



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***EFFECTS OF SCHEMA THERAPY AND SCHEMA-FOCUSED  
MINDFULNESS THERAPY ON MARITAL SATISFACTION, MARITAL  
COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG IRANIAN  
WOMEN IN MALAYSIA***

**NOOSHIN NOORONEY**

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UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA  
BERILMU BERBAKTI

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WOMEN IN MALAYSIA**

By

**NOOSHIN NOORONEY**

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

**September 2017**

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I'd dedicate this thesis to:

My Loving Parents, and

My Beloved Husband



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

**EFFECTS OF SCHEMA THERAPY AND SCHEMA-FOCUSED MINDFULNESS THERAPY ON MARITAL SATISFACTION, MARITAL COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG IRANIAN WOMEN IN MALAYSIA**

By

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**September 2017**

**Chairman: Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar, PhD**  
**Faculty: Educational Studies**

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution of Iranian married women who lived in Malaysia during 2015-2016. Some studies reported that a significant number of Iranian immigrants in Malaysia have a considerable concern about their marriage and show low marital satisfaction and weak conflict resolution ability because of the new situation, which they encounter after moving to Malaysia. It has also been discussed and ascertained that low marital satisfaction and lack of constructive communication cause a lot of difficulties and problems among couples that may finally lead to divorce. However, couple therapy and educational interventions are not quite satisfying to help couples and prevent distress. Therefore, psychologists and counsellors have to do more research in this field and increase their knowledge about couples' issues to find new and fresh methods, skills and strategies. Accordingly, schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy are two new methods that can be examined to help psychologists and counsellors to prevent divorce and enhance the quality of marriage.

This study is an experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution. In this research, population refers to all married Iranian women who lived in Malaysia in 2015-2016 and were interested in participating the treatment sessions and increasing the quality of their relationship. The qualified participants included 96 women who were assigned randomly into three groups: two experimental groups and a control group with 32 women in each group. The first experimental group received schema therapy

and the second group received schema-focused mindfulness therapy while the control group did not receive any treatment. The instruments used in this research included marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution subscales from the ENRICH questionnaire, a demographic questionnaire and Young's schema questionnaire. Post-tests were administered after 18 sessions of treatments, and then follow-up tests were completed two months after the post-tests. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were used in this research and, two-way repeated measures ANOVA and ANCOVA were applied.

In general, it can be derived from the statistical analysis of the two-way repeated measures ANOVA test that the findings of this study are acceptable. The findings showed that both schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy had significant effects on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution. The results were almost the same among schema therapy group and schema-focused mindfulness therapy group in the post-test. However, after two months follow-up, the differences revealed that the results in the second group, i.e. schema-focused mindfulness therapy group, have significantly improved during the time, while the results in the first group, i.e. schema therapy group, have remained constant. It means that mindfulness strategies gradually affected and the results of the second group were improved after a period. The findings of this study ascertained the fact that there are many advantages in schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy for couple therapists and they can use them more to increase the quality of marriages. It means that counsellors can use schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy in work with clients in order to improve their adjustment and function in the marriage, which are the main concerns of guidance and counselling.

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

**KESAN TERAPI SKEMA DAN TERAPI MINDFULNESS BERFOKUSKAN  
SKEMA TERHADAP KEPUASAN PERKAHWINAN, KOMUNIKASI  
PERKAHWINAN DAN PENYELESAIAN KONFLIK WANITA IRAN DI  
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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat keberkesanan terapi skema dan terapi *mindfulness* berfokuskan skema ke atas kepuasan perkahwinan, komunikasi perkahwinan dan penyelesaian konflik dalam kalangan wanita Iran yang tinggal di Malaysia pada tahun 2015-2016. Seseengah kajian mendapati penduduk Iran yang bermigrasi ke Malaysia mempunyai kepuasan perkahwinan yang rendah disebabkan persekitaran yang baharu. Kepuasan perkahwinan yang rendah dalam kalangan masyarakat Iran di Malaysia boleh mengancam komuniti tersebut kerana kepuasan perkahwinan yang rendah boleh mengundang kepada perceraian. Oleh itu, ahli psikologi dan kaunselor berusaha untuk membantu pasangan meningkatkan kepuasan perkahwinan mereka bagi menghalang berlakunya perceraian. Namun begitu, terapi pasangan dan intervensi berbentuk pendidikan masih kurang berkesan untuk membantu pasangan. Model dan pendekatan sedia ada masih tidak memadai dan mencukupi untuk membantu isu yang dihadapi oleh pasangan. Dapatan-dapatan kajian berkaitan pasangan menunjukkan limitasi dalam pelbagai skop seperti corak komunikasi dan resolusi konflik. Oleh itu, ahli psikologi dan kaunselor perlu melakukan kajian untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan sedia ada terhadap isu-isu yang dihadapi oleh pasangan bagi mencari kaedah, kemahiran dan strategi baru bagi membantu mereka. Terapi skema dan *mindfulness* merupakan kaedah terkini yang digunakan untuk membantu ahli psikologi dan kaunselor mengatasi masalah perceraian dan meningkatkan kualiti perkahwinan.

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kajian eksperimen bagi menyiasat keberkesanan terapi skema dan terapi *mindfulness* berfokuskan skema terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan, komunikasi perkahwinan dan penyelesaian

konflik. Dalam kajian ini, penduduk merujuk kepada semua wanita Iran yang tinggal di Malaysia pada 2015-2016, dimana mereka berminat untuk menyertai sesi rawatan bagi meningkatkan kualiti hubungan mereka. 96 orang wanita dipilih secara rawak dan dibahagikan kepada tiga kumpulan iaitu dua kumpulan eksperimen dan satu kumpulan kawalan dengan 32 wanita dalam setiap kumpulan. Pertama, kumpulan eksperimen menerima terapi skema dan kumpulan kedua menerima terapi *mindfulness* berfokuskan skema. Manakala kumpulan kawalan tidak menerima sebarang rawatan. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam kajian ini termasuk kepuasan perkahwinan, komunikasi dan penyelesaian konflik sub skala perkahwinan daripada soal selidik ENRICH, soal selidik demografi responden dan soal selidik Young's Schema. Ujian pasca rawatan telah dijalankan selepas responden melalui 18 sesi rawatan, dan kemudian ujian susulan dilaksanakan dua bulan selepas ujian pasca rawatan. Analisis statistik deskriptif dan inferensi telah digunakan dalam kajian ini dan *two-way repeated measures ANOVA* dan *ANCOVA* digunakan bagi tujuan penganalisan data. Secara umumnya, analisis statistik inferensi menggunakan *two-way repeated measures ANOVA* menunjukkan hasil kajian diterima.

Dalam kajian ini, matlamat utama adalah untuk mengkaji kesan terapi skema dan terapi *mindfulness* berfokuskan skema terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terapi skema mempunyai kesan yang besar ke atas kepuasan perkahwinan, komunikasi perkahwinan dan penyelesaian konflik. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan keputusan hampir sama antara kumpulan terapi skema dan kumpulan terapi *mindfulness* berfokuskan skema dalam ujian pasca. Walau bagaimanapun, rawatan susulan selepas dua bulan menunjukkan perbezaan mendedahkan bahawa kumpulan terapi *mindfulness* berfokuskan skema telah meningkat dengan ketara pada masa itu, manakala keputusan dalam kumpulan skema kumpulan terapi, kekal malar. Ini bermakna bahawa strategi *mindfulness* secara beransur-ansur memberi kesan kepada dan boleh menjadi amat berkesan selepas beberapa tempoh masa. Malah, kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa terapi skema menunjukkan kesan yang baik ke atas kemurungan, keresahan, gangguan personaliti dan masalah-masalah lain, serta sangat berkesan dalam menyelesaikan isu-isu pasangan dan boleh meningkatkan kepuasan perkahwinan antara pasangan lebih-lebih lagi melalui pengintegrasian terapi *mindfulness*. Ini bermakna kaunselor boleh menggunakan terapi skema dan terapi *mindfulness* berasaskan skema untuk membantu meningkatkan keselarasan dan kefungsi klien dalam rumah tangga, dimana hal ini amat ditekankan dalam bimbingan dan kaunseling.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 12 September 2017 to conduct the final examination of Nooshin Nooroney on her thesis entitled "Effects of Schema Therapy and Schema-Focused Mindfulness Therapy on Marital Satisfaction, Marital Communication and Conflict Resolution among Iranian Women 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 Doctor of Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBCT	Cognitive-Behavioural Couple Therapy
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
DFST	Dual-Focused Schema Therapy
DP	Detached Protector Mode
EFT	Emotionally Focused Therapy
HA	Healthy Adult Mode
IBCT	Integrative Behavioural Couple Therapy
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
MMP	Mode Management Plan
OCPD	Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder
PMR	Progressive Muscle Relaxation
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SCBT	Short-Term Schema Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy
SCBT-g	Short-Term group Schema Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy
STE	Schema Therapy Education
TBCT	Traditional Behavioural Couple Therapy
UM	University of Malaya
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
YSQ-SF	Young Schema Questionnaire Short-Form

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, and significance of the study. It also describes the research objectives, research questions and research hypotheses. Finally, the limitation of the study, and the theoretical as well as operational definition of key terms are presented.

#### 1.2 Background of Study

Marriage is a comprehensive bond between couples, which is about sharing bodies, property, children and their time. In addition, it is a durable and exclusive permission for having sexual relationship just with that person and not anyone else. Marriage is a historical, social, and personal concept, which is related to commitment, mortality and euphoria (Girgis, Anderson & George, 2012).

The purpose of marriage has changed totally during last decades. Ahead of time the reasons for marriage were different factors such as political, economic and cultural motives, whereas, today they have been fundamentally revolutionized to the emotional and affecting reasons (Campbell & Wright, 2010).

For example, Manap, Kassim, Hoesni, Nen, Idris and Ghazali (2013) stated that there are three reasons, which play essential roles in motivating Malaysian youths for marriage. The most important reason is religious motives; in fact, they get married because marriage is one of the most important pillars of their religion and strongly recommended in Islam. Another significant reason is biological motives, which consist of having sexual relationship for procreation and reproduction purposes. Likewise, it provides a secure environment for raising children and forming a family structure. The last reason is socio-psychological motives, indicating that partners marry together because of their need for love and intimacy. Moreover, couples would like to stay away from loneliness, which is one of the biggest existential anxieties of human beings.

It is obvious that the reasons of marriage can be completely different for different people but there is a common goal for all couples, which is success in marriage. In fact, a successful marriage can easily guarantee the achievement to the main reasons of the marriage. One of the most important criteria, which should be examined to determine the level of success in marriage, is marital satisfaction (Fowers & Olson, 1989). Marital satisfaction refers to the notion that a person

upholds about the relationship that he/she has with his/her partner (King, 2016). "Marital satisfaction is a complex process that has over time been thought to be influenced by many factors, including education, socio-economic status, love, commitment, marital communication, conflict, gender, length of marriage, the presence of children, sexual relations and the division of labor" (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997). Marital communication and conflict resolution as also two important concepts which play key roles in a healthy relationship. As long as the couples can communicate politely and settle the conflicts properly, they experience higher satisfaction in their marital life (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

ENRICH marital satisfaction scale has provided a proper criteria for researchers to evaluate the level of couples' satisfaction in their marriages by calculating several components which are known as some factors that have negative or positive effect on marital satisfaction. Fowers and Olson (1989) determined and listed several fundamental factors, which affect the quality of marriage based on the various studies in this regard. However, this list has undergone some changes for using in different countries after the developers' approval and the components of each version vary due to the cultural differences.

The Persian version of ENRICH questionnaire was developed in 2010 by Asoodeh according to the Iranian culture. Obviously, it has been checked and approved by the main developers to be used in the Iranian society. This version contains four components, which three of them, i.e. marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution have been measured in this study. The first important component of this questionnaire is marital satisfaction, which appears as a calculable sub-scale in this part. Marital satisfaction is the attribute that shows the couples' evaluation of their marital values. The more partners find their relationship happy, the more they are satisfied with that. In other word, as long as they benefit of their marriage, they assess it desirable (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). Since meeting the basic needs of a marital relationship leads to a broader and general understanding of marital satisfaction in life, this sub-scale has been considered to carry the initial meaning of this expression.

One of the most impressive factors related to marital satisfaction is good communication. Actually, there is a direct link between a constructive, satisfying and happy marriage and efficient communication. Findings showed there is a strong correlation between marital satisfaction and an effective communication skill. Consequently, for having efficient communication, couples need to discuss about problems clearly, spend time with each other, listen to their partner patiently and give constructive comments (Alayi, Ahmadi Gatab & Babaei Zad Khamene, 2011). Thus, an efficient communication skill can provide strong ability to solve problems, prevent conflict, increase respect, trust and effective understanding between couples (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

Conflict resolution is another important component of this instrument. Actually, conflict is an inevitable part of human life and it is a common occurrence between

people in different situations both in personal life and in the community. Conflict has a dual role in close relationships; in fact, it can be effective and play a positive role or be negative and cause argument and stress in close relationships (Cummings, Kouros & Papp, 2007). To be precise, how couples act in situation of conflict is more important than the area and frequency of conflict (Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002). Using a logical method of conflict resolution can have a remarkable effect on decreasing marital difficulties and solving problems among couples (Cummings et al., 2007). Conflict resolution also has a significant relationship with marital satisfaction and plays an important role in intact marriage (Kurdek, 1995; Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). Actually, constructive conflict resolution style lead to enrichment and success in marital life while destructive style such as avoidance and competition can damage healthy relationships among couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Zeidner & Kloda, 2013).

After the evaluation and assessment phase, the therapist and the client need to enter the treatment phase. There are many different treatment methods that more or less have shown their effects on marital quality regarding the changes that appear in the underlying factors after the intervention. In fact, there are some underlying factors, which cause difficulties and distress among couples and finally affect marital quality. These include cognitive distortion, early maladaptive schemas, attachment styles and behavioural problems (Atkinson, 2012; Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Riso, Du toit, Stein & Young, 2008). Schema therapy is a new treatment method developed by Young and colleagues that its core concept consists of these factors (Young, 1990, 1999; Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2003). Thus, the significant effect of schema therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution can be expected as the main objective for this study.

Young et al. (2003) defined schema as “a cognitive propositional construct which represent generalities themes, or patterns of cognitive content”. Schema includes two concepts: assumptions and standards. “Assumptions are beliefs about the nature of close relationships in general as well as specific people” (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Riso et al., 2008). “Standards are beliefs about the way relationships should be or the way partners should behave”. Consequently, assumptions and standards have inflexible and irrational features, which control the manners, feelings and also navigate marriage trough conflict and distress (Young et al., 2003).

Young et al. (2003) developed schema therapy for changing maladaptive schemas and mode. It was very impressive in helping couples by reducing difficulties and problems in marital relationship. Amani and Behzadi (2012) found that schema therapy is effective in increasing commitment and self-esteem of couples. Ziaea, Sepehri, Shamloo and Mashhadi (2013) revealed that there is a significant correlation between negative automatics thought and cognitive schemas, and marital satisfaction. Bahmani, Refahi and Ghaderi (2011)



indicated that schema therapy improved couples' functional relationship, especially expressing emotions and increasing problem-solving abilities.

Recent studies on couple therapy have revealed that early maladaptive schemas have underlying effects on conflicts and distress between couples. Therefore, schema therapy will be very useful in reducing couple's problems. Schema therapy increases awareness of couples about partners' needs and chronic difficulties, which lead to a repetitive and unhealthy cycle. Individual schema therapy and couple schema therapy are both effective in resolving couples' distress and conflict but schema couple therapy can accelerate the process of healing schemas as well as increasing forgiveness and acceptance abilities of couples (Atkinson, 2012).

Moreover, these days, schema therapists integrate mindfulness with different schema techniques to reinforce the process of treatment (Bricker & Labin, 2012). Actually, mindfulness is a mental state that involves observing and allowing one's thoughts and feelings as they arise in the present. It can be learned through directed attention exercises, and can be integrated with existing therapy methods and training programs for use with many psychological problems (Van Vreeswijk, Broersen & Schurink, 2014).

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

Studies show that moving to other countries has negative effects on the quality of marriages because of different kinds of issues such as adjusting with new conditions and dealing with sociocultural and psychological problems (Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko & Lu, 2011). In fact, low marital quality is a common concern among immigrants and international students, and those Iranian couples who have immigrated are not excluded from this concern. According to some research findings, moving to other countries is associated with divorce and low marital quality among Iranian couples (Asadinik, as cited in Madanian et al., 2013; Darvishpour, 2002; Naghdi, 2010; Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale & Chinichian, 2011).

Darvishpour (2002) and Naghdi (2010) conducted accurate researches in Sweden to survey the Iranians' living condition and concluded that the divorce rate is high among Iranian couples due to the conflicts that appear after the immigration. They mentioned that in spite of the welcoming culture, women have shown more adaptation potential compared to men. In fact, the immigration process uncovers some hidden differences and triggers the negative attitudes regarding them. As the result, having different feelings to the new place and its features causes serious conflicts, which result in divorce.

Shirpak et al. (2011) revealed that there are different reasons for the increase in divorce rate among Iranian couples after moving to other countries. Markedly, effective factors include changing roles of women from traditional to modern and increasing their awareness about their rights and social supports. Another significant factor is women's employment, which plays a key role in causing conflicts among couples because of changing marital roles and gender ideologies. Consequently, women do not accept authority and domination of men at home easily. Other important factors include the lack of family support, loneliness, loss of adjusting abilities, spending less time with family and language problems, which have negative effects on marital relationship and can eventually lead to divorce.

Malaysia has been chosen as a desirable country for many immigrants in this decade. Most of them are international students from different countries coming to Malaysia for education and seeking better life conditions (Madanian, Syed Mansor & Bin Omar, 2013). Many of these students are from Iran with one of the highest rates of international students in Malaysia (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013). According to the Iranian Embassy in Malaysia, more than 8000 Iranian students were studying in Malaysia in 2013. Certainly, Malaysia, as an appealing country in the case of immigration especially for Iranians, is not excluded from the other target countries. In this regard, some studies showed that international students and immigrants more or less deal with different adjustment problems in Malaysia (Ghoroghi, Hassan & Baba, 2012; Habil, 2002; Malakloulunthu & Selan, 2011).

Madanian et al. (2013), Salehy, Mahmud and Amat (2013) and Mosavi and Mahmud (2016) reported that a significant number of Iranian students in Malaysia have a considerable concern about their marriage and show low marital satisfaction because of a new situation, which they encounter after moving to Malaysia. This negative change has been observable in their communication patterns and conflict resolution styles as well. Notably, the most important issue affecting marital life is financial pressure. Based on these studies, this happens due to lack of work permits and funds for international students in Malaysia. In addition, commitment and sexual desire is declined after moving to other countries and has negative effects on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution. It seems that there is a major problem here, which needs to be addressed more. Any increasing in the rate of the immigrants who are not satisfied with their marriage may threaten the family basis and can affect the education of the Iranian community in Malaysia. To be precise, since it has been discussed and ascertained that low marital quality causes a lot of difficulties and problems among couples and can lead to divorce (Gottman, 2014), a huge impact ambushes the mental health of those immigrants who seek a peace and quiet place to live or study. Therefore, psychologists and counsellors basically try to prevent divorce through the appropriate interventions that can help couples to increase the quality of their relationships.

But, Bradbury and Lavner (2012) revealed the couple therapy and educational interventions are not quite satisfying to help couples and prevent distress. The

current models and approaches are incomplete and inadequate to solve couples' issues in all areas. The findings showed limitations and deficiencies in many scopes such as communication patterns and the conflict resolution. The study revealed that different relationship education programs and interventions have a moderate effect on improving couples relationships and decreasing distress among them particularly at 3- or 6-month follow-up assessments (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Gupta, Coyne & Beach, 2003; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin & Fawcett, 2008). Although many studies in this field claim that the current interventions are effective in reducing the marital distress, some further researches show that a significant number of clients failed to improve their relationships particularly at follow-up. Based on these researches, only in half of the cases, both partners could increase their marital satisfaction after treatments while around one third of couples showed deterioration in this regard (Snyder & Castellani, 2006). In addition, there are some weaknesses on existing interventions such as lack of workable and useful training skills and low ability of couples in implementing new skills in hard situations and also keeping their relationships in optimal condition after a period of time (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Consequently, psychologists and counsellors have to do more research in this field and increase their knowledge about couples' issues to develop new and fresh methods, skills, and strategies to help resolve these issues.

Snyder and Castellani (2006) have recommended the therapists to go beyond and try to use the "integrative" models, which are formed by the combination of different aspects and components of the initial methods. They believe that it may contribute to the best solution for couple therapy.

For this purpose, some components of existing therapies (CBT and Psychoanalysis) along with some important factors, which have significant effects on marital quality, including early maladaptive schemas, cognitive errors, emotional deprivation and dysfunctional modes have constituted the core structure of schema therapy as a new, innovative and integrative method in work with couples (Atkinson, 2012; Young et al., 2003).

Integrating mindfulness with different psychological approaches has been very common in recent years too. Segal, Williams and Teasdal (2002) predicted that mindfulness dramatically affects psychological treatment in future. Notably, mindfulness-based cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness-based stress reduction and also interventions mindfulness-related are very effective, applicable and prevalent these days. Informal surveys revealed that many schema therapists use mindfulness techniques in treatment protocols (Bricker & Labin, 2012).

There are many researches, which show a positive relationship between schema therapy and resolving depression, personality disorder, eating disorder and posttraumatic disorder (Malogiannis, Arntz, Spyropoulou, Tsartsara, Aggeli, Karveli, Vlavianou, Pehlivanidis & Papadimitriou, 2014; Napel-Schutz, Abma,

Bamelis & Arntz, 2011; Yarmohamadi Vasel, BorjLi, Golzari & Delavar, 2011). However, there is a lack of research in this field especially on couples and their marital issues, whereas the researcher expects that these two treatment methods would show significant effect in improving the marital quality of couples due to the observed effects of them on the underlying factors. As a result, the gap contributes to the scope for research about the effects of schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution, which have been defined in ENRICH questionnaire. Regarding the above discussion and aforementioned gap, this research will try to fill the research gap by determining the effects of mentioned therapies on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution of Iranian women living in Malaysia.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Marriage has been known as a public legal action and it is not just a secret romantic relationship between couples (Kertzer & Barbagli, 2001). It is a common phenomenon and usual occurrence happening in every society and each period of history (Wardle, 2011). Actually, intact and healthy marriage has many advantages that will be explained in detail here. First, it contributes to a safe environment to nurture children because children who live with their parents get higher marks in school and generally achieve more success in education (Elliott & Richards, 1991; Bernardi & Radl, 2014). Children who live with their parents are more likely to finish their school, go to university, take good jobs and show high life satisfaction. On the other hand, children whose parents have divorced encounter many economic problems such as unemployment, low income and poverty. Children of divorce are highly prone to addiction and substance abuse as teenagers and adults (Amato, 2014; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Sweeting, West & Richards, 1998). Second, from an economic standpoint, married couples make more money in comparison to single or cohabitant people (Lupton & Smith, 2002). Third, married people are healthier mentally and physically in comparison with single or divorced individuals, maybe because of more care and support they receive from their partners (Amato & Keith, 2001; Amato, 2014; Kessing, Agerbo & Mortensen, 2003). Therefore, married people have higher life expectancy in comparison with divorced or single people (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007).

The Iranian immigrants' mental health has been one of the main concerns of Iranian researchers across over the world and many solutions have also represented for the related issues. But, there are not enough appropriate researches about Iranians immigrated to Malaysia in this regard, despite the significant population of them. The few conducted researches on Iranian couples living in Malaysia indicated that the level of their marital quality is not satisfactory and a potential crisis threatens their families, which can be harmful for them and their children. As stated in Introduction, good marriage has many advantages for individuals and society while divorce devitalizes them and has destructive effects

on their lives. In order to maintain the Iranian immigrants' family life and improve couples' relationship more research in this field is necessary.

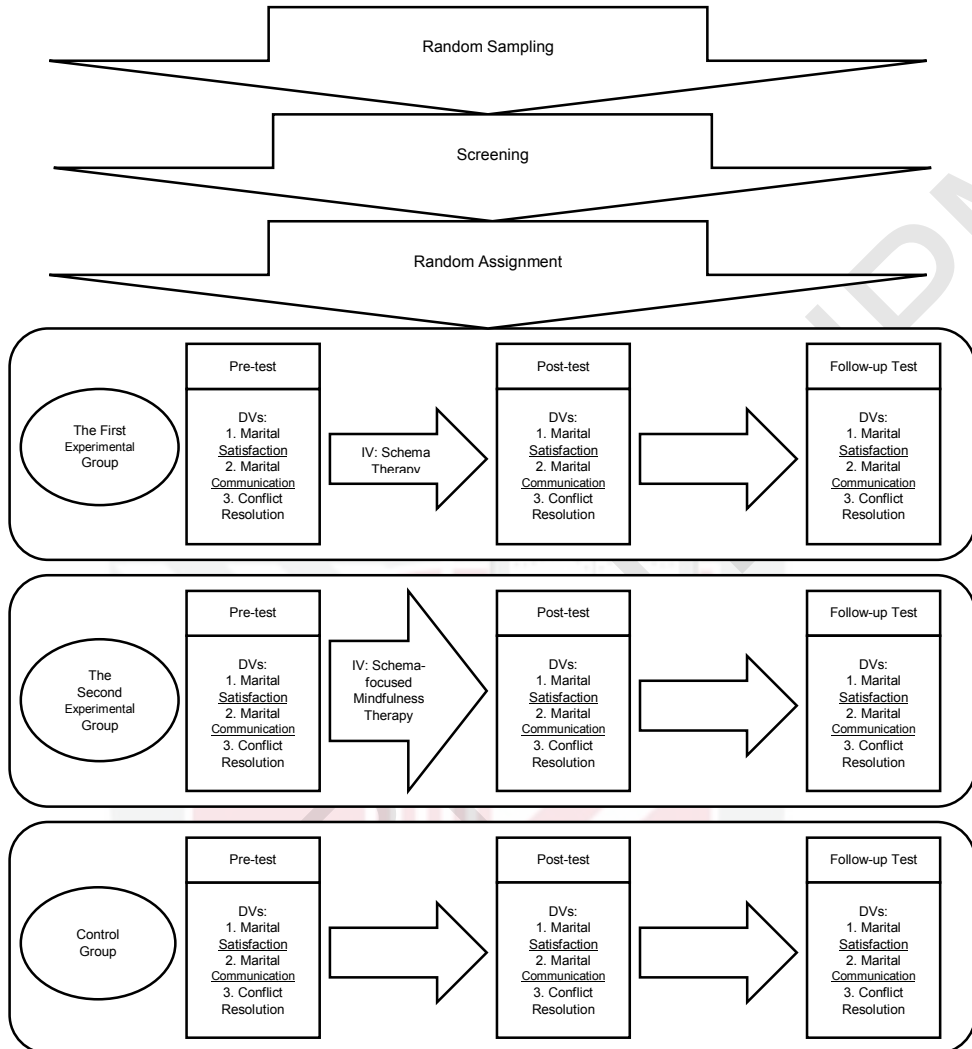
Since the majority of Iranians living in Malaysia are students, the negative effect of problematic marriage on their education is also expected. To the researcher as an Iranian student of UPM, the mental health and the educational success of Iranians in Malaysia matters and this study has been conducted in a way to improve marital quality of Iranian women, which can be beneficial for Iranian context of Malaysia mentally and educationally.

On the other hand, with increasing knowledge about communication, conflict resolution, and also marital satisfaction, the quality of marriage would be improved considerably. However, there seems to be a gap in investigating new methods and finding applied protocols to improve the quality of marriage and interactional skills. As mentioned before, maladaptive schemas and core beliefs play a significant role in causing couples' problems. Schema therapy can be very useful and efficient in solving couples' problems because it can be effective on wide ranges of mental problems such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, and difficulties of romantic relationship (Young et al., 2003). Each of these problems can cause marital distress.

Mindfulness is also a traditional method, which is used to relieve the stress, anxiety and pressures. It has shown a significant effect on mental health (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and certainly can be considered as a reliable treatment method for marital issues, especially low marital satisfaction (Burpee & Langer, 2005). In fact, new methods such as schema therapy and mindfulness have provided some strong techniques for psychologists and counsellors to prevent divorce and enhance the quality of marriages.

As it was stated above, the different aspects of schema therapy have been integrated with mindfulness techniques as another method (schema-focused mindfulness therapy) to improve the effectiveness of the treatment phase. However, there is no study in this regard to compare the effects of these two methods on a case and represent the suitable solutions.

To evaluate the effects of the mentioned combination and fill the research gap, the present study has used both method (as shown in Figure 1.1) to determine the effects of them on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution, which result in higher quality of marriage. To be precise, any change in each of these components is a strong evidence for the change in marital quality and provides sufficient information to compare the effects of mentioned therapies. From this point of view, this research is very new, pragmatic and practical, and will have constructive recommendations for psychologists and counsellors doing couple therapy.



**Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework**

## 1.5 Research Questions

The questions of this study are:

- i. Is there any effect of schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia?
- ii. Is there any difference between schema therapy, schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution at (T1) of Iranian women in Malaysia?

- iii. Is there any difference between schema therapy, schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution at (T2) of Iranian women in Malaysia?
- iv. Is there any difference between schema therapy, schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital satisfaction marital communication and conflict resolution (T3) of Iranian women in Malaysia?

## **1.6 Main Objective**

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the impact of schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia.

## **1.7 Sub Objectives**

The specific objects of this study include:

- i. To assess the effect of schema therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia
- ii. To find out the effect of schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia
- iii. To assess the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital satisfaction of Iranian women in Malaysian at (T1)
- iv. To find out the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital satisfaction of Iranian women in Malaysian at (T2)
- v. To examine the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital satisfaction of Iranian women in Malaysian at (T3)
- vi. To assess the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital communication of Iranian women in Malaysia at (T1)
- vii. To examine the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital communication of Iranian women in Malaysia at (T2)
- viii. To find out the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on marital communication of Iranian women in Malaysia at (T3)
- ix. To assess the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia at (T1)

- x. To find out the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia at (T2)
- xi. To assess the differences between schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy and control group on conflict resolution of Iranian women in Malaysia at (T3)

## **1.8 Research Hypotheses**

The hypotheses include:

H1: There is a significant difference in marital satisfaction between pre-test, post-test and follow-up test (T1, T2, T3) in the schema therapy experimental group.

H2: There is a significant difference in marital satisfaction between pre-test, post-test and follow-up test (T1, T2, T3) in the schema-focused mindfulness therapy experimental group.

H3: There is a significant difference in marital communication between pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test (T1, T2, T3) in the schema therapy experimental group.

H4: There is a significant difference in marital communication between pre-test, post-test and follow-up test (T1, T2, T3) in the schema-focused mindfulness therapy experimental group.

H5: There is a significant difference in conflict resolution between pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test (T1, T2, T3) in the schema therapy experimental group.

H6: There is a significant difference in conflict resolution between pre-test, post-test and follow-up test (T1, T2, T3) in the schema-focused mindfulness therapy experimental group.

H7: There are significant differences among three groups in marital satisfaction at pre-test (T1).

H8: There are significant differences among three groups in marital satisfaction at post-test (T2).



H9: There are significant differences among three groups in marital satisfaction at two-month follow-up (T3).

H10: There are significant differences among three groups in marital communication at pre-test (T1).

H11: There are significant differences among three groups in marital communication at post-test (T2).

H12: There are significant differences among three groups in marital communication at two-month follow-up (T3).

H13: There are significant differences among three groups in conflict resolution at pre-test (T1).

H14: There are significant differences among three groups in conflict resolution at post-test (T2).

H15: There are significant differences among three groups in conflict resolution at two-month follow-up (T3).

## **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

In this study, the researchers just assess the effectiveness of schema therapy and schema-focused mindfulness therapy on marital satisfaction, marital communication and conflict resolution. However, there are many different factors, which may have effects on these variables such as educational programs on TV or internet and other media.

In addition, all of the participants in this study are women, so it will cause lack of comparison between genders. Actually, finding a lot of Iranian couples in Malaysia who both were interested in participating in and continuing long-term group therapy was very difficult and woman showed more interest to participate. It is probably because of this fact that men are not interested to participate in psycho-educational programs and seek help to handle the situation generally (Mahalik, Good & Englar-Carlson, 2003). Anyway, it cannot be overlooked as a limitation.

Further, the sample of the study is small; therefore, the outcomes cannot be generalized without errors. Finally, follow-up sessions could suffer participant

inaccessibility since some students may travel to Iran during the course of the study.

## **1.10 Definition of Terms**

### **1.10.1 Conceptual Definitions**

#### **1.10.1.1 Schema Therapy**

“Schema therapy is an innovative, integrative therapy developed by Young and colleagues that significantly expands on traditional cognitive-behavioural treatments and concepts (Young, 1990, 1999). The therapy blends elements from constructivist and psychoanalytic schools into a rich, unifying conceptual and treatment model”. Schema therapy integrates some strategies including lifelong patterns, affective change techniques and the therapeutic relationship, which were already focused separately in cognitive-behavioural therapy in order to help the clients to change their negative patterns (Young et al., 2003).

#### **1.10.1.2 Schema-focused Mindfulness Therapy**

Schema-focused mindfulness therapy is the integration of mindfulness strategies with schema therapy as an organized and systematic protocol (Van Vreeswijk et al., 2014). Basically, mindfulness does not play a treating role in this method and it is combined in order to improve the effectiveness of the therapy. In fact, mindfulness techniques help the clients to be careful, diligent and patient during the treatment sessions (Bricker & Labin, 2012).

#### **1.10.1.3 Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is the “heart, or the core teaching, of Buddhist psychology” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), and it is “inherently a state of consciousness that involves consciously attending to one’s moment-to-moment experience”. Mindfulness is defined as being aware and conscious of the existing thoughts, feelings and experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

#### **1.10.1.4 Marital Satisfaction**

The term “marital satisfaction” refers to individuals’ subjective evaluation about their marital relationship and “satisfaction” means happiness, lack of distress and good quality (Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 2005). Marital satisfaction reveals general attitudes of partners towards their marriage. Marital satisfaction can be related to different personal factors such as needs, standards and demands of partners

in their relationships. Marital satisfaction is a general and global concept, which is subjective and appraises the marriage quality (Li & Fung 2011). Sometimes, marital satisfaction is interchanged with marital quality, while marital quality is generally used for marital adjustment, marital happiness and marital satisfaction.

### **1.10.1.5 Marital Communication**

Marital communication included two dimensions, i.e. verbal and nonverbal interaction. The first one is objective which means making what you say clear to other people; and the second one is related to body language which is more impressive than verbal interaction (Gladding, 2006). According to the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2007), "communication is defined as the transmission of information which may be verbal (oral or written) or nonverbal (nonverbal communication) for humans to relate and exchange ideas, knowledge, feelings, experiences and for many other interpersonal and social purposes."

### **1.10.1.6 Conflict Resolution**

Hocker and Wilmot (2013) defined conflict as "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, or interference from the other party in achieving their goals". Conflict resolution is trying to seek an effective solution for a conflict (Burton, 1993). It is about finding an alternative solution for incompatibility caused between two parties. This leads to the satisfaction of both sides, who are fulfilled about the desired result. According to the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2007), "conflict resolution" is defined as the reduction of discord and fiction between individuals or groups usually through the use of active strategies, such as conciliation, negotiation and bargaining.

## **1.10.2 Operational Definition**

### **1.10.2.1 Schema Therapy**

In this study, schema therapy includes therapy sessions based on a protocol of treatment, which last for eighteen one-hour and half sessions. The term of therapy refers to giving information, doing exercises and conducting assignments about maladaptive schemas, coping modes and coping styles, which are the patterns of people's psychological problems. In this regard, some cognitive, behavioural and experiential techniques are used to provide the appropriate solution for the participants.

### **1.10.2.2 Schema-focused Mindfulness Therapy**

In this study, schema-focused mindfulness therapy refers to the combination of schema therapy strategies and mindfulness techniques in eighteen two-hour therapy sessions. The main concept of this therapy includes early maladaptive schemas, coping modes and coping styles, which are addressed through the schema therapy protocol. In addition, the mindfulness trainings such as mindfulness about the environment, mindfulness in breathing or mindfulness of schema coping are done during the sessions.

### **1.10.2.3 Marital Satisfaction**

The scores of participants' responses to 10 items of a sub-scale of the Persian version of ENRICH questionnaire are the indicators of their marital satisfaction in the present study. In fact, their response to each question is ranked based on the severity and scored from 1 to 5. The total of 10 scores will be the score of participant's marital satisfaction.

### **1.10.2.4 Marital Communication**

In this study, marital communication refers to the sum scores of 10 items of the sub-scale of the Persian version of ENRICH questionnaire. Similarly, the total score of 10 items will be the score of this sub-scale.

### **1.10.2.5 Conflict Resolution**

The researcher analyzed the score of participants' conflict resolution, using the conflict resolution sub-scale of the Persian version of ENRICH questionnaire. There are also 10 items for this sub-scale, which must be answered by the participants. The sum of the scores will be the participant's conflict resolution score.

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