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EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELING TREATMENT ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT, PARENTING STRESS, AND DEPRESSION AMONG PARENTS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN IN JORDAN

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By

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May 2012

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Autism is a prevalent developmental disorder with prominent impairments in social reciprocity, language impairment and restricted repetitive behaviors or interest. It disturbs the autistic individuals and the people involved with them. Particularly, parents of autistic children have to encounter difficulties and challenges triggered by their children. They experience higher risks of marital discord, parenting stress, and depression. Although group counseling is known to be cost-effective treatment and has been recommended for parents of autistic children, literature remains scarce for Jordanians. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of group counseling treatment (with structural family therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy) on
marital adjustment, parenting stress and depression in parents of autistic children in the city of Irbid, Jordan.

The study adopted a randomize control pretest-posttest design with one month follow up. Participants consisted of 30 males and 30 females were randomly assigned to an experimental group (group counseling treatment) and to a control group (no treatment). The instruments employed were the Dyadic Adjustment scale (DAS) to measure marital adjustment, the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS) to measure parenting stress and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) to measure depression. The collected data were coded and then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16.

Results of repeated-measures ANOVA showed that there were significant differences in the marital adjustment, parenting stress, and depression scores between the experimental and control group over time but there were partial significant interaction effects with gender. The results suggested 48% significant improvement in marital adjustment, 38 % and 50% of reductions in parenting stress and depression respectively. Depression continued to decrease even after the treatment was over. Furthermore, at significant level α=.01, the results of MANOVA revealed that the mean scores of marital adjustment sub-dimensions (cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction) for the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group. In conclusion, the findings indicated that the group counseling treatment was effective in improving
the marital adjustment as well as in reducing parenting stress and depression in parents of autistic children in the city of Irbid, Jordan.

Theoretically, this study supports the amalgamation of key concepts of structural family therapy and cognitive behavior therapy in a form of group counseling treatment for Jordanian parents. Findings on marital adjustment sub-dimensions strengthen the notion that Arab families are enmeshed with high regard to cohesion and consensus. Practically, the findings of the study have implications for mental health centers and for marital and family therapists who provide treatment for parents of autistic children. Future studies of different populations may be needed to replicate the findings and for generalization.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi syarat bagi mendapatkan Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KESAN RAWATAN KAUNSELING KELOMPOK KE ATAS PENYESUAIAN PERKAHWINAN, TEKANAN KEIBUBAPAAN DAN KEMURUNGAN DALAM KALANGAN IBU-BAPA KEPADA KANAK-KANAK AUTISTIK DI JORDAN

Oleh
AHMED KAMEL ALHORANY
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Autisme adalah kecacatan nyata dalam perkembangan kanak-kanak yang mengganggu kesalingan sosial, kemahiran dalam bahasa dan tingkah laku atau minat berulang yang terhad. Keadaan ini mengganggu individu autistik dan orang-orang yang terlibat dengan mereka. Terutama sekali, ibu bapa kanak-kanak autistik yang perlu menghadapi masalah dan cabaran yang dicetuskan oleh anak-anak mereka. Mereka mengalami risiko masalah perkahwinan, tekanan keibubapaan dan kemurungan yang lebih tinggi berbanding dengan ibu bapa kepada kanak-kanak normal. Walaupun kaunseling kelompok telah
dikenalpasti sebagai salah satu rawatan yang berkesan dan disyorkan untuk ibu bapa kepada kanak-kanak autistik, literatur yang melibatkan rakyat Jordan masih terhad. Seiringin dengan itu, tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan rawatan kaunseling berkelompok (dengan terapi keluarga struktural dan terapi kognitif tingkahlaku) terhadap penyesuaian perkahwinan, tekanan keibubapaan dan dan kemurungan dalam kalangan ibu bapa kanak-kanak autistik di bandar Irbid, Jordan.

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kumpulan kawalan rawak ujian pra ujian pasca dengan satu bulan susulan. Peserta terdiri dari 30 lelaki dan 30 perempuan yang dipilih secara rawak untuk kumpulan eksperimen (rawatan kaunseling berkelompok) dan kumpulan kawalan (tanpa rawatan). Instrumen yang digunapakai adalah Skala Penyelarasan Diadic (Dyadic Adjustment Scale - DAS) untuk mengukur penyesuaian perkahwinan, Skala Tekanan Keibubapaan (Parenting Stress Scale - PSS) untuk mengukur tahap tekanan ibu bapaan dan Inventori Kemurungan Beck (Beck Depression Inventory - BDI) untuk mengukur kemurungan. Data yang dikumpul telah dikodkan dan kemudian dianalisis menggunakan perisian SPSS versi 16.

Keputusan ujian repeated-measures ANOVA menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam penyesuaian perkahwinan, tekanan keibubapaan, dan skor kemurungan dari masa ke semasa bagi kumpulan eksperimen tetapi kesan interaksi separa yang signifikan dengan jantina. Dapatan menunjukkan peningkatan sebanyak 48% dalam penyesuaian
perkahwinan, sementara terdapat 38% dan 50% pengurangan dalam tekanan keibubapaan dan kemurungan. Kemurungan terus menurun walaupun rawatan telah tamat. Tambahan pula, hasil daripada ujian MANOVA menunjukkan bahawa skor kumpulan eksperimen adalah jauh lebih tinggi daripada kumpulan kawalan bagi sub-dimensi penyesuaian perkahwinan (perpaduan, kesepakatan dan kepuasan), pada tahap kesignifikanan $\alpha = 0.01$. Kesimpulannya, dapatan menunjukkan bahawa rawatan kaunseling berkelompok adalah berkesan untuk membantu meningkatkan penyesuaian perkahwinan serta untuk mengurangkan tekanan keibubapaan dan kemurungan ibu bapa kepada kanak-kanak autistik di bandar Irbid, Jordan.

Secara teori, kajian ini menyokong penggabungan konsep utama terapi struktural keluarga dan terapi tingkah laku kognitif dalam bentuk rawatan kaunseling untuk ibu bapa di Jordan. Dapatan bagi sub-dimensi penyesuaian perkahwinan mengukuhkan tanggapan bahawa keluarga Arab adalah terikat terutama sekali bagi perpaduan dan kesepakatan. Secara praktikalnya, penemuan kajian ini mempunyai implikasi kepada pusat kesihatan mental, ahli terapi perkahwinan dan keluarga yang menyediakan rawatan bagi ibu bapa kanak-kanak autistik. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian yang lebih mendalam pada masa hadapan dalam populasi yang berbeza mungkin diperlukan untuk mengulangi penemuan dan untuk tujuan generalisasi.
DEDICATION

The study is dedicated to my mother, Hjh. Aminh Alhorany

Who passed away in 2007

Also my deepest appreciation goes to my lovely father

Kamel Muhammad Alhorany
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First and foremost, I would like to thank my major supervisor, Dr. Siti Aishah Hassan, who has been very, very supportive. Her supports, encouragements, advices are really appreciated. To Dr. Siti Aishah, may Allah continue blessing you with the good heart that you have and everyone who is together with you, Amin.

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Third, I thank my supporting systems that comprise of friends and families. My friends and families gave always shared my laughter and joy as well as sorrow and sadness. Dear friends, brothers, sisters I wish to record all of your names here but, more importantly, I wish your names to be recorded in the hereafter.

Finally, a special thank goes to my lovely sister Fatemah Alhorany for her unlimited support.
APPROVAL

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 29 May 2012 to conduct the final examination of Ahmed AlHorany on his thesis entitled “effectiveness of group counseling treatment on marital adjustment, parenting stress, and depression in parents of autistic children in Jordan” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotation and citation which have been dully acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

________________________________________
AHMED KAMEL ALHORANY

29 May 2012
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