



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***CHANGE PROCESS IN BRIEF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY
WORKSHOP FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH
LITERACY AMONG PRIMARY CARE SELF-REFERRALS***

SAM JENG MUN

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By

SAM JENG MUN

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

July 2021

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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 2021

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The prevalence of psychological distress in primary care appears to be high, yet majority of the individuals who can benefit from early and evidenced-based psychological approach are limited. Barriers concerning stigma, lack of access to psychological interventions, high volume of primary care attendees, and poor mental health literacy are among the factors that contribute to the access of adequate treatments.

The study examined psychological distress and mental health literacy (MHL) among primary care attendees in the suburban community. There were two interlinked phases in the study. In phase 1 (detection phase), the sociodemographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and education level) were discussed as predictive variables to psychological distress and MHL to inform on the intervention phase in phase 2. The prevalence of psychological distress using cross-sectional study design among the suburban primary care community were an important determinant for the justification for phase 2 using the DASS-21 questionnaire.

The first phase found a prevalence of 16.7% for at least mild level of depressive symptoms, 15% for at least mild level of anxiety symptoms, and 4.8% for at least mild level of stress symptoms among 293 primary care attendees using systematic random sampling. Gender as one of the sociodemographic factors was found to be the only predictor for psychological distress and mental health literacy using multiple linear regression. These findings from phase 1 highlighted the importance to integrate a feasible and evidenced-based psychological intervention in the primary care level, therefore phase 2 (intervention phase) studies the implementation of change process using the brief Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (b-CBT) as a potential approach in managing psychological distress and improving MHL among 73 primary care self-

referrals using purposive sampling.

One-way repeated measure multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the nonrandomized quasi-experimental study for the change process in psychological distress and MHL. Results revealed that there were significant differences in three time-points (pre-, post-, and one-month follow-up) for psychological distress and MHL using DASS-21 and Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (MAKS). The implementation strategy of b-CBT showed positive changes in integrating brief, non-stigmatized, and evidenced-based psychological approach to the primary care level. Potential feasibility on the implementation of b-CBT workshop to improve psychological distress and MHL can be found in the study. However, the self-referral characteristics of the attendees remained unknown. The reporting of this thesis follows TREND statement reporting guidelines.

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

**PROSES PERUBAHAN BENGKEL 'BRIEF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR
THERAPY' UNTUK TEKANAN PSIKOLOGI DAN LITERASI
KESIHATAN MENTAL DI KALANGAN RUJUKAN KENDIRI PESAKIT
KLINIK KESIHATAN**

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Prevalens tekanan psikologi di kalangan pesakit klinik kesihatan adalah tinggi, namun majoriti individu yang boleh mendapatkan faedah daripada pendekatan psikologi awal berasaskan bukti adalah terhad. Halangan seperti '*stigma*', kekurangan akses kepada intervensi psikologi, pesakit di klinik kesihatan yang tinggi, dan kekurangan literasi kesihatan mental adalah antara faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada akses rawatan yang memuaskan.

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji tekanan psikologi dan literasi kesihatan mental dalam kalangan pesakit di klinik kesihatan dalam komuniti pinggir bandar. Terdapat dua fasa yang saling berkait dalam kajian ini. Dalam fasa 1 (fasa pengesanan), faktor sosiodemografi (umur, jantina, etnik, dan tahap pendidikan) telah dibincangkan sebagai pemboleh ubah ramalan kepada tekanan psikologi dan literasi kesihatan mental. Ini adalah untuk memaklumkan reka bentuk intervensi dalam fasa 2 dalam kajian ini. Prevalens tekanan psikologi menggunakan '*cross-sectional research design*' di kalangan komuniti klinik kesihatan merupakan penentu penting untuk justifikasi kajian fasa 2, menggunakan soal selidik DASS-21.

Hasil kajian dari fasa pertama mendapati sekurang-kurangnya 16.7% dalam "tahap sederhana simptom kemurungan", 15% dalam "tahap sederhana simptom kebimbangan", dan 4.8% dalam "tahap sederhana simptom tekanan" dalam kalangan 293 pesakit klinik kesihatan pensampelan rawak sistematik. Jantina sebagai salah satu faktor sosiodemografi yang telah didapati sebagai satu-satunya peramal untuk tekanan psikologi dan literasi kesihatan mental dalam analisis '*multiple linear regression*'. Hasil daripada fasa 1 ini menekankan kepentingan untuk mengintegrasikan intervensi psikologi berasaskan bukti dalam peringkat pertama di sistem kesihatan, oleh itu fasa 2

(fasa intervensi) mengkaji pelaksanaan proses '*brief Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*' (b-CBT) sebagai pendekatan yang berpotensi dalam menguruskan tekanan psikologi dan menambah baik literasi kesihatan mental di kalangan 73 rujukan sendiri, menggunakan '*purposive*' sampel di klinik kesihatan. Analisis '*multivariate analysis of variance*' (MANOVA) digunakan untuk menganalisa kajian '*nonrandomized quasi experiment*' untuk perubahan tekanan psikologi dan literasi kesihatan mental. Keputusan kajian didapati perbezaan yang ketara dalam tiga titik masa (*pre-*, *post-* dan susulan sebulan) untuk tekanan psikologi dan literasi kesihatan mental menggunakan DASS-21 dan '*Mental Health Knowledge Schedule*' (MAKS). Strategi pelaksanaan bengkel b-CBT menunjukkan perubahan positif dalam mengintegrasikan pendekatan psikologi yang ringkas, tidak berstigma, dan berasaskan bukti di kalangan pesakit klinik kesihatan. Pelaksanaan bengkel b-CBT mempunyai potensi untuk memperbaiki tekanan psikologi dan literasi kesihatan mental. Walaubagaimanapun, ciri rujukan sendiri para pesakit tidak diketahui. Pelaporan tesis ini mengikut garis panduan pelaporan kenyataan TREND.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
B-CBT	Brief Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
BCW	Behaviour Change Wheel
CBT	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
CMD	Common Mental Disorders
GAD	Generalized Anxiety Disorder
IAPT	Improving Access to Psychological Therapies
KKS	Klinik Kesihatan Semenyih
KKB	Klinik Kesihatan Bangi
KKK	Klinik Kesihatan Kajang
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
MDD	Major Depressive Disorder
MHL	Mental Health Literacy
MOH	Ministry of Health
NHMS	National Health and Morbidity Survey
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
RA	Research Assistant
UPM	Universiti Putra Malays

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

Mental health is defined as the wellbeing of an individual's cognition, emotions, and behaviour. Mental health includes aspects of successful mental functions that allow individuals to realize their full potential in day-to-day operations. It is equally important as physical health as a sound mental health allows an individual to achieve success, cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to the community (World Health Organization, 2017). The focus in today's world is not only to have a physically healthy body, but also a healthy mind to become more productive in their daily living (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

Mental disorders are one of the most important contributors to the burden of disease and disability worldwide. Mental disorders can be complex and can take many forms with underlying root causes. It comprises a broad range of problems, with different symptoms. Typically, mental disorders are characterized by a wide range of health conditions that affect an individual's cognition, emotion, and behaviour. When an individual has a mental disorder, their daily functioning relating to work or school, social interactions, and relationships are affected (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

Mental disorders include mental illness from the most commonly experienced symptoms of psychological stress to mood-related disorders and more complex mental health conditions such as psychotic disorders. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* specifies three sections for mood-related disorders: Bipolar and Related Disorders, Depressive Disorders, and Anxiety Disorders. Within each section of these mood-related disorders, there are diagnostic criteria for each mental disorder (Blashfield et al., 2014). Compared to these three mood-related disorders, Depressive Disorders and Anxiety Disorders are more common as compared to Bipolar and Related Disorders (Caron et al., 2012; Chin et al., 2017; Kessler et al., 2007).

Among all the mental disorders within the Depressive Disorders and Anxiety Disorders section in the DSM-5, Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) are the more commonly occurring mood-related disorders (World Health Organization, 2017a). The diagnostic criteria for both mental disorders can be referred to the DSM-5 (please refer to page 150 and page 222, respectively, for the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria). In general, MDD is a clinical depression that can affect family, social, work, or school functioning. For GAD, it is a condition where an individual persistently and excessively worries about many different things in life.

1.2 Mood Disorders

Mood disorders have been noticeable from classical ancient times to the current modern era. In ancient times, the description of depression is closely associated with supernatural occurrences such as movements of evil spirits, or a punishment from god. Later, Hippocrates (460–377 B.C.) began to explicitly term depression as ‘Melancholia’, which emanated from the cerebral dysfunction. The dysfunction is related to the imbalance release of black bile, which affects the equilibrium to maintain good health. Then, humoral theory sought to explain that the four “humors”, namely yellow, phlegm, blood, and black bile, together with the four seasons would lead to developing different temperaments (i.e., Sanguine, Phlegmatic, Choleric, and Melancholic). These concepts and controversies from the past are still active. The advancement of explanations for mood disorders was based on the cerebral amine hypothesis, which is a modern humoral theory. In DSM-5, Melancholia still exists as a ‘specifier’ for major depressive episodes (Davison, 2006). The history of mood disorder provides a foundation in understanding the development of the categorization and diagnosis of mood disorder in this current century.

1.2.1 Depression and Anxiety Disorders

The description of depressive disorders and anxiety disorders can also be related to the pervasiveness of the disorders. The World Health Organization (2017) reports that depressive disorders and anxiety disorders are prevalent and common among the population across different cultures, therefore these two disorders can be referred to as common mental disorders (CMD). CMD has undertaken the iteration of the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) studies (World Health Organization, 2017a). In estimation, major depression is expected to be the largest contributor to the GBD in 2030 (Chong et al., 2012; Hassan et al., 2018; Shahar et al., 2016). Additionally, anxiety disorders were the sixth leading cause of GBD from 1990 to 2010 (Baxter et al., 2014). The term ‘CMD’ therefore, depicts the two most common mood disorders that are prevalent among the general population.

1.2.2 Psychological Stress

Studies have shown that psychological stress can contribute to the development of CMD. Psychological stress affects an individual’s psychological and biological systems that are under pressure to cope with environmental demands (Shahsavarani et al., 2015). It is an overwhelming emotional pressure that exceeds an individual’s ability to cope and endure. While an optimum level of stress allows an individual to perform accordingly, long-term, and overwhelming negative emotions will create an adverse effect on the individual’s psychological and biological system. Studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between chronic psychological stress and the development of depression and anxiety, or CMD (Khan & Khan, 2017). Chronic psychological stress is considered one of the risk factors for the onset of CMD due to its longer duration (Yang et al., 2015).

While the term 'psychological stress' can be used to describe emotions arising from daily pressure and environmental demands, adjustment disorder, on the other hand, is a psychological condition where an individual has persistent stressor or adverse life adjustments impacting the individual's daily functioning for at least six months (Yang et al., 2015). The difference between psychological stress and adjustment disorders are the duration and functioning of the affected individual. First, individuals can experience psychological stress before either a long or short duration, while individuals with adjustment disorders need to have undergone a minimum of six months of persistent stress. Second, individuals experiencing psychological stress may or may not have their daily functioning impacted, while the diagnostic criteria for adjustment disorder include impairment on their daily functioning. In this thesis, the focus was solely on psychological stress as one of the variables as it covers a broader aspect of an individual's experience (Shahsavarani et al., 2015; Yahaya, 2018; Yang et al., 2015). Past studies in western countries had indicated that psychological stress is one of the risk factors to developing CMD (Steel et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2017b), hence, the current study would like to explore a similar phenomenon in the Malaysian population.

Besides psychological distress, current study also focused on depression and anxiety symptoms. The undifferentiated combinations of depression, anxiety, and psychological stress symptoms can be referred to as 'psychological distress' (Drapeau et al., 2012). It is an extensively used indicator of general mental health in public health. Psychological distress is commonly used in population surveys and epidemiological studies, or as an outcome in clinical trials and intervention studies. In this thesis, psychological distress is used to characterize the state of emotions comprising depression, anxiety, and psychological stress, which are the three most common emotional conditions that exist in the general population worldwide (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016; Drapeau et al., 2012).

1.3 Prevalence Studies

Mental health disorders are a major public health issue throughout the world. In Malaysia, mental disorders are estimated to be about 8.6% of the total Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). The Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH) has recently reported that one in three adults in the country was at risk of developing a mental health problem such as depression, anxiety, and psychological stress for the last five years. In year 2020, mental health issues were a major health problem in Malaysia (Hassan et al., 2018).

The National Health Morbidity Survey (NHMS) conducted by the MOH once every four years found that the prevalence of mental health problems among the population has an increasing trend from 10.7% in 1996 to 29.2% in 2015. NHMS reported that the prevalence of GAD, MDD, and suicidality among Malaysian adults aged 16 years and above was 1.7%, 2.4%, and 1.8%, respectively. In 2019, depression was estimated to be 2.3% (about 0.5 million Malaysians). With the relatively high percentage reported, it has also been increasingly recognized that depression and anxiety are the two most common mental health conditions that impacted the public health community.

1.4 Psychological Distress in Primary Care

An attempt to estimate the prevalence of CMD in the primary care setting in Malaysia was reported to be 6.7–14.4%. However, it was inconclusive due to the inconsistency in a standard of measurement across all studies reviewed (Mukhtar and Oei, 2011). The MOH (2015) also stated that the prevalence of mental health problems or disorders in Malaysia was not well established. The prevalence of psychological distress in the Malaysian primary care setting was also limited. A study has shown that the prevalence of anxiety was 7.8% among women primary care attendees (Sidik et al., 2011). These indicated that the estimates of the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among the primary care setting require more attention to improve on the statistics.

The socio-demographic risk factors associated with psychological distress had been well documented in past studies. First, females have a higher risk of developing psychological distress compared to males (Deshpande et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2013). Second, past studies focused on the adult population in studies relating to psychological distress concluded that psychological distress could occur in all age groups from 18 and above, depending on the exposure to a stressful life event (Farrer et al., 2008; Kader Maideen et al., 2014). Third, individuals with higher education and higher household income have a lower risk of developing psychological distress (James et al., 2018; Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011; Milanović et al., 2015). Fourth, the ethnicity in Malaysia that is reported to have the highest prevalence for depression and anxiety was Indian (Picco et al., 2017; Tobi et al., 2017). Therefore, the risk factors for developing psychological distress are contextual.

1.5 Study Location

Primary care is defined as the health care centre for the delivery of integrated and accessible health care services (American Psychological Association, 2016). It includes providing the first line of treatment and care for individuals with mental health issues, including issues relating to psychological distress (American Psychological Association, 2016; Arvidsdotter et al., 2016). Nevertheless, studies reported psychological distress is often overlooked in the primary care setting due to the masked symptoms of physical and psychosomatic complaints of their conditions (American Psychological Association, 2016), leading to worsened condition (Arvidsdotter, 2016).

The World Health Organizations (2011 & 2018) have continuously informed that the integration of mental health services to primary care can improve the accessibility and availability of mental health services. In Malaysia, the medical referral system has indicated that psychiatric and psychological services fall within tertiary care (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011). The likelihood of having primary care attendees who are left out or not being referred to tertiary care can be high due to the level of accessibility (Seekles, van Straten, et al., 2009). Therefore, a targeted community mental health service in primary care is essential to allow undetected individuals with mental health conditions to access appropriate treatment and proper care pathway (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016).

In Malaysia, the suburban population has a unique combination of socio-demographic characteristics to understand the condition and prevalence of their psychological states (Sidik et al., 2011). A suburban area is defined as a housing area on the peripheries of a city (Loh & Brieger, 2013). The study location of this research was in a suburban area in Hulu Langat district in Selangor, Malaysia. This area is reported to have the highest population in Malaysia. Hulu Langat district itself has a mixture of rural, suburban, and urban areas. The suburban area is reported to be exponentially growing with rural-urban migration, newfound economic affluence, and growth of infrastructure facilities. The development of suburban areas may happen at a very fast rate, which could potentially affect the mental health and community wellbeing (Yeoh et al., 2017). Therefore, these literature findings highlight the reason for the study to be focused on primary care settings in the suburban area in the Hulu Langat district due to the above-mentioned reasons.

1.6 Mental Health Literacy

Mental health literacy (MHL) is defined as the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in mental health recognition, management, and prevention (Jorm et al., 1997). The MHL term was first used in 1997 to highlight the importance of recognizing mental health problems and their management and prevention strategies (Cotton et al., 2006b; Jorm et al., 1997; Jorm, 2012; Jorm et al., 2017). The framework of MHL is divided into three categories—recognition, knowledge, and attitude. These three categories are interconnected. For example, an individual who has good recognition of the signs and symptoms of depression (recognition) would source for information regarding the disorder and available help (knowledge). The action of sourcing and seeking help depends on the attitude toward the disorder and/or mental health in general (attitude) (Jorm et al., 1997).

Among the primary care attendees, the recognition and awareness of their mental health condition remains one of the challenges to obtaining effective mental health treatments. This subsequently affects the help-seeking behaviour among many primary care clinics throughout the world (Rafal, Gatto, and Debate, 2018; Gorcezynski, Sims-schouten, Hill and Wilson, 2017; Bonabi and colleagues, 2016). In Malaysia, studies have found that many among the general population did not want to admit that they have mental health issues despite the obvious mental health symptoms presented (Hassan et al., 2018b; Ibrahim et al., 2019a). This issue is most likely associated to fear of self-stigma and public stigma (Hassan, Kassim, Hassan, & Hamzah, 2018). The importance to study the MHL among the public to further understand their recognition, knowledge, and attitude toward mental health conditions in the current study is essential to bridge this gap.

Adequate MHL can affect the treatment outcomes between the primary care attendees and the general practitioners in the primary care clinics. It has been known that primary care attendees who negatively communicate their mental health condition to health care providers are more likely to have poor early detection and treatment (Jacomb & Jorm, 1997). For instance, attendees' reports in somatic terms, such as headache and muscle pain may lead to late detections and poor treatment outcomes. These physical reports

could be perceived as nonmental health–related hence, affecting the key importance of early identification and early care (Herran, Vasquez-Barquerro, and Dunn, 1999). Therefore, adequate mental health literacy among primary care attendees and the general practitioners can assist in better communication between the two parties, leading to better-targeted treatment.

1.7 Mental Health Systems in Malaysia and the United Kingdom

The mental health systems between Malaysia and the United Kingdom were compared in the literature review. UK’s mental health system (i.e., UK National Health Services, stepped care and self-referral concept) is chosen for comparison with the Malaysian mental health system as the mental health system in the United Kingdom involves the intervention of community sector. This involvement is consistent with the current study that focused on primary care in Malaysia.

1.7.1 Malaysia’s Mental Health System

The National Mental Health Policy for Malaysia was formulated in 1998. This policy emphasizes on advocacy, promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. There are eight guiding principles for the development of mental health in Malaysia, according to the policy—comprehensiveness, accessibility and equity, continuity and integration, multi-sectoral collaboration, community participation, human resource training, standards, and monitoring, as well as research. The policy was revised and updated to develop strategies for the implementation of mental health programs (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011, 2017; Tsuey Chong et al., 2013).

Following that, the Malaysian Mental Health Framework was developed in 2002 as a blueprint for the planning and implementation of mental health services in Malaysia (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011). A comprehensive range of services and care for all age groups, from mental health promotion, prevention of mental disorders, treatment, and rehabilitation of the mentally ill at the hospital, primary care, and community level, was highlighted. Among them, the emphasis on primary care facilities was still at a very early stage as the focus was more toward improving the number of psychiatric healthcare professionals (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011, 2017).

Next, the National Operational Plan of Action for Comprehensive Integrated Community Mental Health Services (CMHS) for the year 2013 to 2020 was formulated, mainly focusing on the Public Health Division of the Ministry of Health. Action plans, which include strengthening the community mental health services in the states for more community participation and detection, were recommended (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011). The effort aims to allow more accessible and integrated mental health care for the community to alleviate the prevalence rates of mental disorders in Malaysia (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2017). However, these implementations have faced many challenges, such as lack of manpower and funding, lack of sharing of visions among mental health providers, and lack of coordination between primary health centers for

mental health services activities (Midin and Toh, 2018). These issues were still present from the Malaysian Mental Health Framework that was proposed in 2002 (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2017).

Mental health services in Malaysia have been offered in 704 (82%) of all primary health centers in the year 2002. Those services include mental health promotion, and early detection and treatment of common mental disorders. Follow-up of stable patients, outreach care for those who drop out of care, family intervention, and psychosocial rehabilitation were among the services offered in the chosen 23 clinics throughout Malaysia in their pilot study. Some of the clinics are still conducting services for the community, while most of the clinics currently conduct mental health screening (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2017). The plan that was developed by the MOH—National Mental Health Policy in 1998 and 2012—was still ongoing, although many challenges are being faced. Therefore, the integration of mental health care services is still not fully utilized or implemented (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2011, 2017).

There have been efforts to integrate mental health services to all primary mental healthcare clinics since the Malaysian Mental Health Framework was launched. The focus of the integration involves empowering the family physician with mental health promotion and rehabilitation. However, some primary care clinics in rural and suburban areas are still having limited resources and expertise to manage cases with mental health issues (Ministry of Health, 2015). As mentioned above, these challenges are not in ideal terms with the recommendations from the World Health Organization (2018), where resources were identified as one of the most important factors for the inclusion of mental health in primary care settings. Therefore, the ongoing effort to strengthen and increase mental healthcare services in the community is still in the early stages as compared to many other countries, such as the United Kingdom.

1.7.2 United Kingdom Mental Health Services and Systems

In the United Kingdom, the implementation of integrated care for mental health at the primary care level suggests multiple potential benefits for both primary care attendees and their providers, especially for the rural and suburban populations (National Health Services, 2018). Additionally, a recent systematic review study indicated that the integration of mental health care in the public health settings was found to increase patients' satisfaction with perceived quality of care and enabling access to services (Baxter et al., 2018) as well as often able to be more cost-effective (Department of Health: London, 2001). The benefits of the integration have assisted the UK National Health Services (NHS) to reduce the growing financial and service pressures through these transformations (National Association of Primary Care, 2018). Benefits and the possibility of mental health service integration were identified.

1.7.3 Stepped Care Model and Self-Referral Concept

The implementation of integrated mental health services at the primary care level requires a few implementation strategies. First, the United Kingdom has identified the evidenced-based Stepped Care model and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services as convincing models for the National Health Service in England to utilize (National Association of Primary Care, 2018; National Health Service, 2018). The Stepped Care model is used by the IAPT services to make clinical decisions as to the type of treatments currently most needed for the person to assess (Franx et al., 2012). The Stepped Care model is a system that provides monitoring and delivery of treatments. This model is most effective and yet, least resource intension as the treatment is only delivered to patients who needed them, or in other words, ‘stepping up’ to a tertiary care service as clinically required (Clark et al., 2009a; Franx et al., 2012; Richards & Borglin, 2011).

Second, Brown, June & Cochrane (1999) has introduced the concept of self-referral for mental health services. According to Brown et al., (1999), self-referral is defined as self-initiative in referring themselves to medical care. The rationale of having self-referral is to reduce stigma, social exclusions, discriminations, and lack of resources the self-referral concept to psychological services in primary care. These psychosocial and environmental factors were long identified as hampering factors that affect psychological help-seeking (Abi Doumit et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Shimotsu & Horikawa, 2016). Self-referral to psychological services, such as counseling and psychotherapies, can assist as an alternative access point to decrease the impact of “medicalization” so that mental health problems can be perceived as less likely to automatically come within the domain of medical professionals (Archer et al., 2009). The self-referral concept can improve on the number of individuals, who may benefit from early identifications of mild to moderate mental health conditions as they are frequently being “filtered out” from the health care system, despite consulted a primary care medical officer (Brown et al., 1999). This helps in improving access to mental health services at the primary care level (Brown et al., 2010b). The self-referral concept, therefore, can be said as an alternative to support the existing social and environmental issues that hinder an individual from seeking help in managing their mental health condition.

1.8 Brief Psychological Workshops

In the year 1996, the first day-long community in the United Kingdom called “Stress Workshop” using the self-referral route was introduced in conjunction with the World Health Organization campaign (Brown et al., 1999). The workshop aimed to improve the health of the general population in the United Kingdom. The workshop found that 39% who had not consulted the general practitioners, attended the workshop. This group of individuals was reflected as the group that had been “filtered out” or was reluctant to seek for help previously but was more receptive in attending this workshop. (Brown et al., 1999; Morgan et al., 2010). Additionally, the self-referral route to a large-scale psychological intervention was found to be a preferred approach for people experiencing distress as compared to self-referral to mental health professionals in the private setting,

especially for common mental health problems (Brown et al., 2010; Brown & Cochrane, 1999). Through these studies, the self-referral route to mental health services appeared to be promising in increasing mental health help-seeking.

In the United Kingdom, the inclusion of mental health services for the public is important as it is an inherent element of the health and wellbeing of an individual. Furthermore, mental disorders are highly treatable and manageable, yet the treatment gap remains enormous (World Health Organization, 2018). However, social exclusion within the society, discrimination, stigma, lack of social network and support, lack of awareness and recognition of symptoms, as well as diminished social roles are among the ongoing challenges many different countries, including the United Kingdom (Crowe et al., 2018; Jorm, 2012b; Low et al., 2019; Shimotsu & Horikawa, 2016) and Malaysia. Studies have attempted to explain and rectify the multifactorial causes of having poor treatment gaps and the lack of resources and options for them to seek help and manage their mental health at an earlier level remain to contribute to the rising of mental health issues and repeated visitations to the general practitioners (Collins, 2016). The health care system in the United Kingdom that previously may not be able to target appropriate implementation strategies for mental health services has improved to target appropriate treatment and capture individuals who required the treatments.

Using psycho-educational Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) workshop and the self-referral route as an approach to increase the uptake of psychological interventions and reducing the individuals being “filtered out” was originally set up in Birmingham and further developed in south-east London (Brown, 2010). The workshop aimed to attract people with problems of depression and anxiety, who might not have proper access to primary care treatments, poor knowledge of mental health, or faces challenges to being discriminated against and stigmatized. These factors can address similar problems that may be faced by Malaysia’s primary care attendees in accessing mental health treatments (Hassan et al., 2018).

1.9 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

A psychological approach used in psychotherapy called the brief Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (b-CBT) has shown mild to moderate empirical support for the management of anxiety ($d=1.06$) and depression ($d=0.33$) (Cape et al., 2010; Christensen et al., 2006; Cully et al., 2012). Studies showed that the techniques in b-CBT stem from changing thoughts and behaviours that contribute to distressing emotions, creating awareness of problems, and learning a set of skills to manage one's issues (Cully et al., 2012). The techniques are similar to the traditional CBT model; however, in a more compressed duration. The typical CBT involves around 6 to 12 sessions with an hour per session (Beck, 2011). However, the b-CBT has 4 to 8 sessions, with an hour per session (Cully et al., 2012). The b-CBT workshop adopts from the b-CBT sessions is compressed to a 4-hour, half-day psychoeducational workshop (Brown et al., 1999). The components that are included in the b-CBT workshop include an introduction, goal setting, behaviour activation, identification of negative thoughts, thought challenging, thought patterns, and problem-solving skills. The main areas covered targeted the alleviation of depression

and anxiety symptoms such as physical, cognitive, behavioural, and action planning (Cully et al., 2017; Ekers et al., 2006) and expected to improve on mental health literacy due to its psychoeducation nature of the workshop.

1.10 Challenges to Service Provision

There are a few challenges to mental health service provision based on the literature review. First, the population's recognition and awareness of one's mental health condition remain one of the challenges of obtaining mental health treatments (Khan et al., 2010; Amirah et al., 2020). As the level of MHL positively correlates to help-seeking behaviours among many primary care clinics throughout the world (Rafal, Gatto, and Debate, 2018; Gorczynski, Sims-Schouten, Hill and Wilson, 2017; Bonabi et al., 2016), the concept of MHL should be further highlighted in mental health service provision. Studies have found that many among the Malaysian population do not come forward with their mental illness fearing social stigma and discriminations (Crowe et al., 2018). While some of the individuals relate mental illness to cultural-based syndrome due to their belief system, others do not seek treatments due to stigma (Hassan et al., 2018). Both the belief system and attitudes toward mental illness in Malaysia remain complex.

On the other hand, an individual may have difficulty recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders as well as the name of the mental disorders. This is a crucial stage of communication during the help-seeking attempts in the primary care clinic. It has been known that primary care attendees who negatively communicate their mental health condition to the health care providers are more likely to have poor early detection and treatment (Chen et al., 2000a). Most of the attendees' report in somatic terms, such as headache and muscle pain (Herran, Vasquez-Barquero, and Dunn, 1999). These physical reports could be perceived as non-mental health-related, hence, affecting the key importance of early identification and early care. This may create another challenge for the mental health service provision due to communication and knowledge barriers.

Despite countless attempts by Malaysia's government to conduct awareness programs and advertisements (Cawangan Kawalan Amalan Perubatan Swasta (CKAPS) / Private Medical Practice Control Branch, 2014; Ministry of Health, 2017), individual factors such as stigma and discrimination toward mental health patients still affects the complex personal attitudes towards help-seeking in Malaysia (Hassan et al., 2018). The perception of mental health and mental disorder remained multifaceted in Malaysia. Attempts to understand the contribution to stigma and discrimination towards mental disorders include cultural factors, lack of understanding, social judgments, and fear (Aida et al., 2010; Norhayati Ibrahim et al., 2019; Shoosmith et al., 2018).

Lastly, it is undoubtedly that the integration of traditionally used psychotherapy services in primary care settings are costly and resource intensive (Brownawell & Kelley, 2011). With the fast and busy nature of the setting, it is almost difficult to implement traditional psychotherapy, which may require sessional follow-ups and a minimum of 45 minutes per session. Therefore, a proper implementation strategy needs to be considered. As

indicated, short, brief, targeted intervention to symptoms, least resource-intensive, and self-management evidenced-based intervention has been discussed as a potential approach to be integrated into primary care. The Stepped Care model from the IAPT services and the self-referral concept used in the United Kingdom can be learned and utilized as a model to increase the access to psychological services for individuals who clinically require it. Therefore, the b-CBT workshop approach and recruitment strategy appeared to be encouraging in implementing in Malaysia's primary care setting.

1.11 Statement of Problems

The prevalence of psychological distress among primary care attendees in the suburban area is still unknown due to varied standards of measurements (Mukhtar & Oei, 2011). The prevalence of psychological distress in the suburban primary care community in Malaysia remains unidentified as most studies are focused on the general population instead of a specific group of population, such as the suburban primary care attendees. The unidentified prevalence of psychological distress among the suburban population can lead to poor targeted interventions as the needs are unidentified (Harder, 2014). Through the identification of specific prevalence psychological distress and its socio-demographic factors, the intervention planning can be more targeted.

Additionally, the MHL among the Malaysian population is still unknown at present. There were minimal studies that attempted to understand the MHL among individuals in Malaysia and none of them has been done in the primary care attendees. Through investigating the level of MHL among primary care attendees and its associated socio-demographic factors, light can be shed on the level of knowledge and awareness of mental health in the suburban community for a targeted intervention. It is aimed that the b-CBT workshop as the targeted intervention can be the potential approach as the b-CBT workshop stems strongly from a module with psychoeducation (Ekers et al., 2006). These assessment of the MHL rates are expected to bring new knowledge in the field of MHL among the primary care attendees and for future selected interventions in this area.

The need for integrating psychological service in long run to the primary care setting involves reducing stigma (Brown & Cochrane, 1999; Li et al., 201a), improving the provision of services, planning and implementing strategies for prevention of mental disorders (Brown & Cochrane, 1999; World Health Organization, 2011), and upscaling primary healthcare workers to apply psychosocial and behavioural skills to reduce the prevalence of psychological distress (Brown et al., 1999, 2010). An evidence-based psychological service that could address the identified challenges to help-seeking is needed. Based on the literatures, the mental health system in Malaysia have limited evidence-based and targeted interventions for primary care attendees. The targeted interventions are important to complement with existing gaps in the existing system.

1.12 Significance of Research

The current study can complement the existing system by addressing self-referred attendees in groups, while targets the awareness of the primary care population in general. The implementation of b-CBT as a potential approach to managing psychological distress follows the National Mental Health Policy in 1997 (developed by the Ministry of Health (MOH), with three aims: (1) to provide a basis in developing strategies and direction to those involved in any planning and implementation towards improving mental health and wellbeing; (2) to improve mental health services for populations at risk of developing psychosocial problems; and (3) to improve the psychiatric services for people with a mental disorder in the provision of care and protection by the family, community and relevant agencies.

This study was also consistent with the World Health Organization's (2018) suggestion on integrated care model in the primary care healthcare system to increase accessibility, enhancing primary care attendees perceived satisfaction and needs as well as lowering the cost incurred for the health system (World Health Organization, 2018b). This study's objectives are aligned to WHO's and MOH's policy in developing a targeted module to enhance well-being and reduced risk, via collaborative work within a non-psychiatric setting.

Besides that, the integration of psychological services in the primary healthcare setting will enable primary healthcare workers to apply the psychosocial skills and behavioural techniques to primary care attendees. This can improve the current provision of services through integration of mental health services to the primary healthcare. Additionally, the scaling up of mental health services can potentially increase the coverage and number of individuals receiving psychological services that are scientifically evidenced. This sustainable integration can benefit the primary healthcare workers to reduce their workload due to symptomatic and recurrent treatments as well as providing accessible resources for the attendees.

Lastly, the study highlighted the importance of looking at psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) as an important contributor to the burden of disease in Malaysia. Moreover, the awareness of mental health and their mental health literacy are also important in facilitating help-seeking. These two factors can potentially improve on the burden of disease and disability, which can be impactful towards the economy of the country.

1.13 Operational Definitions

This study uses several key definitions to study the change process of an evidence-based intervention as brief CBT as a potential approach for the management of psychological distress (conceptualized as depression, anxiety, and stress) among primary care attendees in the suburban primary care clinics.

The first phase of the study focused on obtaining the prevalence of psychological distress and the socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and education level) to predict psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress). The same set of socio-demographic factors was used to predict mental health literacy among the primary care attendees. The objective of the first phase was to inform on the widespread of psychological distress in justifying the need for intervention in the second phase, as well as the identification of socio-demographic factors as variables that are important for the second phase of the study consider.

The second phase of the study was to assess the change process of using a validated psychological approach, namely brief Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (b-CBT) approach. Change process is the process to assist individuals to change their internal (e.g., knowledge, awareness, thoughts, emotions) and external processes (e.g., behaviour, physiological state) to achieve a desired outcome. The compressed version of b-CBT in a workshop format (b-CBT workshop) is used to manage mild-to-moderate levels of psychological distress and improving mental health literacy among the primary care self-referrals. The purpose of this phase of the study was to identify the change process of the b-CBT workshop in the management of psychological distress and improving mental health literacy using psychoeducation, cognitive and behavioural approach, across different time effect (pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up). It is the changes of the individual's internal and external state to achieve the study objectives. The implementation strategy used in this phase follows the gaps in knowledge identified.

1.13.1 Psychological Distress

In this study, psychological distress was defined by the symptoms from Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) as well as psychological stress. The diagnostic criteria for MDD and GAD can be referred to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* (APA, 2013, p.150, p.222). For psychological stress, the study defines this construct as a response that involves the interrelations between the physiological, behavioural, and cognitive responses aimed at maintaining homeostasis whenever there are any changes to the individual or environment (Tan & Yip, 2018).

In this study, the MDD, GAD, and stress symptoms are screened and identified using the the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21-items (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The depression, anxiety, and stress items in the DASS has 7-items each in the questionnaire. The cut-off scores of the for the three components in the scale are indicated in Appendix M.

1.13.2 Mental Health Literacy (MHL)

Mental Health Literacy (MHL) refers to “knowledge about mental health disorders that are associated with their recognition, management, and prevention” (Jorm, 2000). In this study, MHL is defined as stigma-related mental health knowledge. MHL is measured using the Mental Health Knowledge Schedule (MAKS) (Evans-Lacko et al., 2010) . In the MAKS, there are two components namely, mental health knowledge and mental health recognition. In mental health knowledge, six items measure stigma-related mental health knowledge such as recognition, help-seeking, support, employment, treatment, and recovery. In mental health recognition, six-items were asked about familiarity and recognition with mental health conditions. The scoring for both components use the ordinal scale. The total of each of the components from the MAKS showed the higher the score, the higher the mental health knowledge and recognition.

1.14 Research Objectives

Phase 1: The objectives in the first phase of the study was to identify the prevalence of psychological distress (conceptualized as depression, anxiety, and stress) and whether the socio-demographic factors predict psychological distress. The same set of socio-demographic factors was also used to determine whether they predict mental health literacy (conceptualized as mental health recognition and mental health knowledge) among primary healthcare attendees in the government primary health care clinics in the Hulu Langat district.

Phase 2: The objective in the second phase of the study was to determine the change process of the b-CBT intervention approach in reducing psychological distress (conceptualized as depression, anxiety. and stress) and improving mental health literacy (mental health knowledge and mental health recognition) at three-time points (i.e. pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up) among self-referral primary health care attendees in the government primary health care clinics in the Hulu Langat district

1.15 Research Hypotheses

In the phase 1 study, the cross-sectional research design was guided by the research hypotheses below:

- RH1: Socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) would predict depression among primary care attendees at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district
- RH2: Socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) would predict anxiety among primary care attendees at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district.
- RH3: Socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and

educational level) would predict stress among primary care attendees at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district

RH4: Socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) would predict mental health recognition among primary care attendees at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district.

RH5: Socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) would predict mental health knowledge among primary care attendees at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district.

In the phase 2 study, the quasi-experimental research design was guided by the research hypotheses below:

RH6: There would be a significant change in depression over pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up among primary care self-referrals after receiving b-CBT intervention at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district.

RH7: There would be a significant change in anxiety over pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up among primary care self-referrals after receiving-CBT intervention at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district

RH8: There would be a significant change in stress scores over pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up among primary care self-referrals after receiving b-CBT at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district.

RH9: There would be a significant change in mental health recognition scores over pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up among primary care self-referrals after receiving b-CBT intervention at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district.

RH10: There would be a significant change in mental health knowledge scores over pre-intervention, post-intervention, and one-month follow-up among primary care self-referrals after receiving b-CBT intervention at primary health care clinics in Hulu Langat district

1.16 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study was conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, the prevalence of psychological distress was obtained to identify the number of cases that are within the range of mild, moderate, and severe levels of psychological distress. The results would inform the implementation of a targeted intervention for the same group of population. Besides that, Phase 1 was also used to inform on the potential participants' socio-demographic characteristics in Phase 2 using the socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) (Chong et al., 2016; Yahaya, 2018; Yeoh et al., 2017; Yuan et al.,

2016). These socio-demographic variables aimed to predict psychological distress and mental health literacy. Figure 1.1 showed the theoretical framework in Phase 1. The socio-demographic factors (age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level) are the predictors and psychological distress, and mental health literacy are the criteria. Both results from Phase 1 would then assist with the justification of intervention and participants recruitments in Phase 2. Therefore, both phases are linked.

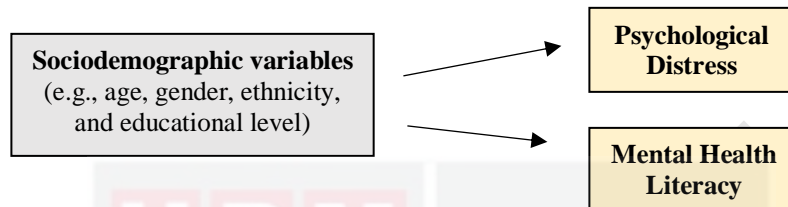


Figure 1.1 : The Theoretical Framework in Phase 1 Study

In Phase 2, b-CBT workshop as a potential approach in the change process of psychological distress was studied. The b-CBT workshop was used in this study as it is one of the most widely and most evidenced-based psychotherapy approaches to manage psychological distress. The cognitive and behavioural components in the traditional CBT have proven evidenced-based results to improve on psychological distress symptoms particularly. The framework which stated that the change of cognition can lead to a change of emotions and behaviours appeared to be able to target the negative thoughts (i.e. palpitations) that frequently exist in individuals with anxiety. Techniques such as behavioural activation, deep breathing, psychoeducation, cognitive identification, cognitive challenging, goal setting, and problem-solving are among the CBT techniques following the framework.

Figure 1.2 shows the theoretical framework for the Phase 2 study. The framework was obtained from The Public Health Model (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The public health approach is a four-step model that is based on scientific evidenced method. It can be applied to any health problems, including mental health conditions that affect the population (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The design of the study from Phase 1 to Phase 2 follows this model for Step 1, 2 and 3.

Step 1 focused on understanding the magnitude of the problems which includes analyzing data that are related to the health problem (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). In the study, Phase 1 follows Step 1 in the public health model. The identification of the prevalence of psychological distress can inform the psychological distress conditions in the primary care population pertaining to the magnitude of the problem in Phase 1. This data is important for Phase 2 study and Step 3 in the public health model.

Step 2 focused on identifying the risk and protective factors of the health problem (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Besides identifying the prevalence of psychological distress, the study also identified the risks factors which were the socio-demographic characteristics of the primary care attendees having psychological distress in Phase 1. The identification of risk factors can increase the understanding of the likelihood an individual having psychological distress and poor mental health literacy.

Step 3 emphasized on developing and testing prevention strategies (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Information obtained from Phase 1 study and Step 1 from the model are useful to develop evidenced-based treatment for the mental health problem. The development of b-CBT as a potential approach to improve psychological distress and mental health literacy among the primary care attendees is considered Step 3 in the model. The application of an evidenced-based approach, the b-CBT on psychological distress and mental health literacy were evaluated for its change process.

Step 4 focused on assurance of widespread adoption where the dissemination of the evaluated treatment strategies can be done. This dissemination technique helps to promote widespread adoption which comprises networking, training, and evaluation. The study stops at Step 3 and will continue to move to Step 4 based on the evaluation and results obtained.

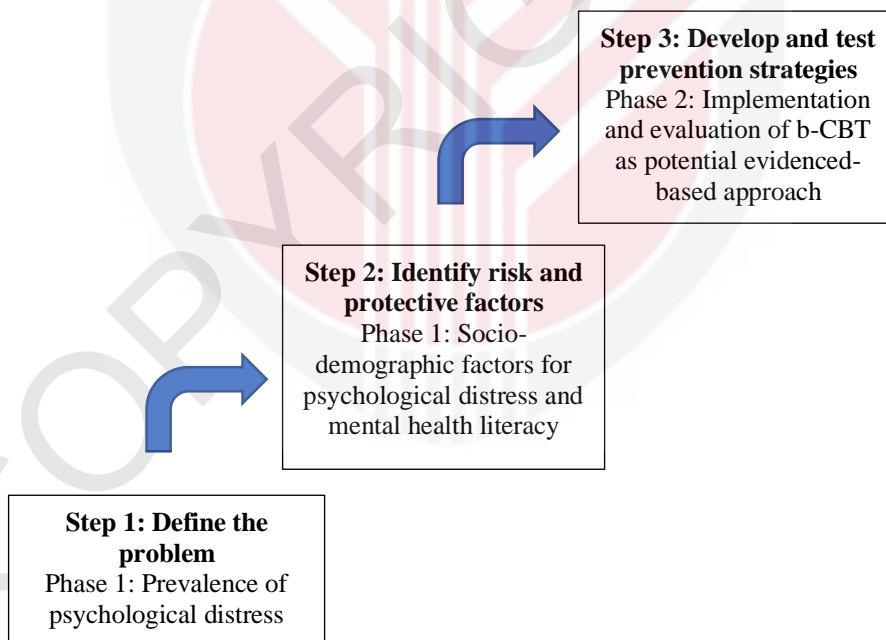


Figure 1.2 : The Theoretical Framework in Phase 2 Study

Note : The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention. The figure demonstrates three out of four steps of the Public Health Model.

(Source : Centre for Disease and Control (2021))

Table 1.1 shows the targeted domains, aim of intervention, and its expected outcomes

based on the issues identified from the literatures for the implementation of b-CBT workshop. Detailed components of each session, such as issues identified, domains of interventions, proposed interventions, the aim of the intervention, and expected outcomes in the b-CBT workshop implementation was shown in table 1.1. The issues identified were based on the problem statements and the domains of interventions were based on past literature. The proposed intervention being b-CBT detailed the specific components and its implementation strategies to address the problem statements in issues identified.



Table 1.1 : Framework of Phase 2 Study

Issues identified	Domains of intervention	Proposed intervention	Aim of intervention	Expected outcomes
Early intervention	Access to primary care	b-CBT	Recognition and self-help	Remissions of symptoms
Evidenced-based approach	Psychological and evidenced-based (CBT)	b-CBT	Recognition and self-help	Remissions of symptoms
Low MHL affects the efficiency of primary care attendees	Psycho-education	b-CBT	Recognition, self-help, and resources	Early identification and self-management
Stigma	Non-stigma/ non-medical publicity	Psycho-education	Recognitions and beliefs	Early identification and self-management
Volume of attendees	Accessibility	Large-scale workshop	Promote accessibility	Low cost, and a high volume of attendees

1.17 Outline of this Thesis

This chapter provides the introduction of the whole thesis. Details of the past literature using local and international evidence and gaps in knowledge are discussed in Chapter 2. Then, the study design and methodology are presented in Chapter 3. The results and discussion of the study are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. Finally, Chapter 6 includes the conclusion, recommendations, and future studies



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