



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***COUNSELLING ATTITUDE AS MEDIATOR BETWEEN ADULT  
ATTACHMENT AND CYBERSEX ACTIVITIES AMONG  
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN  
MALAYSIA***

**HARISA HAWAFI**

**FPP 2018 12**

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**I dedicated this work to:**

My beloved mother, Nur Ainis Binti Jamili

My beloved father, Hawafi Bin Gisam

My beloved brother, Ainul Yakin Bin Hawafi

My sweet little sister, Nur Erfana Hawafi

Thank you, Allah, for grant me such a wonderful family!



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

**COUNSELLING ATTITUDE AS MEDIATOR BETWEEN ADULT ATTACHMENT AND CYBERSEX ACTIVITIES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA**

By

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**November 2017**

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The existence of internet has changed human behaviour in many aspects of life. The number of internet subscribers in Malaysia has been increasing tremendously. This scenario contributed to the growth of internet usage which has caused profound shifts in the way people interact and behave. There were more internet-related social problems and issue such as cybersex activities has received significant attention from people. The main objective of this research is to examine the mediating roles of counselling attitudes on the relationship between adult attachment and cybersex activities among undergraduate in a public university. This research employed descriptive and correlational research design. The respondents ( $n = 269$ ) were selected through multistage random cluster sampling. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in the collegial residences at a public university. The data were analysed using SPSS 22.0 for descriptive analysis and AMOS 22.0 for inferential analysis. Majority of the respondents (82.50%) have medium level of counselling help-seeking attitude. While for adult attachment style, the dominant pattern of adult attachment style among respondents is adult attachment close ( $M= 3.223$ ,  $SD= 0.539$ ). Next, for cybersex activities, the majority of respondents (63.9%) have low level of cybersex activities. A hypothesized model was established to examine the direct and indirect effect between variables. This model was admissible ( $GFI= .908$ ,  $AGFI= .879$ ,  $CFI=.922$ ,  $IFI=.924$ ,  $NFI=.910$ ,  $TLI=.907$ ,  $RMSEA=.047$ ). The results show there are no significant direct effect of all types adult attachment styles on cybersex activities. However, there is a significant direct effect between all adult attachment styles on

negative counselling attitudes. For counselling attitudes, there is significant direct relationship between negative counselling attitudes on cybersex. The model shows that counselling attitudes is a full mediator between adult attachment and cybersex activities. This study shows the adult attachment is not directly influence university students in cybersex activities, but, they involved in cybersex activities if they have negative counselling attitudes. Practically, this study shows that counselling services is important to influence clients in cybersex involvement. Thus, counsellors have prominent roles to shift undergraduate students' attachment to their boyfriend or girlfriend from secure attachment to insecure attachment. The prevention programs on cybersex engagement is effective if the counsellors help clients to get rid of their negative attitudes.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana Sains

**SIKAP TERHADAP KAUNSELING SEBAGAI PERANTARA ANTARA PERAPATAN DEWASA DAN AKTIVITI SEKS SIBER DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR PRASISWAZAH DI SEBUAH UNIVERSITI AWAM DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Kewujudan internet telah mengubah tingkah laku manusia dalam segenap aspek kehidupan. Jumlah pelanggan internet di Malaysia meningkat dengan sangat pesat. Senario ini menyumbang kepada perkembangan penggunaan internet, yang menyebabkan anjakan yang besar kepada interaksi dan tingkah laku manusia. Pada masa kini, terdapat banyak masalah sosial yang dikaitkan dengan kesan penggunaan internet seperti seks siber, mendapat perhatian daripada banyak pihak. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan perantara sikap untuk mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling terhadap hubungan perapatan dewasa dengan aktiviti seks siber dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah di sebuah universiti awam. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kajian deskriptif dan korelasi. Responden ( $n= 269$ ) dipilih secara rawak melalui persampelan rawak kluster berperingkat. Soal selidik diedarkan kepada responden di kawasan kolej-kolej kediaman di sebuah universiti awam. Data deskriptif dianalisis menggunakan SPSS 22.0, manakala perisian AMOS 22.0 digunakan untuk menganalisis data jenis inferensi. Kajian mendapati majoriti responden (82.5%) mempunyai tahap sederhana untuk mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling. Bagi perapatan dewasa, jenis perapatan dewasa yang paling banyak dikongsi oleh responden ialah jenis perapatan *close*. Seterusnya, majoriti responden (63.9%) mempunyai tahap penglibatan yang rendah dalam aktiviti seks siber. Model hipotesis dibangunkan untuk menguji kesan langsung dan tidak langsung antara pemboleh ubah. Indeks kesepadanan nilai model hipotesis diterima ( $GFI= .908$ ,  $AGFI= .879$ ,  $CFI=.922$ ,  $IFI=.924$ ,  $NFI=.910$ ,  $TLI=.907$ ,  $RMSEA=.047$ ). Keputusan kajian mendapati tidak terdapat kesan langsung yang signifikan bagi semua jenis perapatan

dewasa ke atas aktiviti seks siber. Seterusnya, kesemua perapatan dewasa menunjukkan terdapat kesan langsung yang signifikan ke atas sikap negatif mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling. Bagi sikap mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling, hasil kajian menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara sikap negatif untuk mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling ke atas seks siber. Model menunjukkan sikap negatif untuk mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling merupakan perantara penuh antara perapatan dewasa dengan aktiviti seks siber. Kajian ini menunjukkan perapatan dewasa tidak mempengaruhi secara langsung ke atas penglibatan pelajar dalam aktiviti seks siber, namun mereka terlibat dalam aktiviti tersebut sekiranya mempunyai sikap negatif untuk mendapatkan bantuan kaunseling. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa perkhidmatan kaunseling mempunyai peranan yang signifikan dalam mempengaruhi penglibatan pelajar dalam aktiviti seks siber. Oleh itu, kaunselor bertanggungjawab untuk mengubah perapatan dewasa pelajar prasiswazah terhadap teman lelaki atau teman wanita dari perapatan selamat kepada perapatan tidak selamat. Program pencegahan aktiviti seks siber akan lebih efektif sekiranya kaunselor membantu klien untuk menyingkirkan sikap negatif terhadap kaunseling.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2017 to conduct the final examination of Harisa Binti Hawafi on her thesis entitled “Counselling Attitude as Mediator between Adult Attachment and Cybersex Activities Among Undergraduate Students in A Public University in 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 student be awarded the Master of Science.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	i
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	v
<b>APPROVAL</b>	vii
<b>DECLARATION</b>	ix
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xiv
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xv
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xvi
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Overview of The Chapter	1
Background of The Study	1
The Counselling Services in Malaysia	2
Online Sexual Activities	2
Cybersex and Counselling Help-Seeking	5
Statement of The Problem	7
Objectives of The Study	9
Research Questions	9
Hypotheses	10
Significance of The Study	11
Definition of Terms	13
Counselling Attitudes	13
Adult Attachment Styles	13
Cybersex Activities	14
Undergraduate Students	15
Scope and Limitations	15
Chapter Summary	15
<b>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b>	<b>16</b>
Overview of The Chapter	16
Cybersex and Online Sexual Activities	16
Cyber Affairs and Cyber-Relationship	18
Compulsive Cybersex	19
The Negative Effect of Cybersex Activities	19
Theoretical Background	24
Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)	24
Attachment Theory	25
Adult Attachment	26
Psychoanalysis Theory	29

The Psychosexual Stages of Development	30
The Pleasure Principle	32
Psychoanalysis and Cybersex	33
Theoretical Framework	33
Research Variables	34
Counselling Attitudes Among University Students	35
Adult Attachment	36
Online Sexual Activities	37
Review of The Related Study	38
Adult Attachment, Cybersex, The Internet, and Sexual Activities	39
Adult Attachment, Help-Seeking Behaviours, and Perceived Social Support	41
Help-Seeking Attitudes, Internet and Sexual Activities	42
Conceptual Framework	43
Chapter Summary	44
<b>3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>45</b>
Overview of The Chapter	45
Research Design	45
Subject of The Study	46
Population of The Study	47
Sample	47
Sampling Technique	50
Instrumentation	51
Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPH; Fischer & Turner, 1970)	51
Validity of ATSPPHS	53
Reliability of ATSPPHS	53
Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Read & Collins, 1996)	54
Validity of RAAS	55
Reliability of RAAS	55
Malaysian Internet and Sexual Activities Inventory (MISAI-21; Siti Aishah et al., 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)	56
Validity of MISAI-21	57
Reliability of MISAI-21	57
Research Procedure	57
Ethical Consideration	58
Pilot Study	58
Statistical Data Analysis	59
Preparation of The Data	59
Assessment of Normality	59
Outliers	60
Multicollinearity	60
Data Analysis	61
Descriptive Analysis	61

	Analysis of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	61
	Confirmatory Factor Analysis	63
	The Measurement Model	70
	The Hypothesized Model Input	71
	Summary of The Data Analysis	72
	Chapter Summary	74
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	<b>75</b>
	Overview of The Chapter	75
	The Profile of The Respondents	75
	The Level of Counselling Help-Seeking Attitudes	77
	The Dominant Adult Attachment Styles	80
	The Level of Cybersex Activities	84
	Findings on Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	87
	The Direct Effect Between Adult Attachment and Counselling Attitudes	89
	The Direct Effect of Counselling Attitudes and Cybersex Activities	91
	The Direct Effect Between Adult Attachment and Cybersex Activities	92
	The Mediation Effect of Adult Attachment and Cybersex Activities Through Counselling Attitudes	94
	The Final Model	95
	Chapter Summary	96
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>97</b>
	Overview of The Chapter	97
	Summary of The Study	97
	Conclusion of The Study	99
	Implication of The Study	99
	Theoretical Implications	100
	Practical Implications	102
	Recommendations for The Future Research	103
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>105</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>116</b>
	<b>BIODATA OF STUDENT</b>	<b>139</b>
	<b>PUBLICATIONS</b>	<b>140</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
2.1	The summary of negative effects of cybersex	22
2.2	The psychosexual stage development	32
3.1	The characteristics of explanatory research	46
3.2	Determining sample size for continues data	48
3.3	Rotated component matrix for ATSPPHS	51
3.4	Distribution of items in ATSPPHS	52
3.5	The distribution of positive and negative item in ATTPSH	53
3.6	The score of ATSPPHS	53
3.7	The distribution of items and description of adult attachment styles	54
3.8	The items of RAAS	54
3.9	The distribution of items in MISAI-21	56
3.10	Scoring and description of MISAI-21	57
3.11	Cronbach Alpha for pilot study	59
3.12	Multicollinearity statistics	61
3.13	The Goodness-of-fit Indices	64
3.14	The summary of data analysis	72
4.1	The distribution of respondents based on gender	75
4.2	The distribution of respondents based on age group	76
4.3	The distribution of respondents based on year of study	76
4.4	The time spent for online activities (hour/week)	77
4.5	The level of counselling help-seeking attitudes among respondents	77
4.6	The frequency of items of ATSPPHS	78
4.7	The distribution of items for RAAS	81
4.8	The level of cybersex activities	84
4.9	The distribution of items for MISAI-21	85
4.10	Summary of the goodness-of-fit of the structural model	89
4.11	The direct effect of adult attachment on counselling attitudes	90
4.12	The direct effect of counselling attitudes and cybersex activities	92
4.13	The direct effect of adult attachment and cybersex activities	93
4.14	The direct, indirect and total effect between variables	94

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)	25
2.2	The Prototype of Adult Attachment (Bartholomew, 1997)	28
2.3	Theoretical Framework of The Research	34
2.4	The Conceptual Framework of The Research	44
3.1	Flow Chart of Multistage Cluster Sampling	50
3.2	Full Mediating Effect	63
3.3	Partial Mediating Effect	63
3.4	CFA for Initial Counselling Attitudes	65
3.5	CFA for Modified Counselling Attitudes	66
3.6	CFA For Initial Model Of RAAS	67
3.7	CFA For Modified RAAS	68
3.8	CFA For Initial Model Of MISAI-21	69
3.9	CFA for Modified MISAI-21	70
3.10	The Measurement Model	71
3.11	The Hypothesized Structural Model Input	72
4.1	The Hypothesized Model Output	88
4.2	Results of Path Coefficient	96

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Adult Attachment Styles
ANX	Adult Attachment Anxiety
ATPPHS	Attitudes towards Professional Psychological Help Scale
AVE	Average Variance Extract
B	Unstandardized Regression Weight
C.R	Critical Ratio
CA	Counselling Attitudes
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CLOSE	Adult Attachment Close
CMIN	Minimum Sample of Discrepancy
CMIN/DF	Discrepancy/df
CR	Composite Reliability
CS	Cybersex Activities
DEP	Adult Attachment Close
DF	Degree of Freedom
DV	Dependent Variable
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
IV	Independent Variable
<i>M</i>	Mean
MCMC	Malaysian Commission of Multimedia and Communication
MeV	Mediating Variable
NCA	Negative Counselling Attitude
NFI	Normed Fit Index
NPAR	Number of Parameter
PCA	Positive Counselling Attitude
RAAS	Revised Adult Attachment Styles
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SD	Standard Deviation
S.E	Standard Error
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Packages for Social Sciences

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter begins with the introduction of the counselling services in Malaysia. Next, the researcher explains about the existence of internet and online sexual activities, as well as its impact on society. The problem statement discusses the gaps from previous studies and how this research fills those gaps. Then, the objectives, research questions, and hypotheses are drawn to have a clear focus on this study's undertaking. The researcher also explains about the significance of the study, definition of terms, scope, and limitations. Chapter one ends with a summary of this chapter.

### **Background of the Study**

Recently, the internet has changed the social landscape of human being. Although the internet has significant role in making our life more convenient, the potential negative impact of internet still need to be considered over the time. The example of negative impact of the internet on the society including cyber-bullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2013), love scams, fraud (Hamsi, Bahry, Tobi, & Masrom, 2015; Owoyemi, Din, & Sabri, 2015), and cybersex activities (Ballester-Arnal, Calvo, Gil-Llario, & Gil-Julia, 2016). There are numerous literatures that highlights the issue of cybersex as it is one of the alarming issues in the world and causes negative impacts to the marital dysfunction (Anderson, 2001; Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003; Goldberg, Peterson, Rosen, & Sara, 2008; Schneider, 2000) as well as behavioural problems (Rimington & Gast, 2013). Thus, the role of counsellors is more challenging, and higher level of competency to help clients with cybersex issues is required (Mohd. Zaliridrizal & Dini Farhana, 2011; Siti Aishah, 2015).

The previous study shows that the cybersex issue is not a new issue in the world and this issue is still unveiled in Malaysia. As the crucial role of counsellors is significant to overcome this unveiled issue, the researcher next will discuss the history of guidance and counselling in Malaysia. The counsellor roles on cybersex issues are discussed in detail.

## **The Counselling Services in Malaysia**

The history of guidance and counselling in Malaysia has been influenced by the economic and social changes ranging from the agricultural to the industrial sectors (Jamaludin, 2014). The movement of guidance and counselling services in Malaysia began in 1963 (Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013), but then later developed rapidly in the 1980s (See & Ng, 2010).

As for the youth, their massive involvement in drug-related issues has long pressured the government to hire counsellors in every school in Malaysia. The position of full-time school counsellors was introduced in 1996, where the role of teaching for the school counsellors was lessened as they have dual functions: to teach and to counsel students at the same time. By the 2000s, each school in Malaysia had at least one full-time school counsellor (See & Ng, 2010).

In the 1990s, the counselling services was not only demanded in schools, but for the society at large. The rapid economic development had changed the structure and functions of the family, urging them to seek help through counselling (Jamaludin, 2014). In the corporate sector, the need of counselling has begun to increase as employers are more aware of the importance of mental health among their employees. Thus, the corporate sector such as *Telekom Malaysia Berhad*, National Bank of Malaysia, *Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad*, Public Service of Malaysia, and Malaysian Royal Navy hired counsellors in their respective departments (Jamaludin, 2014).

### **Online Sexual Activities**

The existence of free online pornography websites ignites the increasing number of people engaging in cybersex activities. The growth of the internet is in line with the growth of the sex industry. Hughes (2000) stated that the present rate of the internet industry would have not expanded without the help of sex industries. It shows that sex related trading has contributed to the growth of the internet. Covenant Eyes (2015) reported that the total revenue from pornography industries was estimated to be \$20 billion, where \$10 billion was contributed by the United States of America (USA) in 2007. There was a 50% decrease in the revenue earned by the USA due to the free online pornography from the year 2007 till 2011.

According to Wery, Devos, DeSutter, and Billieux (2014), there are many individuals who use the internet for sexual purposes such as watch pornography, engage in sexual

chats, search and participate in sex-webcam and seek for offline sexual partners. Cybersex is a loose term that encompasses a variety of internet-mediated sexual activities, in which some are regarded as pathological (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2015). Cybersex also defined as a subcategory of online sexual activities, which includes two or more people engaging in online sexual talk to get sexual pleasure and may or may not include masturbation (Daneback, Cooper, and Månsson, 2005).

Furthermore, Laier and Brand (2014) stated that cybersex includes the use of internet for sexual purposes interactively or passively. Interactive cybersex refers to self-involvement in cybersex activities such as sex chatting and sexual self-displaying or watching other individuals performing sexual actions through a webcam. In contrast, passive cybersex takes place when an individual watches pornographic material. Cybersex activities in a broader spectrum include sexual contacts via the internet, the involvement of online trading for sexual products, accessing information on sexual issues, using online service sex, and searching for online sex workers (Döring, 2009; Laier & Brand, 2014). Meanwhile, Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelly and Mathy (2004) defined cybersex as using the internet to engage in gratifying sexual activities such as viewing pictures, engaging in sexual chats, exchanging sexually explicit emails, and “cybering”.

Delmonico (1997) defined cybersex based on three conditions: a) people engage in cybersex by viewing and exchanging pornographic material; b) cybersex as the first step interaction before indulging in real sexual conduct; and c) cybersex conducted offline where multimedia systems act as a medium to channel one’s sexual desires.

As the internet contributes to the involvement in cybersex activities as cited in Hughes (2000), then the negative effect of cybersex to the society are outnumbered. First, the negative impact of cybersex can be view through the macro level, when it promotes human sexual trading through online. Waterlow (2015) reported in *MailOnline* that the Philippines became a hub for the cybersex industry where girls from poverty-driven backgrounds were enslaved for cybersex purposes. The preys who are mostly teenagers were recruited for online prosecution. The economic problems being the major excuses of the family members to hand over their children to the pedophiles.

The crimes due to cybersex activities continues as reported by Chibba (2013) in explaining cybersex trafficking. Cybersex trafficking elaborated as prostitution businesses that operates through online. This sexual trading involves underaged girl that had been exploited and forced to pose nakedly to satisfy their online clients with certain amount of payment (Chibba, 2013). The demand for cybersex trafficking can be both; either within the country or cross over the country. The concept of cyber trafficking

supported Döring (2009) and Li and Zheng (2016) that stated internet provides a space for individual to search online prostitutes.

In Malaysia, the awareness on the threat of cybersex among youth was promoted by Olivia, Shereen, and Rohani (2015), through their paper on anti-sexting and cyberlaw in Malaysia. The descriptive findings onto 27 youth in Malaysia found 94% of the respondents do not know the law enforcement on sexting, meanwhile they have greater chances to be involved in cybersex activities. Even the generalization of the findings cannot be made due to the limited number of sample, it still can help us to understand the cybersex issues in Malaysia. Thus, they suggested that specific on sexting should be enforced by the government even there are numerous cyber laws in Malaysia due to the low awareness and knowledge about sexting among young adult (Olivia et al., 2015).

Among Malaysian university students, Ghoroghi (2016) conducted a study among postgraduate students in Klang Valley, Selangor ( $n= 256$ ). A descriptive analysis on respondents' time spent for cybersex activities shows 58.59% of them are engaged in cybersex activities. In detail, 122 of the respondents spent one to five hours per week for cybersex, 24 respondents spent six to ten hours per week and only four respondents spent 11 to 15 hours per week. Another 106 respondents are not spent their time for cybersex activity.

Secondly, cybersex activities contribute negative consequences at the micro level which includes individual, couple and family. A study by Akerman and Priebe (2011) on 2015 male students in Sweden who were 18 years old found that 10.5% ( $n=200$ ) are frequent users of pornography. Furthermore, the frequent users of pornography were found to have been involved in unhealthy social activities such as consuming alcohol, having the greater sexual desire, and often sold sex to others. In another research, cybersex has not only contributed to social problems, but it has also affected academic performance and motivation among university students (Syamsul Anuar, 2003).

Besides that, cybersex disrupts marital relationships which may cause emotional distress such as hurt, betrayal, anger, and loneliness. The other effects of cybersex on marital relationships are divorce, and loss of interest in sexual intercourse which in turn can affect children's life and emotions (Schneider, 2003). People who are compulsive users of cybersex are often presented with underlying trauma, depression or addiction (Southern, 2008). Thus, past studies proved that cybersex affects users in many aspects of lives such as academic, marriage, work performances, and mental wellness.

Cooper (1998) introduced the "Triple A" Engine to explain why people engage in cybersex activities. The A's are access, affordability, and anonymity. Access refers to

the characteristics of the internet which is “easy to pass” and “easy to log”. People can access the internet if they own a computer or a smartphone. In addition, there is no time limit when it comes to using the internet, and people are free to surf anytime and anywhere.

Cooper (1998) explained that affordability refers to the low economic spending by people to access sexual material via the internet. Covenant Eyes (2015) reported that the total revenue of online pornography business reduced to 50% due to free online pornographic websites. Statistics show that 80% to 90% of internet porn users prefer to access free online material. Lastly, the internet has the power to conceal the identity of users. This characteristic is known as anonymity and thus, attracts people to explore sexually explicit material because there is more freedom to do so without the risk of revealing one’s identity; there is a freedom to experiment; and the freedom to talk openly about sex, questions, concerns and/or fantasies without people knowing your identity.

The “Triple A” Engine proposed by Cooper (1998) revealed some of the factors that lead people to engage in cybersex. Due to the mechanism of access, affordability, and anonymity, the number of people involved in cybersex has been increasing across the globe. In the United States, 70% of teenagers aged between 15 to 17 years old reported having viewed pornography accidentally during online browsing (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2003). In Taiwan, it was reported that 40% of teenagers aged between 14 to 17 years old had been exposed to internet pornography (Lo & Wei, 2005).

### **Cybersex and Counselling Help-Seeking**

The cybersex issues are controversially discussed (Laier, Pawlikowski, Pekal, Schulte, & Brand, 2013) and the roles of professional mental health such as counsellor is crucial (Mohd. Zaliridrizal & Dini Farhana, 2011; Siti Aishah, 2015). Due to the effects on mental health, academic and job performances, as well as couples and family, the governments all over the countries are forced to provide a support centre to combat the problems due to excessive used of the internet (Karapetsas & Fotis, 2013), especially on cybersex issues. The needs of the centre are supported through the previous study that found cybersex issues that had been discussed through the therapy or counselling sessions.

McEachern, McEachern-Ciattoni, and Martin (2012) stated that cybersex is the present challenge for schools and professional school counsellors. Thus, school counsellors play as a front liner to unite parents, schools, communities as well as policy makers to combat cybersex activities such as sexting among school students. The prevention programs such



as psychoeducational programs are vital to educate students on the implication of cybersex to their academic, emotional and career.

The average of clients with cybersex issues treated by Marital Family Therapist (MFT) was four clients per year (Goldberg, Peterson, Rosen, & Sara, 2008). Through this study, 30% of the therapist found cybersex issues was presented by the clients who came to the therapy. In addition, 16% of the therapists stated that cybersex was the primary issues that discussed by the clients through the sessions.

A qualitative study conducted by Zakaria and Baharudin (2011) onto five registered counsellors in Malaysia found cybersex issues was presented in couple and marital issues among Malaysian. There are many interventions that had been practised to the clients with cybersex issues such as psycho-spiritual intervention, behavioural therapy, marital and family therapy, as well as relapse interventions.

Ford, Durtschi, and Franklin (2012) discussed Structural Therapy can be applied to help family with cybersex issues. The coalition and triangulation were established in the family with cybersex issues. The formation of coalition is occurred between problematic spouse with his or her cybersex addiction. This coalition will against his or her non-problematic spouse, results to the imbalance of the couple's structure. According to Ford, Durtschi, and Franklin (2012), the formation of triangulation between problematic spouse, non-problematic spouse and cybersex endangered the structure of the couple. Thus, structural therapy will focus on the formation of the new coalition and retriangulated between spouse against cybersex. The couple will cooperate and support each other to reduce his or her problematic spouse in cybersex.

Twohig and Crosby (2010) had introduced Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) as an intervention to help clients with cybersex problems. This therapy is a technique that underlies Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). The focus of the therapy is to change client's experience on problematic behaviour to new accepted experiences. In this context, the involvement in cybersex activities is the problematic behaviour of the clients. Then, they will be assisted to commit in new meaningful experiences. This eight-session treatment help to reduce 85% of the involvement in cybersex activities.

From the discussion above, it is shows that cybersex is one of the issues that required attention from the professional mental health practitioners, especially counsellors. However, there are some limitations for cybersex engagers to seek professional help regarding their openness to discuss sexual issues with counsellor (Ferree, 2003). Moreover, sexual issues is a taboo to be shared with others especially among Asian (Li et al., 2015).

In this section, the researcher discussed about the phenomenon of cybersex activities based on previous studies. Cybersex refers to the use of internet for sexual purposes and the explanation given to this definition by other scholars was consistent. The researcher next shows the needs of help-seeking in helping clients with cybersex problems. However, there are some researchers stated the reluctance of clients to seek help especially for clients with cybersex issues. Although cybersex activities are a matter of concern, this issue is still unconcealed in Malaysia. Thus, in the next section, the researcher will discuss on the gaps of the study and clarify why the study needs to be conducted.

### **Statement of the Problem**

MCMC (2017) reported that approximately 15.6 million people use the internet, with 72.1% of them are at young age. University students (67.4%) are reported as the highest internet users among school-goers in Malaysia. Accordingly, university students have the highest chance to be engaged in cybersex activities due to their spent for online (Ghoroghi, 2016; Ghoroghi, Siti Aishah, & Ahmad Fauzi, 2017).

The involvement of students in cybersex activities is not aggressively covered, however, there are studies reported their involvement in cybersex activities in Malaysia (Ghoroghi, 2016; Ghoroghi et al., 2017; Jazilah & Siti Aishah, 2014; Nor Syafini, Hanif Suhairi, & Huzili, 2015; Syamsul Anuar, 2003). There is a study found the postgraduate students in Malaysia are engaged in online sexual activities, such as viewing pornography, sex chatting or reading erotica materials (Ghoroghi, 2016). In general, it can be argued that the internet has been used as a medium of cybersex activities by Malaysian internet users.

Recently, Malaysia Population and Family survey confirmed that youth aged 13 to 24 years old are involved in sexual activities, where 40% of them surfed for pornography (NPFDB, 2016). Consequently, cybersex activities contribute to the increasing rate of sexual activities among youth in Malaysia (NPFDB, 2016) from 0.9% in 1994 to 4.8% in 2014, where 6.5% of youth, who are involved in romantic relationship, have sexual intercourse. Hence, concerted effort must be taken to control cybersex activities among university students in Malaysia.

NPFDB (2016) also claimed that romantic relationship or attachment to partner is the driven factor to influence individual to be involved in cybersex activities. To date, dominant adult attachment style as a factor that influence cybersex activities is still not clear. Moreover, Nor Syafini et al. (2015) indicates that social media had been used by the students in Malaysia to be engaged in cybersex activities with their romantic partner.

Surprisingly, the study has revealed that cybersex activities, especially sexting is a common activity among unmarried youth in Malaysia to maintain their intimacy.

Counselling services are needed to not only help university students with academic, self-development and career but also to assist in psychological issues particularly cybersex activities. It is shown that the competency of counsellors in handling cybersex issues is crucial (Mohd. Zaliridrizal & Dini Farhana, 2011) due to negative consequences it may bring to students. Previous studies indicated that cybersex activities lead to marital dysfunction (Anderson, 2001; Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003; Goldberg, Peterson, Rosen, & Sara, 2008; Schneider, 2000), psychological distress (Southern, 2008), poor academic and job performance (Syamsul Anuar, 2003). Although the negative consequences of cybersex have been highlighted in literature, study indicates that the number of cybersex engagers who seek help from counsellors is very limited (Ghoroghi, 2016). Thus, it is important to understand the underlying factors such as the attitudes towards counselling help-seeking among cybersex engagers for counsellors to play their role in assisting them to cope with cybersex activities.

Despite the growing of importance to study cybersex involvement, little research has relatively been done in Malaysia on cybersex activities (Ghoroghi, 2016). It is due to the fact that sexual issue is a taboo subject to be discussed and shared with others (Li et al., 2015). Cybersex engagement studies have been conducted intensively in Western setting (Ballester-Arnal, Calvo, Gil-Llario, & Gil-Julia, 2016; Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Levin, Lillis, & Hayes, 2012; Paul & Shim, 2008; Perry, Accordino, & Hewes, 2007), whereby the finding could not be generalized due to cultural and geographical differences.

Considering the vast amount of the internet users and the negative consequences of cybersex engagement, little is known about the underlying factor that influence the involvement in cybersex activities and more specifically among university students in Malaysia. In fact, the study of cybersex activities in Malaysia is still limited in understanding the consequences of cybersex involvement, such as on academic and job performances (Syamsul Anuar, 2003).

Therefore, this study intends to fill the existing gap in the literature by investigating the relationship between counselling attitude, adult attachment, and cybersex activities. This study is conducted among undergraduate students in a public university in Malaysia. It is expected that this study will contribute to the literature and practitioners especially counsellors who deal with university students.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the mediating roles of counselling attitudes on the relationship between adult attachment and cybersex activities among undergraduate students in a public university.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- 1) To measure the level of counselling attitudes among undergraduate student at a public university.
- 2) To describe the dominant pattern of adult attachment styles among undergraduate students in a public university.
- 3) To measure the level of cybersex activities among undergraduate students in a public university.
- 4) To examine the significant direct effect of adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) on attitudes towards counselling (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes).
- 5) To examine the significant direct effect of counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes) on cybersex activities.
- 6) To examine significant direct effect of adult attachment (close, depend and anxiety) on cybersex activities.
- 7) To examine the significant indirect effect of adult attachment (close, depend and anxiety) on cybersex activities mediated by counselling attitudes.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the level of cybersex activities and counselling attitudes among undergraduate students in a public university?
- 2) What is the common pattern of adult attachment styles among undergraduate students in a public university?
- 3) What is the level of cybersex activities among undergraduate students in a public university?
- 4) Is there any significant direct effect of adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) on counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes)?
- 5) Is there any significant direct effect of counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes) on cybersex activities?
- 6) Is there any significant direct effect of adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) on cybersex activities?
- 7) Is there any significant indirect effect between adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) and cybersex activities mediated by counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes)?

### **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses that were formulated based on the objectives and research questions are as follows:

- H1 : There is a significant direct effect of adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) on counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes).

- H2 : There is significant direct effect of counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes) on cybersex activities.
- H3 : There is a significant direct effect of adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) on cybersex activities.
- H4 : There is a significant indirect effect on adult attachment (close, depend, and anxiety) and cybersex activities mediated by counselling attitudes (positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes).

### **Significance of the Study**

The cybersex phenomenon is not a new issue and it moves around the world. There are many studies that shows the underlying factors, specifically adult attachment styles contribute to the involvement in cybersex activities. The concept of adult attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) were adapted from Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1977) to explain the attachment process in adulthood. The adult attachment is the formation of emotional bond between individual to their significant figure. The adult attachment styles, either there are securely or insecurely attached to their partner will affect their sexual behaviour.

There are interesting findings that show people with problematic internet and sexual issues are reluctant to seek help from professional mental health practitioner. To explain this situation, Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) was adopted in this study. There are three factors that influenced behaviour of an individual. Attitudes towards behaviour, social norms and perceived behaviour are the factors that influenced individual to perform behaviour. Malaysia that located in Asia, who are rich in culture and values view sexual issues is a taboo to be shared with professional figure (Lu, Ma, Lee, Hou, & Liao, 2014). Thus, it is important to notice either counselling attitudes is one of the underlying factor that mediate the relationship between adult attachment and cybersex activities.

In another side, the involvement in cybersex activities was to gain sexual pleasure which are align with the concept of pleasure principle as coined by Freud (1920) in Psychoanalysis Theory. The sexual force is the nature of the human being, where they are born with this psyche energy. The involvement in cybersex activities is a form of

pleasure satisfaction, which is contradict to reality principle. Theoretically, this study is the intertwine of three theories (Adult Attachment Theory, Theory of Planned Behaviour and Psychoanalysis Theory) that contribute the new body of knowledge.

For practical significance, the number of internet users in Malaysia has been increasing in line with the social problems that related to cybersex. However, the actual numbers of cybersex engager are still vague. Therefore, this research may help counsellors, psychologists, and mental health practitioners to be front liners in combating this social illness. Research on human behaviour may increase practitioners' knowledge and skills to achieve this goal. The current study which is related to human behaviour will help practitioners to understand the characteristics or human styles that may influence people to engage in cybersex. Their understanding of these behaviours may help to improvise the effectiveness of interventions.

The finding of the study can be the key references for the counsellor, especially to set up interventions for the clients with cybersex issues. By understanding Attachment Theory, counsellor act as an object who are consistently available for the subject (client). The fondness and calmness of the object through transference and counter-transference technique help to establish a positive mental image of the human to human relations that results in change of the insecure attachment to secure attachment of the clients (Siti Aishah, 2011).

Besides that, the findings of this study will be useful in the process of improving existing policies in Malaysia. As the youths are the pillar of the nation, their involvement in cybersex will definitely affect certain areas of their lives which in turn is detrimental to the development of the nation. The Ministries in Malaysia may gain more benefits by using the key ideas and core concepts of this research to improve their efforts and policies especially when dealing with cybersex issue. For an instance, through the findings of this research, MCMC would be able to find technical strategies to filter any suspicious online sexual activities done through the internet. Furthermore, the Ministry of Youth will be able to help raise public awareness and educate the youth about the implications of online sex and cybersex addiction.

The Board of Counsellors may provide special training for counsellors in handling cybersex cases. Technology is growing rapidly, and people are potentially exposed to cybersex threats. Thus, the training that specifics on cybersex need to be given to the counsellors to upgrade their skills and competencies in handling cybersex issues especially among university students.

## **Definition of Terms**

The definition of terms used in this study is segregated into two sections which are conceptual definitions and operational definitions. The researcher defines conceptual definitions based on previous reviews of literature. Meanwhile, operational definitions are defined based on instruments that will be utilized in this research.

### **Counselling Attitudes**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

Salim (2010) defined counselling attitudes as the readiness of the clients to seek for psychological services. Fisher and Farina (1995) defined attitudes towards psychological help as the overall evaluation, either positive or negative, towards professional psychological help.

#### **Operational Definition**

In the context of current study, counselling attitudes can be divided into positive counselling attitudes and negative counselling attitudes. The relevant instrument was adapted from Fisher and Turner's (1970) Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale.

### **Adult Attachment Styles**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

The adult attachment was manifested from a research by John Bowlby in the 1950s which explained about the pattern of interaction between infants and their caretakers. This research then expanded from infancy to adult. Wilhelm, Gillis, and Parker (2016) described adult attachment as one's view of self (either worthy or unworthy of love and attention) and one's view of others (trustworthy, rejecting, or distant). On the contrary, Collins and Read (1990) classified adult attachment into three categories which are : a) close; b) depend; and c) anxiety. Adult attachment close refers to the extent to which a



person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. While, adult attachment depend refers to the comfortableness of a person to rely on others when he or she needs them. Next, adult attachment anxiety refers to the anxiety of being rejected or abandoned by others.

### **Operational Definition**

In this study, adult attachment was segregated into three types which are: a) adult attachment close; b) adult attachment depend; and c) adult attachment anxiety. The adult attachment was measured by using the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) from Collins and Read (1995).

### **Cybersex Activities**

#### **Conceptual Definition**

Delmonico (1997) categorised cybersex into three forms, which includes the exchange of online pornography, real time sexual exchanges, and multimedia software. Moreover, Delmonico (1997) defined cybersex as any activity that uses the internet for sexual purposes such as watching, downloading, online trading of erotic pictures or engaging in erotic conversation through the internet. Starcevic and Aboujaoude (2015) defined cybersex as the variety of internet-mediated sexual activities in which some of it may be regarded as pathological.

#### **Operational Definition**

In this study, cybersex activities refer to: i) cyber-relationship and ii) cybersex activities. Cybersex was measured by using the Malaysian Internet and Sexual Activities Inventory (MISAI-21; Siti Aishah et al., 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). MISAI-21 contains 21 items in which the scale ranges from strongly disagree to disagree mostly. The item of MISAI-21 are having boyfriend or girlfriend, Short Messaging Services (SMS), phone, social media, dating, watched pornography, sexual behaviour (hugging, kissing, masturbating, oral sex, intercourse, sodomised), sexual ID, and romantic purposes.

## **Undergraduate Students**

Undergraduate students refer to students who are pursuing their undergraduate studies at one selected public university in Malaysia. They are Malaysians and aged between 19 to 27 years old.

## **Scope and Limitations**

There are many limitations that should be noted and considered in this study. Firstly, this study was conducted at a public university in Malaysia in Selangor. This study was a conducted in one public university in Malaysia. The finding of this study is not generalised to all university students in Malaysia. The respondents of this study also were limited to Malaysian undergraduate students who are studying in a public university in Malaysia. The respondents were limited to Malaysian students because all the instruments were prepared in the Malay language. Furthermore, the age of respondents should not be less than 19 and should not be more than 27 years old. They must hold 'active student' status at undergraduate level.

The instruments were limited to three which are a) Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Help (Fisher & Turner, 1970); b) Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins & Read, 1996); and c) Malaysian Internet and Sexual Activities Inventory (MISAI-21; Siti Aishah et al., 2008, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Also, for this study was limited to descriptive and correlational study. The findings descriptive findings of this study (RO1, RO2 and RO3) are representing the characteristics of the population in one public university in Malaysia. While, the inferential finding (RO4, RO5, RO6 and RO7) representing the relationship between variables without any cause and effect relationship.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher explained the concept of cybersex, adult attachment, and the attitudes towards seeking counselling. The chapter also discussed about the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, research hypotheses, significance of the study, definitions of the terms, scope and limitations of the study.

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