

Effects of Psychoeducational Group on Muslim Spouse's Attachment Dimension: A Randomized Control Trial

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to examine the effects of psychoeducational group on attachment dimension among Muslim spouses. The randomized controlled trials (randomized control group design with pretest, posttest and follow up test) was utilized in this study. Thirty eight spouses were randomly assigned to either experimental group (19 spouses) or control group (19 spouses). Participants in experimental group received a treatment of psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) for 6 weeks (2 h/week). Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) was utilized to obtain the data for attachment dimensions (anxiety and avoidance) in three periods of time (pretest, posttest and follow up). A mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was used to test the differences between the mean scores of pretest, posttest and follow up test within both experimental and control group. The findings of this study indicate that there are significant main effect of time, $F(2,72) = 5.14, p < 0.05$ and group, $F(1,72) = 7.77, p < 0.05$ for avoidance dimension. However, for anxiety dimension, there are no significant main effect of time and group. The findings of this study suggest that psychoeducational group helps improves attachment dimension of avoidance among Muslim spouses.

Key words: Psycho-spiritual, psychoeducational group, attachment, marriage, ANOVA

INTRODUCTION

Attachment theory is appropriate for understanding the attachment in adulthood especially in marriage relationships. This theory was originally developed to understand the emotional bond between infants and caregivers (Bowlby, 1969) and was then extended by Hazan and Shaver (1987) to understand the emotional bond among adults in the romantic relationship context. Hazan and Shaver (1987) recommended that adult romantic affection is a process of attachment whereby the emotional connection is parallel with the emotional connection between infants and their caregivers. In addition, the objective of the attachment system is similar both in infancy and adulthood that is, achieving the realization of safety, certainty and comfort by preserving closeness to the attachment figures. Selcuk *et al.* (2010) stated that spouses switch as caregivers as the most important attachment figures in adult attachment.

There are three adult attachment styles as suggested by Hazan and Shaver (1987) that are similar to children's attachment process such as feeling secure, anxious and avoidant. A secure adult was defined as a person who

experienced affections in their relationship as joyful, pleasant and believing in their partners. In this style of attachment, adults emphasized their capacity to assist and direct their partners notwithstanding their mistakes and had long lasting relationship. The secure couples may feel assured that the spouses are available when needed. An avoidant adult was characterized by fear of affection, uncomfortable with closeness and lack of trust while an anxious adult wished for proximity or affections from their partners but lacked self-assurance in their partner's responsiveness. These feelings and realizations about partners have great significance for the social and psychological functioning.

Studies have found that these attachment styles are found to be determinants of relationship quality (Knoke *et al.*, 2010). It had been well documented by studies there were associations between relationship satisfaction and adult attachment styles (Mikulincer *et al.*, 2002; Brassard *et al.*, 2009). A secure attachment style characterized by intimacy, commitment, trust and satisfaction were associated with greater relationship satisfaction (Collins and Read, 1990; Bippus and Rollin, 2003; Shi, 2003; Timm and Keiley, 2011). It was reported

securely attached spouses were more satisfied with their relationships and had a greater level of stability and proximity, longer lasting relationships and the lowest possibility of separation as compared to the avoidant attachment spouses (Monteoliva and Garcia, 2005).

Researches on relationships between marital dissatisfaction and attachment insecurity had been documented as well. In several longitudinal and cross-sectional studies it was found both attachment-related avoidance and attachment-related anxiety were positively related to marital dissatisfaction (Davila and Bradbury, 2001; Rholes *et al.*, 2006). Likewise, insecure attachment had low correlations with satisfactory or cohesive relationships among partners (Monteoliva and Garcia, 2005; Towler and Stuhlmacher, 2013) but a higher probability of divorces and a higher number of breakups (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick and Davis, 1994; Monteoliva and Garcia, 2005).

The findings of these studies gave valuable information that attachment is important due to its role in forming the spouse's behaviors with their partners. Attachment was identified as another predictor contributing to a successful marriage relationship (Brassard *et al.*, 2009) and therefore, this element cannot be ignored in discussing marital issues.

The importance of attachment in marriage relationship has raised an interesting question for research on couple interventions on how to help married couples improved their quality of attachment. Another question is to what extent couple intervention affects couple's attachment styles or attachment dimensions. Various interventions have been developed with an eye toward preventing relationship distress, most commonly offered in the United States in the form of marriage enrichment programs such as Prevention Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Relationship Enhancement (RE) and Couple Communication (CC). These marriage enrichment programs used a psychoeducational approach in educating married couples; typically focus on teaching couple's effective communication and problem solving skills. Even though research on prevention programs and couple therapy is encouraging in western countries, the research findings pertaining to the effects of such intervention on attachment dimension are limited.

Several studies have shown that attachment-based group therapy promoted changes in interpersonal functioning and more secure attachments among couples (Kilmann *et al.*, 1999). Interestingly, they identified such treatment had the most positive effect on participants who were fearful-avoidant attachment pattern (high anxiety and high avoidance). Besides, a few other

previous studies found positive changes in attachment related to group therapy (Kirchmann *et al.*, 2012; Tasca *et al.*, 2007).

However, there are studies reported that the attachment dimensions did not show any changes after the intervention (Benson *et al.*, 2013; Lawson *et al.*, 2006). These mixed findings need to gain further insights to know the effects of intervention on attachment styles or attachment dimension. Thus, a close examination of the research findings associated with the impact of intervention on attachment is critical for furthering knowledge in this area.

In addition studies on the effects of such intervention among married couples in Muslim background are limited as well. Therefore in an effort to increase the reach of couple interventions on attachment, this study attempts to examine the effects of a psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) on attachment dimension (avoidance and anxiety) among Muslim spouses. Specifically, our aim was to assess the effects of the intervention on attachment. We hypothesized that the intervention of MP-SI has a positive effects on attachment (avoidance and anxiety attachment).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: The participants were 76 Muslim (38 couples) which were 38 males (50%) and 38 females (50%). The participants were equally distributed by gender for both experimental and control groups. Most of the participants in the experimental group were within 29-32 years of age. Based on marital status, most of them were married for about 3-5 years. In terms of education level, most of the participants in both groups have SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) which involved a total of 50 out of 76 participants. In terms of the number of children, majority of the participants have two children.

Measures

Demographics: The demographics section of the initial questionnaire asked spouses to provide their age, gender, level of education, duration of marriage and number of children.

Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) Othman (2011): The Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) was developed by Othman (2011). The UPI has 69 items. Each items is rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (I never do this) to 6 (I always do this). This instrument was developed for measuring and assessing Muslim personality from the Islamic perspective. The items were constructed based on the Holy Quran and the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad SAW. There are three constructs

measured in UPI. The constructs are worship, trust and knowledge. The reliability for UPI in this study is 0.95. For this study, scores of UPI was used as a characteristic in process of matching the participants to assign participants either in the experimental group or control group.

Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) Collins (1996): The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) was used to measure adult attachment among Muslim spouses in this study. The RAAS was designed by Collins (1996). It is an 18 item self-report that consists of three attachment subscales; close, depend and anxiety. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from (not at all characteristic of me) 1-5 (very characteristic of me). However, there is another alternative for the researcher to measure attachment based on two dimensions; avoidance and anxiety (Collins, 1996). For the purpose of this study, attachment among husbands and wives was measured based on these two dimensions.

Procedure: Participants in this study were identified based on certain criteria which is the age of participant is between 25-40 years have an educational level at least up to primary six and live together with respective spouses at the time of participations in the study. Those who met these criteria were asked to respond to a set of questionnaire which consists of UPI and RAAS. These questionnaires were utilized to measure personality and attachment among participants. The scores of this set of questionnaires were considered as pretest scores. Those who were scored moderate for these questionnaires were selected to participate in this study. The sampling procedure for this study is presented in Fig. 1.

After the process of assigning participants either in the control group or the experimental group, the treatment of MP-SI was carried out for 6 weeks for the participants in the experimental group. These participants were met for 2 h regularly once a week. These participants were divided into two groups. Each group consisted of 18-19 participants. The participants had an opportunity to select the day for treatment either Friday or Saturday. The sessions of treatment were conducted from 3.00-5.00 p.m.

In phase of post treatment, posttest and follow up test was administered. A posttest was given to both groups to measure participant's attachment after 2 weeks the intervention of MP-SI ends. Then, two months after the administration of posttest, the researcher administered a follow up test. The same instruments were used in pretest, posttest and follow up test. The scores of these instruments were compared to examine the effects of the treatment on attachment dimension among participants in both groups.

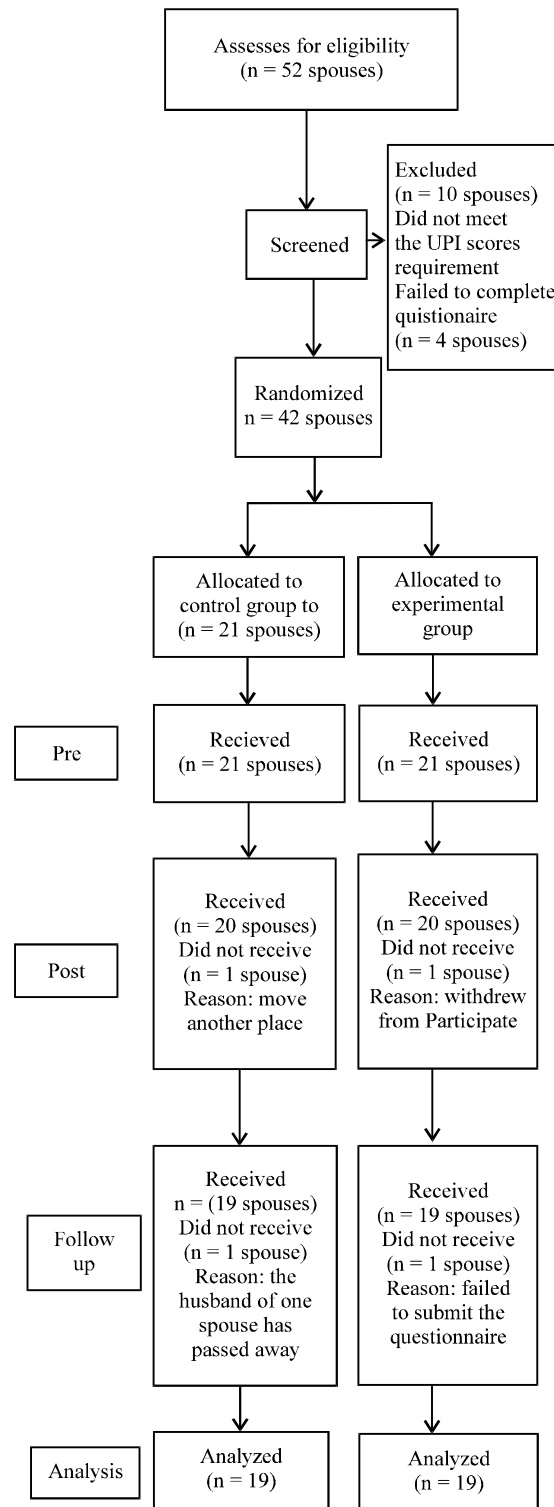


Fig. 1: Participant flow chart following consort guidelines

Treatment: A psychoeducational group known as Marital Psycho-Spiritual Interventional (MP-SI) is a treatment

Table 1: Content of psychoeducational group-MP-SI

Session	Topics
1	Introduction to the program and its structure; issues in marriage relationship and factors of divorce
2	The Islamic marriage. The concept of Islamic marriage; role and responsibility of husband and wife as prescribed by Islam; purpose of marriage in Islam
3	The importance and relationship between knowledge, practice and faith
4	The importance role of qalb (heart) in human personality development
5	The concept of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of soul) in marriage relationship and its practical means
6	The meaning of communication and its importance in marriage
7	Prevention of the ways in handling negative communication
8	The importance of non-verbal communication
9	An Islamic perspective regarding on conflict in marriage
10	Steps and skills in handling conflict based on Islamic conflict perspective
11	A concept of Islamic forgiveness and a frame work for working through grudges and resentment
12	Tranquility, love with a passion and mercy: An importance elements highlighted in the Holy Quran

used in this study. It is a psychoeducational group that emphasizes the importance of religious and spiritual practices in the Muslim marriage relationship. It is an approach that integrates knowledge and skills in enhancing marriage relationship. This intervention specifically developed to help Muslim couples build a good relationship with God with themselves and with their respective spouses.

The knowledge of the Holy Quran and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW was highlighted in MP-SI to increase spiritual development among Muslim couples to become a good husband and a good wife. The content of this intervention takes into account the views of Holy Quran on the fact of man's creation which consists of four importance elements, nafs (soul), aql (intellect), qalb (heart) and ruh (spirit). These elements were emphasized in the MP-SI in context of producing good husbands and good wives according to Islam.

The participants of this psychoeducational group were taught specific skills and knowledge to strengthen marriage relationship. Rather than teach particular forms of couple communication, conflict resolution skill, this psychoeducational group teach couples on how Islamic spiritual can help husbands and wives to be a good Muslim couple as well.

This intervention is a structured format. In each session, the participants were exposed with the knowledge of Islamic marriage, the skills to communicate effectively, work as team to work as team to resolve conflicts, manage conflicts without damaging closeness, preserve and enhance marriage relationship through forgiveness, sakinah (tranquility), mawaddah (love with passion) and rahmah (mercy).

Each session begins with a follow up discussion on the topics from previous session. Then, new topics were introduced and were explained followed by participant's discussion on the topics. The topics and the contents delivered for each session in this psychoeducational group are briefly described as follow (Table 1).

Data analysis: Data was analyzed using a mixed between-within ANOVA with anxiety and avoidance dimension scores as dependent variables and psychoeducational group of MP-SI as the independent variable, analyzed over three time periods and between groups. This statistical test was used to examine whether there are main effect of time and group and interaction effect of time by gender and group by gender.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses: Preliminary checks on the data revealed no violations of the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance. There also was no violation for the assumption of sphericity as indicated by the output in Mauchly's Test of Sphericity, $\chi^2(2) = 2.69$, $p > 0.05$. The results of an independent sample t-test showed that randomization of the 38 spouses yielded groups with no significant differences on avoidance ($t = -0.00$, $p > 0.05$) and anxiety ($t = -0.18$, $p > 0.05$) dimensions at pretest between experimental and control group.

Main analyses: The results relating to research hypotheses were as follow.

Effects of time on avoidance dimension: As shown in Table 2, the findings revealed that there are significant main effects of time on avoidance dimension, $F(2,72) = 5.14$, $p < 0.05$, partial eta squared = 0.07. According to the guidelines of effect size for ANOVA proposed by Cohen (1988), the effect size for time in this study can be considered as moderate effect which represented 7% of the variances in the avoidance mean scores. The results showed that the follow up test score ($M = 1.60$) was significantly lower than the posttest ($M = 1.65$) and the pretest ($M = 1.75$) scores. Therefore, it demonstrated that the avoidance dimension mean scores decreased significantly for the three time periods.

Table 2: Effects of time on avoidance dimension

Effect	df	F-value	Sig.	Partial η^2
Time	2.72	5.14	0.00	0.07

Table 3: Effects of group on avoidance dimension

Effect	df	F-value	Sig.	Partial η^2
Time	1.72	5.14	0.00	0.10

Table 4: Effects of time on anxiety dimension

Effect	df	F-value	Sig.	Partial η^2
Time	2.72	0.23	0.79	0.00

Table 5: Effects of group on anxiety dimension

Effect	df	F-value	Sig.	Partial η^2
Time	1.72	0.32	0.58	0.00

Effects of group on avoidance dimension: Table 3 shows that there are significant effect of groups on avoidness dimension, $F(1.72) = 7.77, p < 0.05$. The partial eta squared is 0.10 which can be referred as a moderate effect size for group and representing 10% of the variances in the avoidance scores explained by group. A comparison of the total mean scores of avoidance between these two groups showed the total mean scores of the experimental group ($M = 1.52$) was lower than that of the control group ($M = 1.81$). This result indicated that the participants in the experimental group reduced more in their avoidance dimension mean scores than those in the control group.

Interaction effects of time and groups by gender on avoidance dimension: The finding shows that there are no significant interaction effects of time by gender, $F(2.72) = 0.12, p > 0.05$ and group by gender, $F(1.72) = 0.71, p > 0.05$ for the avoidance mean scores. These findings demonstrated that the changes in avoidance mean scores across time and between groups were not significantly different for male and female participants.

Effects of time on anxiety dimension: Table 4 shows that there are no significant main effects of time on anxiety dimension, $F(2.72) = 0.23, p > 0.05$. This suggested there were no changes in the anxiety mean scores across the three time periods.

Effects of groups on anxiety dimension: Table 5 shows that there was no statistically significant effect for group, $F(1.72) = 0.32, p > 0.05$. This result indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean score of anxiety between the experimental and control groups. However, a comparison between these two groups on the total mean of anxiety showed the total mean scores of the experimental group at posttest ($M = 2.47$) which was lower than the mean scores of the control group ($M = 2.66$).

Besides, the total anxiety mean scores of the experimental group at the follow up test ($M = 2.54$) were also lower than that of control group ($M = 2.63$). These results indicated the participants' anxiety mean scores in the experimental group at posttest and follow up test were lower than that of the control group but still statistically insignificant.

Interaction effects of time and groups by gender on anxiety dimension: The results showed that there were no significant interaction effects of time by gender, $F(2.72) = 0.90, p > 0.05$ and group by gender, $F(1.72) = 0.07, p > 0.05$ for the anxiety mean scores. These findings demonstrated that the changes in anxiety mean scores across time and between groups were not significantly different for male and female participants.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the effects of psychoeducational group of MP-SI in reducing attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety) among Muslim spouses. As hypothesized, a reduction in avoidance dimension did occur following the MP-SI. The findings revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores for the avoidance dimension across the three time periods (pretest, posttest and the follow up test).

Participants in the experimental group have decreased in avoidance compared to those in the control group. It demonstrated that a psychoeducational group produced a moderate effect size in reducing avoidance from pretest to follow up test. The changes in the avoidance dimension mean scores across time and between groups were not significantly different for male and female participants.

This finding supported previous studies using different population and intervention, such as one of the early empirical researches of Kilmann *et al.* (1999) who found attachment-based group therapy promoted changes in interpersonal functioning and more secure attachments. Interestingly, they identified such treatment had the most positive effect on participants who were fearful-avoidant attachment pattern (high anxiety and high avoidance).

Besides, a few other previous studies found positive changes in attachment related to group therapy (Kirchmann *et al.*, 2012; Tasca *et al.*, 2007). Impressively, Kirchmann *et al.* (2012) revealed the avoidance was decreased after the group therapy and was stable after the one year follow-up test. Furthermore, the findings of this study were in line with the study by Lin *et al.* (2013), where the participants with attachment insecurity could

be improved through the intervention program. On the other hand, the findings of this study contradicted the results of the studies where the attachment dimensions did not show any changes (Benson *et al.*, 2013; Lawson *et al.*, 2006).

For anxiety dimension, a reduction in anxiety dimension did not occur following the MP-SI. The findings have shown that there were no statistically significant differences in the mean scores for the anxiety dimensions across three time periods and also there was no significant difference between the experimental and control group mean score. These findings were in line with a previous study by Benson *et al.* (2013) who used different population and intervention. Benson *et al.* (2013) studied how the role of behavioral couple therapy to secure attachment in distressed couples. The study aimed to assess the changes in anxiety related to attachment over the course of the therapy. The findings in this study showed the mean scores for anxiety did not change. The outcome patterns as a result of this treatment strategy were steady during the course of therapy.

These present findings were also consistent with the research conducted by Lawson *et al.* (2006) who found there were no significant changes from pre to post treatment for the anxiety dimensions. However, these findings found to be inconsistent with other studies such as Kirchmann *et al.* (2012) and Tasca *et al.* (2007) who provided evidences that the group intervention programs effectively reduced attachment related to anxiety. Tasca *et al.* (2007) stated that attachment anxiety scales (need for approval, preoccupied-two of which measure aspects of anxiety) would show positive changes as a result of therapy.

CONCLUSION

MP-SI is an alternative intervention in the form of psychoeducational group to help Muslim spouses enhance their attachment and finally strengthening marriage relationship according to Islamic way. The knowledge pertaining to marriage relationship that derived from Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad SAW could help Muslim spouses prevent their relationship from various marital conflicts.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of the present study concerns the use of only self-report data whereby the subjects may have the tendency to give socially acceptable answers and tend to give more favorable self-reports. A second limitation is that this study experimentally investigates the

effectiveness of MP-SI on attachment among Muslim spouses and it focuses on Islamic psycho-spiritual approach whereby the Holy Quran and the sunnah were used as sources of knowledge and skills for marriage relationships. Thus, the result of this study may not necessarily apply to another intervention that incorporates other techniques, skills and approaches. A third limitation is that the unit analyses of this study are husband and wife and statistical tests compute mean scores for each participant and not by couples.

The findings of this study leads to a wide range of implications for practice especially for Muslim married couples, marriage counselors and to the public as well. Firstly, this study is an empirical research on the impact of Islamic psycho-spiritual approach on human growth. This intervention could be recognized as a “marital booster” for strengthening marriage relationship among Muslim married couples. It also can be applied as a prevention of many marital conflicts that lead to marital distress and marital dissolution.

An Islamic psycho-spiritual approach utilized in the MP-SI provides an essential tool for good and blessed marriage which is in line with the viewpoint that religion has a positive impact and promotes the most positive changes. This study has provided insight that psycho-spiritual approach is perceived as helpful when the Muslim married couples are taught with the knowledge derived from Holy Quran and sunnah of Prophet Muhammad SAW. It brings awareness to all that the knowledge from these sources is the way to strengthen marriage relationship. Thus, it could not be neglected by Muslim couples even though there are many ways to build a good relation between husbands and wives.

IMPLICATIONS

Further implication for practice is connected to marriage counselor. Besides conducting counseling session for client among married couples, marriage counselor also can conduct psychoeducational group that are proposed in this study. Through this intervention, family and marriage counselors can teach a positive elements and ways to handle marriage relationship.

A psychoeducational approach may expand knowledge, guiding to improvements in manners and better skills to deal with conflict in marriage. Therefore, there is a need for counselors to increase the knowledge and expertise to conduct the psychoeducational group such as MP-SI.

Another practical implication is the importance of knowledge in marriage. In Islam, the goal of marriage is to worship to Allah SWT in order to gain happiness in the world and in the hereafter. This goal can't be achieved without knowledge. The importance of knowledge has stated in the Holy Quran. Practicing and disseminating the knowledge of Islam is a key ingredient to prevent any problem in marriage life. Therefore, this study is an attempt to emphasize that everyone who wants to be good husbands and good wives should have knowledge and most important, should practice the knowledge of Islam. This knowledge can be obtained from various sources and one of the sources is through the intervention that is suggested in this study.

Future research could requires further studies to be conducted which represent more diversity of participant's demographic such as differences in location, length of married life, age, level of education, number of children and socio-economic conditions; examines the longer term effects, a sixth month or even one year follow up to examine whether the effects of MP-SI are temporary or more lasting; includes couples with low marital quality.

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