

## EFFECTIVENESS OF MARITAL PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL INTERVENTION (MP-SI) ON COMMUNICATION AMONG MUSLIM HUSBANDS AND WIVES

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI) on communication among Muslim husbands and wives at Felda in Kedah. The randomized controlled trials (randomized control group design with pretest, posttest and follow up test) was used in this study. The experimental and control group of this study composed of a total of 76 participants, 38 in experimental group and 38 in control group. Participants in experimental group received a treatment of MP-SI for 6 weeks (2 hours per week). Marital Communication Inventory (MCI) was utilized to obtain the data for communication in three times (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  $F(2, 73) = 32.31, p < .05$ , main effect of group  $F(1, 74) = 15.37, p < .05$ , and interaction effects for time and group,  $F(2, 73) = 22.75, p < .05$ . The findings revealed that communication among Muslim husbands and wives was significantly improved with the treatment of MP-SI.

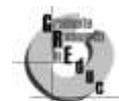
Keywords: psycho-spiritual, communication, MP-SI

### **Introduction**

Marriage is a great institution. It was recognized by every major religion in the world as a sacred relationship and a fundamental part for the survival of generations. Studies have shown that married couples have a positive psychological well-being (Williams, 2003; Simon, 2002) and they have an opportunity to achieve exceptionally high level of intimacy, trust, support, and meaningful life. However, issue of marital conflict and marital dissolution is inevitable. The divorce rate has increased throughout the world. In Asian countries, the divorce rate has increased quite dramatically especially in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (Huang, 2005). In Malaysia, even though the divorce rate seems small compared to other countries such as United States, Australia and Canada (Chan & Mohamad Sharif Mustaffa, 2008), divorce rates among Muslim married couples increase every year. According to the statistic released by Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), the divorce rates among Muslim couples has increase to 28 035 cases in 2010 (JAKIM, 2012). In 2009, it was reported that Muslim couples get divorced every 15 minutes (Berita Harian, March, 2011). This report is quite alarming and should be addressed by all parties.

There are many factors that lead to marital distress and divorce. Studies have shown that the marital distress and divorce was associated with various factors such as couples' personality (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002), communication (Gottman & Silver, 1994), conflict resolution skills (Russell-Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001), interpersonal processes such as forgiveness and sacrifice (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007), and also today's rapid growth and urbanization (Huang, 2005). In western countries, several approaches have been made to overcome marital conflict and marital dissolution. There are explosions of interest in an attention to marriage enrichment programs for couples to address marital distress in preventive manner. A variety of marriage enrichment program with regard to improvements of marital quality and marital skills among couples was developed such as Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Relationship Enhancement (RE), Couple Communication Program, and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment (Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller, 2004). There are also faith-based marriage enrichment programs such as SANCTUS (Sager & Sager, 2005), and Recovery of Hope (Giblin & Combs as cited in Sager & Sager, 2005). Studies have shown that these programs demonstrated efficacy in increasing marital adjustment (Kalkan, & Ersanli, 2008), improving marital satisfaction and married couples' psychological well-being (Pihet, Bodenmann, Cina, Widmen, & Shantinath, 2007).

Taking into account the effectiveness of marriage enrichment program in western countries in enhancing marriage relationship and might reduce the rate of divorce, there is a need for the marriage enrichment program in effort to help Muslim couples in Malaysia as well.



However, for Muslim where religion and spiritual is an important dimension, there is a need for the programs that applying psycho-spiritual approach in effort to strengthen marriage relationship (Siti Aishah Hassan & Maznah Baba, 2008; Siti Aishah Hassan, 2011). Hence, this study proposed the marital intervention namely Marital Psycho-Spiritual Intervention (MP-SI). It is an intervention that emphasizes the importance of practicing the knowledge in the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet SAW in order to enhance the Muslim couples' relationship. Through this intervention, husbands and wives were taught with topic related to marriage relationship such as the goal of Islamic marriage, *tazkiyatun nafs* (the process of purification of soul), communication according to Islamic perspective, conflict resolution, and elements of peace, tranquility and loves in marriage.

The MP-SI conducted in this study are expected to help Muslim husbands and wives improving the quality of communication, which is the pertinent element in relationship satisfaction (Egeci&Gencoz, 2011; Burchard, Yarhouse, Kilian, Worthington, Berry, & Carter, 2003; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Even though, this element is seen as a vehicle for understanding, loves, help, and entertainment between husbands and wives, it's also has been cited as a leading cause of relationship dissolution among married couples (Burchard et al. 2003). Usually, the negative interaction lead to decreased intimacy, weaker relationships, and ultimately divorce (Gottman & Notarious, 2002). As might be expected, positive communication is associated with satisfaction and negative communication with dissatisfaction. This expectation was proven with research conducted by Christensen, Eldridge, Catta-Preta, Lim and Santaga in 2006 which their finding shows that constructive communication did significantly predict satisfaction while the demand withdraw interaction pattern is associated with relationship dissatisfaction. The findings of these studies signify that relationship satisfaction and stability in marriage are closely tied to the quality of couples' communication. Every married couples should aware that an effort to learn effective skill of communication is noteworthy and marriage intervention such as MP-SI is a platform to help them improve the quality of communication. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of MP-SI in improving communication among Muslim husbands and wife at Felda in Kedah.

## Methodology

### Research Design

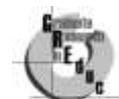
The research design used in this study was experimental design (randomized control group design with pretest, posttest and follow up). In this study, participants were assigned into two groups (experimental and control) through process of randomization. The independent variable or the treatment for this study is in the form of MP-SI. A pretest was conducted before the experiment to determine the scores of communication for both groups prior to the treatment. The experimental group was received a treatment for a period of 6 weeks, while the control group did not receive a treatment. Both groups were given a posttest, two weeks after the treatment. Then after two months, a follow up test was carried out to control group and experimental group.

### Population and sampling

The target population of this study is the husbands and wives in 15 FELDA in Kedah. This is the population which the results of the study are intended to generalize. However, this target population is rarely available (Frankel & Wallen, 2006). Therefore, the researcher used the accessible population among husbands and wives who lives in FELDA Laka Selatan. This FELDA is the one of the 15 FELDA in Kedah. This accessible population is the population of research participants that is practically available to the researcher and the population that researcher is able to generalize.

### Determining the sample size

For this study, the sample size was determined based on the factors that proposed by Cohen (1988). According to Cohen (1988), the concept of power analysis which is defined as the probability of rejecting a false-null hypothesis is an important in determining sample size. Conventionally, the power of statistical test is .80 (which means correctly reject a false-null



hypothesis 80% of the time). The power of statistical test is determined by the alpha level, the sample size, and the effect size. These three factors are related. The sample size can be determined after the power, alpha level, and the effect size is known. For this study, the power is set at .80, an alpha level is .05, and the expected effect size is large. Based on the sample size table (Cohen, 1988, Table 8.4.4, p. 384), the number of participants needed in this study for expected large effect size at recommended power of .80 and alpha level .05 is 26 for each group. In this study, the researcher used 38 participants for each groups and the total participants are 76 as shown in the Table1.

**Table1. Sample Size**

Group	No. of Participants		Total
	Male	Female	
Experiment	19	19	38
Control	19	19	38
Total	38	38	76

### Screening and selection of participants

The screening and selection of participants in this study was conducted before the treatment begins. The participants were screened based on certain criteria such as the aged is 25 years and above, level of education at least up to primary six and live together with the spouse at the time of their participations in the study. The participants who met these criteria were asked to respond to the two questionnaires; Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) and Marital Communication Inventory (MCI).

The UPI was used to assess the level of participants' personality from the Islamic psycho-spiritual dimension, while MCI to measure participants' communication. The participants who have achieved moderate score in UPI were selected to participate in the study whereas participants who either have achieved the lowest score or the highest score were excluded. The purpose of this screening process is to avoid offering the treatment of MP-SI to the participants who have poor personality especially in Islamic psycho-spiritual dimension.

### Measurement

#### Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI; Noraini Othman, 2011)

The Ummatic Personality Inventory (UPI) was developed by Noraini Othman (2011). The UPI has 69 items. Each items is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (usually). 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). This instrument is differing from other instrument personality in terms of using psycho-spiritual dimension. The term ummatic personality refers to "the characteristics of an individual that are in accordance with Islamic spirituality, as described in the Quran and the Sunnah" (Noraini Othman, 2011, p. 38). There are three constructs in UPI. The constructs are worship, trust, and knowledge.

#### Marital Communication Inventory (MCI; Bienvenu, 1970)

Communication in this study was measured by the Marital Communication Inventory (MCI). The MCI was developed by Bienvenu in 1970. This inventory is widely used in evaluating marriage enrichment program because the content of most of these programs focuses on communication which is evaluated in the MCI (Anderson, 1984). This instrument measures the communication couples' behaviors and attitudes. Some items refer to the behavior of the subject, some to the behavior of the subject's spouse, and others to the behavior of the couple as a unit. This instrument is a self-report questionnaire with separate forms for husbands and for wives. Form F for females and form M for males. The forms differ only in the use of the term "husband" and "wife" when referring to the subject's spouse. The MCI has 46 item self-inventory. Each



items is rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (usually). The MCI is scored by summing the raw scores to obtain total score which may range from 0 to 138. The higher score indicating good communication.

### Procedure

The research procedure for this study consists of three phases; pretreatment, treatment, and post treatment. During the phase of pretreatment, the screening process of participants, administration of pretest, and assigning participants into groups was carried out. Then it's followed by phase of treatment whereby the intervention of MP-SI was conducted and lasted with phase of post treatment which is the post test and follow up test was administered. A brief research procedure was explained as follow:

In phase of pretreatment, the researcher selects the participant to be included in this study based on certain criteria which is the age of participant is 25 years and above, 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 were met these criteria were asked to respond to a set of questionnaire which consists of UPI and MCI. These questionnaires measured participants' personality and communication. Only the husbands and wives who achieved moderate score of UPI were selected to be included in this study.

The selected participants then were assigned into group through the process of matching of participants and random assignment. The participants were matched based on the moderate score of UPI. After the process of matching, the participants were assigned randomly into control and experimental groups equally. Only the participants in experimental group received the treatment whereas the control group did not receive the treatment. The treatment to the participants in control group was given after the administration of follow up test.

The treatment was conducted in this study is MP-SI. This treatment was carried out for 6 weeks. The participants of experimental group were met for 2 hours regularly once a week. After two weeks the treatment ended, a posttest was given to both groups to measure participants' communication. 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 effectiveness of the treatment on communication among participants in both groups

### Result

*Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in communication between pretest, posttest, and follow up test.*

In order to examine the effectiveness of MP-SI on communication across three periods of times, a Mixed between-Within Subjects ANOVA was conducted. Before proceeding with the analysis for hypothesis, the preliminary assumption testing was conducted to determine there is no violation for normality, homogeneity of variance and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. Based on the output, there was no violation noted.

The findings showed a significant main effect of time,  $F(2, 73) = 32.31, p < .05$ , indicating higher follow up ( $M = 87.38$ ) than posttest ( $M = 83.82$ ), and pretest ( $M = 79.03$ ) scores. This result indicates that there was a change in communication scores across the three different time periods. The effect size for time was .47. It is suggesting the large effect size which is it represent 47% of the variance in scores of communication explained by time.

*Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in communication between experimental group and control group across three periods of time.*

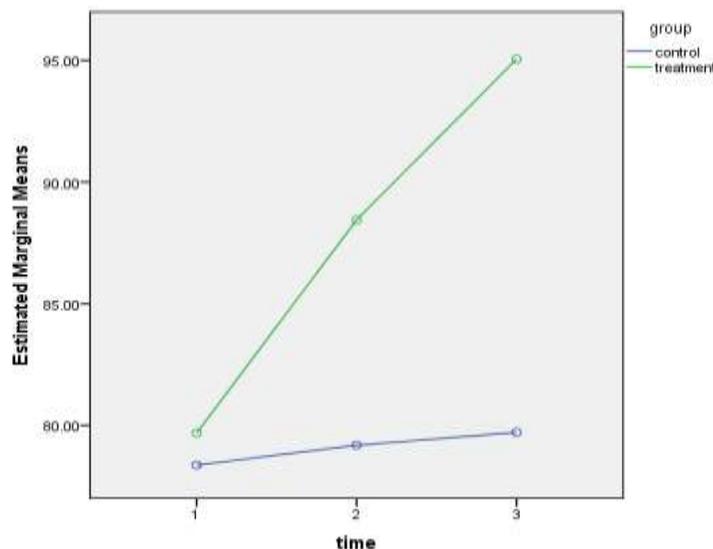
This hypothesis is to assess whether there was a statistical significant difference in the communication scores between the two groups (experimental and control groups). The findings indicate that there is a statistically significant effect for group;  $F(1, 74) = 15.37, p < .05$ . This result shows that mean score of experimental group ( $M = 87.73$ ) is higher than control group ( $M = 87.73$ ). This result suggesting that the participants in experimental group had improved their



communication compared the participants in control group. The partial eta squared value for group in this study was .17. Its suggesting a small effect size for group which is it represents 17% of the variance in communication scores explained by group.

*Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference interaction effect between time and group for the mean scores of communication.*

This hypothesis is to determine whether the change in communication scores over time is different for the experimental and control groups. The findings suggest that there is a statistically significant interaction effects for time and group,  $F(2, 73) = 22.75$ ,  $p < .05$ . This result implied that the treatments gave different effect to groups across time. The effect size for interaction effects was .38, which is closest to large effect size. It represents 38% of the variance in communication scores as explained by the group and time. The finding suggests that the treatment gave an impact on communication among participants in experimental group. Figure 1 show the estimated marginal means of communication for experimental and control groups across the three period of time. The directions of line demonstrated the progress from the pretest to posttest and follow up for both groups. This figure revealed that the mean scores of communication for experimental group are higher than control group across the three period of time. This suggests that the treatment gave an impact on communication among participants in experimental group.



**Figure 1.** Estimated Marginal Means of Communication for Experimental and Control Groups Across Time

### Discussion

Results showed that there was a significant treatment effect of MP-SI on communication among participants in this study. The findings revealed that the communication among participants in experimental group significantly improved compared to the participants in control group. This finding is consistent with study conducted by Alqashan in 2008 through experimental studies that show the participants were taught with communication skills, techniques of problem solving, and elements of loving relationship could improve marital communication among Kuwait couples. Additionally, this finding was also supported by Stanley, Markman, Prado, Olmos. Gallo, and St. Peters (2001) that study on the effect of PREP. They found that when couples were taught with specific and very structured models for effective communication and problem solving namely as “The Speaker-Listening Technique”, the couples’ communication skills has increased.

### Limitation and recommendation for future research

This study provides several recommendations that should be addressed in future studies to get clearer understanding on how MP-SI could help Muslim husbands and wives improved the

quality of communication. The recommendation was viewed in the contexts of the limitation of this study which is the number of the participants was relatively small ( $N = 76$ ). Thus, generalizing the finding beyond the representative sample to other population in Felda would be inconclusive. This requires further studies to be conducted which utilizes a larger sample size with more diversity of participants' demographic such as differences in location, length of married, age, level of education, number of children and socio-economic.

In this study, participants are among the husbands and wives who scored moderately communication and they also have no serious problem in their marriage relationship. This raises the question whether the intervention conducted in this study can also benefit for those couples with low score or experiencing low marital quality. Hence, it is recommended for future study, couples with low marital quality could be included in marriage intervention to evaluate the effectiveness of MPSI. It's because, it was proven in other studies (Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001) couples that are more distress can also benefit from marriage intervention.

In addition, it is also important to conduct a study in various stages of marriage to assess when this kind of intervention might be most effective. For example, future study can be conducted on newlywed couples as well. Providing the newly married couples (5 month or less) with MPSI may produce positive results as they are just beginning to adjust to the marriage relationship and beginning to form ways of relating and communicating to each other. Future researcher also can only utilize middle aged couple in the intervention and then make a comparison which couples do and do not benefit from the intervention depends on the length of marriage. This kind of research would add more findings for the effectiveness of MPSI in improving couples' communication.

### Conclusion

MP-SI is an alternative intervention in the form of psycho-educational approach to help husbands and wives 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 that taught in MP-SI could help Muslim husbands and wives prevent their relationship from various marital conflict.

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