group utilizes an Islamic psycho-spiritual approach that emphasizes the important role of human being to getting closer to Allah SWT and acting according to Islamic teachings and the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in order to solve marital problems and finally help them to build up a good relationship.

A psychoeducational group conducted in this study is expected to help improves Muslim spouses' personality, communication, and attachment. These three elements are emphasized in this study because it had been documented certain personality traits predict marital adjustment between husbands and wives (Knabb & Vogt, 2011), while communication and attachment have an important and positive impact on relationship satisfaction (Egeci & Gencoz, 2011).

Personality refers to an individual's way of thinking, perceiving, behaving, and acting as a person. There are various types of personality proposed by non-Muslim psychologists depending on how they define the meaning of personality and the nature of human being. However, in this study, the researcher focuses on the Islamic concept of human personality derived from the teachings of the Holy Quran and the *sunnah*. In Islam, Muslim personality is based on basic beliefs on the purpose of human creation



as well as the basic duties of Islam. A healthy personality of a Muslim will be developed when there is a balanced fulfilment in all the dimensions of human personality that consists of spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social elements (Raba, 2001). Whereas, an unhealthy personality will be developed when there is a lack of balanced fulfilment in one or more of these dimensions. Faith is seen as an important factor in shaping, guiding, and protecting Muslim personality (Raba, 2001). It was concluded that those who have a strong faith will have a good and positive personality (Raba, 2001). Therefore, the MP-SI conducted in this study takes into account these dimensions in order to help Muslim spouses to have a good personality and finally become a good husband and a good wife.

The second element emphasized in this study is communication. This element is the heart of every functional marriage. It is seen as a vehicle for understanding, love, help, and entertainment between husbands and wives. Studies have shown that communication is the pertinent factor in a marriage relationships (Burchard, Yarhouse, Kilian, Worthington, Berry, & Canter, 2003; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005) whereas problems in communication are among the leading risk factors for divorce and marital distress (Gottman & Silver, 1994). In this study, Muslim spouses will get help to increase their quality of communication through the knowledge and skills according to the Islamic way.

Besides the element of personality and communication, the MP-SI conducted in this study is intended to help improve Muslim spouses' attachment. Attachment is an emotional bond between husbands and wives. Attachment is important due to its role in forming the spouses' behaviors with their partners. This element cannot be ignored in discussing marital issues because recent studies have shown that couples' attachment is another predictor contributing to a successful marriage relationship (Brassard, Lussier, & Shaver, 2009; Egeci & Gencoz, 2011). It was stated in previous studies that the attachment styles of husbands and wives are an essential role in conflict resolution (Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008) and communication (Domingue & Mollen, 2009). Thus, Muslim spouses in this study are helped to improve their attachment with their respective spouses.

The focus of this study is to assist Muslim spouses in FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority), which is one of the largest Malay settlements in Malaysia that represents 15% of the overall population in Malaysia. The psychoeducational group of MP-SI is intended to help the FELDA society in enhancing their marriage relationship. Based on a research conducted by Hisham, Kamaruddin, and Nordin (2010), FELDA societies faced social problems including financial, crime, social relationship, broken families such as divorce, and religious faith. These problems are indeed serious challenges that exist in the FELDA community. According to Hisham et al. (2010), the main cause of these social problems was due to the malfunction of the family institution. Hisham et al. (2010) suggested that, the family institution needs to be improved with positive values to ensure family members grow up within the same value system so they can overcome the problems. Hence, a psychoeducational group of MP-SI is highlighted as a preventive intervention to improve personality, communication, and attachment among Muslim spouses in FELDA and finally help

them to strengthen their relationship and family, and prevent marital distress according to the Islamic religion and spiritual practices.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

In Islam, marriage is a form of worship. Its aim is to gain pleasure and approval of Allah SWT in order to live in happiness and tranquility in the world and hereafter. Instead of happiness and tranquility which are the objectives of marriage in Islam, the opposite is happening, whereby a substantial number of Muslim spouses are actually suffering in their marriage. Statistics released by JAKIM (2013) shows that the divorce rates among Muslims increased to 29 583 cases in 2013. Current report from JAKIM (2013) shows irresponsible spouses and lack of religious education are the main reasons for marital conflict. Factors such as disrespectful towards spouses, irresponsible spouses, financial problem and religious background also were identified as a contributor to the marital conflict and divorce (JAKIM, 2013).

In present study, factors such as personality, communication, and attachment were highlighted as among the factors that contribute to a stable and happy marriage and directly decrease marital conflict and divorce cases. Instead of report from JAKIM pertaining to factors that contribute to marital conflict, three factors highlighted in this study are important and noteworthy. Previous studies on these factors provide convincing information regarding its significance on relationship between husband and wife. Bradbury and Karney (2004) reported that personality directly impact spousal interactions and many studies have been examined its relationship with marital functioning (Luo, Chen, Yue, Zhang, Zhaoyang, & Xu, 2008), and marital adjustment (Knabb & Vogt, 2011). Personality impact on relationships among spouses is obvious because it uniquely influences individual's cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in various situations.

Communication is emphasized in this study because it was identified as one of the factors of marital conflicts among Muslim spouses in Malaysia by JAKIM (2013). Besides, this factor has been recognized as a critical component of romantic relationship by Fincham (2004). It has been well documented that good communication is the foundation of a strong marriage. Studies have shown that spouses experienced dissatisfaction when both of them (husband and wife) communicated negatively (Baucom, McFarland, & Christensen, 2010; Knobloch-Fedders, Critchfield, Boisson, Woods, Bitman, & Durbin, 2014). In addition, it was observed that lack of communication skills was one of the critical factors to relationship dissatisfaction (Egeci & Gencoz, 2011). Moreover, it has been reported that there were significant relationships between communication patterns and attachment styles (Ebrahimi & Ali Kimiaei, 2014). With this regards, the factor of attachment is also highlighted in present study.

Attachment is an emotional bond that relates to husband and wife togetherness. In Malaysia, attachment research is sparse and adult attachment research is even more limited (Ng, Loy, Mohd Zain, & Cheong, 2013). Research conducted by Ng et al.

(2013) found that two dimensions of attachment (avoidance and anxiety) were associated with marital satisfaction among married couples in Malaysia. They also found that Malays reported as having higher levels of anxiety than Chinese and Indian. Besides, it was reported that Malaysians show significantly higher levels of dismissing romantic attachment than secure romantic attachment (Schmitt, 2004). As examined by Kilmann, Finch, Parnell, and Downer (2012), attachments (anxiety and avoidance) were associated with lower relationship quality. Thus, an element of attachment is emphasized in present study to assist Muslim spouses to improve their attachment and finally strengthening marriage relationships.

Based on the justifications for these three factors, there is a need to help and improve Muslim spouses' personality, communication, and provide them with relationship skills to experience more secure attachment. In Malaysia, there is a compulsory premarital course conducted by JAKIM for Muslims who plan to get married. However, this course is not really effective in helping husbands and wives to take meaningful steps to preserve a meaningful relationship. Moreover, a lot of things that they learned become out of date after many years of marriage (Chan & Mustaffa, 2008). Furthermore, less is known about the effectiveness of such program and there is a lack of empirical study which focuses on intervention teaches specific skills and positive elements in marriage to spouses in Malaysia as compared to western countries.

By taking into account the views by Kabbani (2008), conflict is related to the lack of spiritual knowledge and practice, it displays that most of the cases in marital conflict and divorce among Muslims nowadays may be due to the lack of spiritual knowledge and spiritual practices. It is recommended that Muslims spouses need an Islamic base intervention according to the religious perspectives. Therefore, current study proposes an Islamic psycho-spiritual approach which can be conducted through psychoeducational group in guidance and counseling services. The psychoeducational group conducted in this study is known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) and it is conducted among Muslim spouses in FELDA. Even though there is no statistics on marital conflicts or divorce rates among Muslims specifically in FELDA, but there is a recent study revealed that FELDA societies are facing with several social problems such as broken families and religious faith (Hisham et al., 2010).

An educational approach applied in the MP-SI is to teach Muslim spouses about the effectiveness of communicating and overcoming conflict before any serious problems occur in the future. Besides of improving spouses' personality, communication, and attachment, the Muslim spouses are provided with knowledge and spiritual practices in order to ensure that the marriage is consummated as an act of pleasing Allah SWT. Knowledge and skills provided in this group offer more resources and viewpoints in helping and improving Muslim spouses' personality, communication, and attachment which finally helps them strengthening their marriage relationship. The psychoeducational group of MP-SI is a platform for Muslim spouses to the process of learning to interact with others, closeness among members, and accepting responsibility for one's life that bring the counseling and therapy groups successful.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

### **General Objective**

The main objective of this study is to examine the effects of the MP-SI on the personality, communication, and attachment among Muslim spouses in Kedah, Malaysia.

### **Specific Objectives**

This study has three specific objectives:

- i) To examine the effects of the MP-SI on the personality and its subconstructs (worship, trust, and knowledge) of the participants.
- ii) To examine the effects of the MP-SI on the communication of the participants.
- iii) To examine the effects of the MP-SI on the attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety) of the participants.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

To fulfil the objectives, three research questions were constructed:

- i) Does MP-SI effectively improve personality and its subconstructs (worship, trust, and knowledge) of the participants?
- ii) Does MP-SI effectively improve communication of the participants?
- iii) Does MP-SI effectively reduce the attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety) of the participants?

## **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

Hypotheses of this study are:

- H<sub>1a</sub> There are significant differences in the personality mean scores across the three time periods (pretest, posttest, and the follow up test).
- H<sub>1b</sub> There are significant differences in the personality mean scores between the experimental and control groups.
- H<sub>1c</sub> There are significant interaction effect time by gender and group by gender in the personality mean scores of the participants.
- H<sub>1d</sub> There are significant differences in the mean scores of the subconstructs of personality between the experimental and control groups.

- H<sub>2a</sub> There are significant differences in the communication mean scores across the three time periods (pretest, posttest, and the follow up test).
- H<sub>2b</sub> There are significant differences in the communication mean scores between the experimental and control groups.
- H<sub>2c</sub> There are significant interaction effect time by gender and group by gender in the communication mean scores of the participants.
- H<sub>3a</sub> There are significant differences in the avoidance mean scores across the three time periods (pretest, posttest, and the follow up test).
- H<sub>3b</sub> There are significant differences in the avoidance mean scores between the experimental and control groups.
- H<sub>3c</sub> There are significant interaction effect time by gender and group by gender in the avoidance mean scores of the participants.
- H<sub>3d</sub> There are significant differences in the anxiety mean scores across the three time periods (pretest, posttest, and the follow up test).
- H<sub>3e</sub> There are significant differences in the anxiety mean scores between the experimental and control groups.
- H<sub>3f</sub> There are significant interaction effect time by gender and group by gender in the anxiety mean scores of the participants.

## 1.7 Significance of the Study

Due to the increasing concern regarding the issue of marital distress and marital dissolution, this study highlights ways of coping with the issues associated with marriage relationship, namely the Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI). This intervention integrates both psychological growth and Islamic psycho-spiritual in improving Muslim spouses' personality, communication, and attachment. An educational approach applied in this intervention can be utilized by marriage counselors to impart knowledge, skills, and techniques of positive elements to help Muslim spouses facing problems related to marriage relationship. In addition, marriage counselors can also utilize this intervention or design another intervention based on the MP-SI to help Muslim spouses cope with marital problems.

Findings from this study are expected to give information to all Muslim spouses especially those in FELDA regarding the importance of MP-SI towards helping them face difficulties and conflicts in marriage and to finally enhance their relationship. Government agencies in Malaysia such as *Lembaga Pembangunan Penduduk dan Kemajuan Negara* (LPPKN) and *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM), which are involved in providing marriage courses to spouses in Malaysia, can use the intervention conducted in this study to improve the quality of programs organized by them. These agencies should know more about the effective ways to help husbands and wives enhance marriage relationships through learning and applying particular skills based on knowledge in the Holy Quran and the *sunnah*. The MP-SI is an intervention that can be used as a guideline to improve other programs conducted. Moreover, these agencies can also compare the intervention proposed in this study to their existing ones. Besides making a comparison, these agencies can also apply the strategies undertaken in this study on the programs they will be conducting in the future.

Marriage enrichment programs and research on the effectiveness of the programs are widely carried out in western countries but not in Malaysia. Studies have shown that the marriage education programs in the western countries have positive effects on marriage relationships. Therefore, this study attempts to provide reassurance to spouses in Malaysia, that every marriage problem can be solved and marriage relationship can be enhanced through acquired knowledge and skills. This study is expected to provide necessary information for counselors, spouses, and the community in Malaysia, there is an alternative prevention method of marital problems other than counseling. It is expected this study provides new information there is a need for a new kind of intervention to strengthen marriage relationship among Muslims. The intervention proposed in this study may become a wise solution to decrease the divorce rates in Malaysia.

### **1.8 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

There are several delimitations and limitations in terms of the research design and methodology as follows.

This study experimentally investigates the effects of MP-SI on personality, communication, and attachment among Muslim spouses. This study focuses on Islamic psycho-spiritual approach whereby the Holy Quran and the *sunnah* were used as sources of knowledge and skills for marriage relationships. The participants in this study were taught and exposed to the skills and elements according to Islamic perspective. Thus, the result of this study may not necessarily apply to another marriage intervention that incorporates other techniques, skills, and approaches.

The measurement for dependent variables in this study was based on self-report data rather than observations. There is a limitation of data collection through self-reporting method whereby the subjects may have the tendency to give socially acceptable answers and tend to give more favorable self-reports.

In experimental design, there is an extraneous variable that might influence the effect of a new practice or intervention on the outcome (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the changes in the dependent variables in this study will be affected by extraneous variables and not necessarily due to the MP-SI. In practice, personal characteristics of participants in any experiment can never be totally controlled (Creswell, 2012). In order to control the extraneous variables in this study, the participants will be assigned through the process of random assignment. Through this process, each participant has an equal chance of being assigned to either the experimental or control group. Then, any bias in the personal characteristics of participants in the study can be distributed equally among the groups (Creswell, 2012).

The impact of MP-SI on personality, communication, and attachment among participants in this study can only be observed based on differences in the mean scores

of pretest, posttest, and the follow up test. Since this study is a short-term study, the effects of the study can only be observed within the duration of the study which is 6 weeks for posttest and two months for the follow up test.

The mixed between-within subjects ANOVA and MANOVA were used to analyze the hypotheses in this study. These statistical tests compute mean scores for each participant (unit analysis of this study is individual). Although certain precautions have been taken care of to reduce the effects of correlated data, advanced statistical techniques such as Action Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) are recommended.

## **1.9 Definition of Terms**

Each important term used in this study is defined conceptually and operationally.

### **1.9.1 Psycho-Spiritual**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

The term “psycho” refers to “prefix connected to the mind that is used with some nouns and adjectives: the study of the relationship between a person’s mind and his body and “spiritual” is related to the spirit instead of physical world” (Khalid, 2008, p. 144). Sa’ari and Borhan (2008) refer psycho-spiritual as a term used to discuss the relationship between psychology and the discipline of Sufism (a path of spiritual advancement). Badri (2000) mentioned Islamic contemplation which is an Islamic form of worship in order to attain mental health, is commonly used by the Sufis as a method in Islamic psycho-spiritual.

#### **Operational Definition**

In this study, psycho-spiritual refers to the marriage intervention of psycho-spiritual growth by educating and helping Muslim spouses in dealing with their marriage relationship as prescribed in Islam. A psycho-spiritual intervention for this study known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) is the psycho-spiritual approach that focuses on teaching knowledge and skills which are derived from the Holy Quran and the *sunnah*. This intervention consisted of a 2 hour sessions per week for duration of 6 weeks. The aim of the intervention is to provide participants with knowledge of the Islamic marriage, its goal, and the important elements needed in a successful relationship. The knowledge and skills help participants to cope effectively with marital conflicts, strengthen marriage relationships, and finally become good husbands and good wives according to the Islamic way.

## 1.9.2 Personality

### Conceptual Definition

Personality is “the dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in various situations” (Ryckman, 2013, p. 4). It is “the sum total of a person’s conceptions, beliefs, emotional reactions, thoughts, actions, appearances, which interact with the environment to distinguish the individual from other people” (Raba, 2001, p. 8).

### Operational Definition

In this study, personality refers to the Muslim personality from the Islamic perspective. The Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI; Othman, 2011) was used to measure the individual characteristics in accordance to the Holy Quran and the *sunnah*. Three constructs in this inventory were used to assess individuals’ personality namely, worship to Allah SWT, trust, and knowledge. High scores indicate a good personality quality.

## 1.9.3 Communication

### Conceptual Definition

Communication is referred as “the process of transmitting feelings, attitudes, facts, beliefs, and ideas between living beings” (Bienvenu, 1970, p. 26). It can also be defined as “a symbolic and transactional process of creating and sharing meanings” (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2004, p. 23). ‘Symbolic’ means the symbols are used to create meaning and messages. This symbol includes words or verbal behavior and nonverbal behavior including facial expression, eye contact, gestures, movement, posture, appearance, and spatial distance whereas, communication as a transactional process means “when people communicate, they have a mutual impact on each other” (Galvin et al., 2004, p. 24).

### Operational Definition

In this study, communication refers to the communication behavior and attitude of the husbands and wives as experienced by the individual. It involves verbal communication and nonverbal communication that accompany it, as well as the way anger and other effects are handled by the spouses. The communication of the participants in this study was measured using Marital Communication Inventory (MCI; Bienvenu, 1970). The quality of communication among the participants was based on the score of MCI. High scores indicate a good quality of communication.



## **1.9.4 Attachment**

### **Conceptual Definition**

Bowlby (1969) originally defined attachment as any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual usually conceived as stronger or wiser. An attachment can also be referred to as “an affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one, a tie that relates them together in space and endures over time” (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970, p. 50).

### **Operational Definition**

In this study, attachment refers to the two dimensions of attachment that husbands and wives feel about their relationships. The attachment was measured using Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins, 1996) which assesses the dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. The avoidance dimension measures the extent to which a person is unpleasant with closeness and intimacy, whereas the anxiety dimension measures the extent to which a person is anxious about being neglected.

## **1.9.5 FELDA**

### **Conceptual Definition**

FELDA is an acronym for Federal Land Development Authority. It was set up in 1956 to assist the Malaysian Government to solve problems of rural landlessness and rural poverty. Since then, it has transformed nearly one million acres of jungle into well-planted schemes, chiefly rubber, and oil palm. It also created hundreds of new villages where the resettled families enjoy social and community benefits and services which are geared to provide a better living for the settlers and their families (Bahrin, & Thong, 1988).

### **Operational Definition**

In this study, FELDA refers to FELDA Laka Selatan which is one of the 16 Feldas located in Kedah. FELDA Laka Selatan is the place where the intervention of MP-SI was conducted. Muslim spouses from this FELDA were chosen to participate in this study.

## 1.9.6 Psychoeducational Group

### Conceptual Definition

The term psychoeducational group focuses on “developing members’ cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills through a structured set of procedures within and across group meetings” (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2014, p. 8). This group work specialization deals with imparting, discussing, and integrating factual information. This group shares the aim providing members with increased awareness of some life problem and the tools to better cope with it. Sometimes a psychoeducational groups simply referred to as educational groups or guidance groups (Gladding, 2008).

### Operational Definition

In present study, a psychoeducational group refers to an approach used in the treatment conducted in this study. It is a type of group conducted by the facilitator to deliver and teach knowledge and skills related to marriage according to the teaching of the Holy Quran and the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad SAW. The participants in the psychoeducational group are taught with several topics such as the Islamic marriage concept, practical means of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), communication, marital conflict, forgiveness, and the elements of *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love of a passion), and *rahmah* (mercy). A two way communication between facilitator and participants are utilized to make an interactive learning during the treatment.

## 1.10 Summary

This chapter gives an overview of this study, specifically on aspects of the research background and the discussion of some issues that led to the formation of the statement of the problem and the three appropriate research objectives. Based on these research objectives, three research questions and thirteen hypotheses were formed. The significance of the study was elaborated, highlighting the importance of the Islamic psycho-spiritual approach in improving Muslim spouses’ personality, communication, and attachment. The marriage counselor is hoped to utilize the knowledge and skills taught in the MP-SI to help Muslim spouses. Instead of just giving information to the Muslim spouses especially in FELDA, the government agencies in Malaysia such as LPPKN and JAKIM can also benefit from this study whereby they can improve the quality of the marriage programs conducted by them. Then, the limitations of this study were described, followed by the definitions of each variable conceptually and operationally.

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