Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling is an international, professional refereed journal in the interdisciplinary fields relevant to Counseling. The Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling serves as a platform for presenting and discussing the emerging issues in counseling and counseling-related areas. The journal aims to promote dialogue and exchange of information about counseling, particularly in the Asia Pacific region, as well as internationally. Therefore, the editor welcomes papers for publication that provide practical, conceptual, or research contributions with the above perspective in the following areas:

- Theories and models of counseling
- Case studies and special applications
  - Counseling services in Asian Pacific Rim countries
  - Reports on counseling in specific settings
- Diversity and underrepresented populations in relation to counseling activities
  - The development of new measures to be used in counseling activities
  - Professional issues in counseling and supervision

The Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling also considers manuscripts that deal with clients who are not severely disturbed, who have problems with living, or who are experiencing developmental crises. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are appropriate. Extensions of previous studies, implications for public policy or social action and counseling research and applications are encouraged. Articles of quality will show academic rigor, originality, relevance and be of interest to the Journal readership base on Counseling.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling is dedicated to promote the study of the field of counseling through the publication of research articles. It is a professional refereed journal in the field of counseling sponsored by Faculty of Education, University of Malaya. This journal serves as a forum to promote and disseminate emerging issues in the field of counseling. The journal is committed to providing access to quality researches ranging from original research papers in counseling. In order to produce a high quality journal, extensive effort has been put in selecting valuable researches that contribute to the journal. I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the editorial board, reviewers and researchers for their valuable contributions to make this journal a reality.

January, 2013
Editor in-chief
Professor Dr Saedah Siraj

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

The Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling is a peer reviewed, open access online publication that publishes studies that contribute to the understanding of counseling issues in the contemporary world. The journal is published electronically twice a year. The journal welcomes original and qualified researches on all aspects of counseling. The topics covered in the journal are related to any counseling matters. As editors, it is a great pleasure to see the success of this journal. On behalf of the editorial team of Malaysian Online Journal of Counseling, we would like to thank all the authors and editors for their contributions to the development of the journal.

January, 2013
Editor
Dr Melati Sumari

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FROM NASTY TO HEALTHY DIVORCE:
A MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY MODEL FOR WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH DIVORCING MALAY-MUSLIM COUPLES

Azmawaty Mohamad Nor¹, Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin¹ (Ph.D),
Dharatun Nissa Fuad Mohd Karim², Norazani Ahmad³

ABSTRACT

Divorce happens and it can happen to any married couples across cultures and contexts. In most societies, people tend to perceive divorce negatively. Hence, it becomes a negative concept or generally associated with the term “nasty divorce”. In truth, there are always two sides to a coin. This means that a divorce can be a nasty and destructive, or it can be what we would call a “healthy divorce”. In this paper, several theoretical perspectives on divorce and its consequences are explored to shed light on the changing societal view of divorce - from a nasty one to a healthy concept – in the Malaysian context. Informed by our understanding of these multiple perspectives and drawing on a real-life case scenario and life-cycle process on marriage and family therapy (MFT), a conceptual model for working effectively with Malay-Muslim clients in Malaysia is proposed. Some issues and challenges in the current practice of MFT in Malaysia are included.

Keywords: healthy divorce, family therapy model, Malay-Muslims, family life cycle, divorcing families, Malaysian perspective
INTRODUCTION

Many marriages around the globe have resulted in divorce (e.g., United Nations Demographic Yearbooks 2010; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States 2012). The figures on the divorce percentage rate in various countries and regions from 1990 to 2010 are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Divorces and crude divorce rates by urban/rural residence in various countries and regions from 2008 to 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>European Countries</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Turkey</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- France</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Germany</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>- UK</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>n.a</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Asian Countries</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- China</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Japan</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Kuwait</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Qatar</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Countries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Egypt</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>n.a</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Australia</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>n.a</td>
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<tr>
<td>- New Zealand</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple Sources: (1) Calculated from data on numbers of divorces from United Nations 2011 Demographic Yearbook, (2) Eurostat, 2012.

This phenomenon does not exclude Malaysia, a multicultural country in the Southeast Asia region among which Malay-Muslims represent one of the major ethnic groups recorded at 50.4 %
The number of divorces in Malaysia increased in between 2009 and 2010 from 27,891 to 28,035 divorce cases in all states respectively (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, JAKIM). In 2010, it was recorded that 135,548 couples registered for marriage and 20.7% of these marriages resulted in divorce. This indicated an average of 77 divorced couples each day or 3 divorce cases each hour for the year 2010 alone, an alarming trend which calls for proactive counseling measures, interventions and preventions. Among the states in Malaysia, Selangor has recorded the highest divorce rates at 5,342 divorce cases, followed by Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Perak with 2,793, 2,693, 2,573, 2,223 cases, respectively. Table 2 presents the latest statistics on divorce in Malaysia.

Table 2: Divorce Statistic among Muslims according to States In Malaysia, 2000-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johor</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>1627</td>
<td>1612</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>1521</td>
<td>1647</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>5342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedah</td>
<td>1168</td>
<td>1549</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>1085</td>
<td>1474</td>
<td>1737</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2188</td>
<td>2573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelantan</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>2042</td>
<td>1472</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2257</td>
<td>2623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melaka</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>1454</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>2793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Sembilan</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>867</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>2223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pahang</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>1505</td>
<td>1541</td>
<td>1502</td>
<td>1704</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perlis</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>2140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulau</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>925</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>1273</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinang</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perak</td>
<td>1234</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1363</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1475</td>
<td>1577</td>
<td>1551</td>
<td>1511</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selangor</td>
<td>2075</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3158</td>
<td>3136</td>
<td>3030</td>
<td>3295</td>
<td>3722</td>
<td>1343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP KL</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>1423</td>
<td>1141</td>
<td>1721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terengganu</td>
<td>1005</td>
<td>1046</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>1285</td>
<td>2464</td>
<td>1537</td>
<td>1138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to figures released by the Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), Muslim couples get divorced every 15 minutes in Malaysia. There were 27,116 divorces in 2009, up from 17,749 in 2005. Divorce rates among Muslims are now at an all-time high, making up about 82 per cent of total divorces in Malaysia (New Straits Times, 2011).

Generally, the perception of divorce in most societies tends to be one-sided because it has been associated with negative consequences. Hence, divorce is often known as a negative concept and often labeled as "nasty divorce". However, this paper argues that divorce need not be viewed solely as a negative concept but also viewed from positive aspects, resulting in the term coined as "healthy divorce". In doing so, we first discuss divorce from multiple theoretical perspectives including the traditional Malaysian perspective, marriage and family therapy (MFT), and Islam. The goal is two-fold: to challenge societal labeling of the term divorce and to promote the perception of divorce from a positive viewpoint. For some couples and families, a divorce maybe the healthiest alternative they have available. Next, we present a scenario of a divorce case experienced by a young Malay-Muslim as a platform for discussion. The aim is to understand the causes for divorce and to highlight some positive consequences from the divorce. Our main argument lies in the notion that divorce can have both negative and positive consequences depending on how it is handled by the divorcing couples, family and community. Finally, we propose a MFT model for working effectively with Malay-Muslim clients in Malaysia. We believe that this model is practical and psychoeducational because it guides practitioners in MFT to better help Malay-Muslim clients and it challenges the traditional beliefs about divorce, that is, from a nasty to a healthy concept.
UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE FROM TRADITIONAL MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

A pool of resources from Malaysian literature such as newspapers, local journal articles, and Malay studies provide information on the definition of divorce, the main causes for divorce, popular reasons to file for divorce, and the consequences of divorce (Chan and Mustaffa, 2008; New Straits Times, 2011). According to an English-Malay Dictionary of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the term divorce refers to *perceraian*, which means dissolution of marriage from a legal perspective (Civil or Syariah law). Malaysians’ perceptions of and reactions to divorce have changed over the past years.

In the old days, divorce was perceived by local Malaysians as a social taboo and those divorced couples, especially the wives, were subjected to stereotypes and prejudices. They were generally perceived as those who did not know how to take care of their spouses (Kassim, 2007). Thus, divorce became a hidden issue and divorce cases were not normally discussed in mass media but were confined to legal proceedings in the courtroom. Nowadays, the community's view towards divorce has changed. Divorce has become more commonplace and is recognized as something that may happen in one's life. Divorce issues and cases have become one of the hottest topics in the media sector. Unfortunately, Malaysian perspectives on divorce still tend to be one-sided, viewing all divorces as a negative life episode and as having negative effects on all concerned (Kassim, 2007). Divorcees also have to deal with children who face a host of problems as a side effect of divorce. Children display anti-social behavior and start to exhibit inappropriate behaviour (Rozumah, Krauss, Siti Nor, & Pei, 2011). Therefore, people's reactions to divorce also become negative and contribute to perceived negative consequences of divorce.

Some of the main causes of divorce are third-party interference (e.g., parents, in-laws, family members, and friends), extra-marital affairs and sexual relationships, lack of knowledge and skills in marriage (e.g., communication and inter-personal relationship), financial problems, and psychosomatic problems (Chan & Mustaffa, 2008; Abeel, 1982; Kassim, 2007). Among the psychosocial problems presented in the Malaysian literature that become the popular reasons for couples to file for divorce are (Undang-undang Keluarga Islam Negeri-Negeri, 2011):

1. Sexual relationship problems (e.g., Erectile dysfunctions, unusual genital organs, *mati pucuk*) [the term *mati pucuk* is a Malay word and it refers to inability to perform sexual intercourse with a partner/spouse]

2. Mental illness (e.g., the husband is mentally ill or suffers from sexual-transmitted-diseases)
3. Forced marriages (e.g., the wife is forced into marriage due to underage factor, or mentally disturbed)

4. Financial constraints (e.g., the husband is financially not stable to support the wife and children)

5. Unfulfilled duties and responsibilities (e.g., the husband does not provide *nafkah zahir* (physical needs such as clothing, house, and food) and *nafkah batin* (love, a sense of belonging, and sexual fulfillment) for the wife and children for three years due to personal preference, negligence, or imprisonment)

6. Domestic violence and abuse (e.g., the wife is physically or mentally abused by the husband).

7. Other reasons deemed legal to dissolve a marriage from civil or syariah law perspective.

Divorce is a sensitive issue among Malaysians, thus it is very challenging to help couples, especially the Malay-Muslims, to deal effectively with their divorce issues in a constructive and positive manner. This highlights the need for a context-specific model of MFT that can work well with Malay-Muslim couples in dealing with divorce issues and its consequences. Before such a model can be proposed, divorce must not only be understood from a traditional Malaysian perspective, but from an Islamic perspective, and from selected MFT theories. These multiple theoretical perspectives may provide a solid foundation for our proposed model for working with Malay-Muslim clients towards healthy divorce.

**UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

_Talak_ is an Arabic word which means "to release" or "to divorce". Under Muslim law, talak means to untie the matrimonial knot by articulating a word denoting divorce. In Islam, there are several types of divorce:

1. _Talak Raj’ie_ - A divorce that is revocable during _iddah_, without the couple having to go through the process of _nekah_ (solemnization of marriage). _Iddah_ is a probation period of about three times menstrual cycle (i.e., three months). A husband is allowed to reconcile with his wife (_ruju’_) during the _Iddah_ period without the need for a new _Aqad_ and _Mahr_ – new contract of marriage and dowry. The _talak_ that is uttered by a husband is classified as _raj’ie_ (revocable) only if it is the first or the second divorce.
2. **Talak Bain** - A divorce where the husband cannot reconcile with the wife during the *Iddah* period, unless with a new *Aqad* and *Mahr*. *Talak Bain* falls under two categories: *Talak Bain Kubra* and *Talak Bain Sughra*.

   a. **Talak Bain Kubra** is a situation where a divorce has taken place on three occasions - in other words, the husband has divorced his wife three times. The divorce is irrevocable. The husband may re-marry his ex-wife only if subsequent to the third divorce, the ex-wife has married another man and the marriage has ended in a divorce or death.

   b. **Talak Bain Sughra** is a divorce that takes place less than three times but is irrevocable even during iddah. A couple divorced under such a circumstance must go through the process of nikah if they want to live as a couple again. *Talak Bain Sughra* occurs in the following situations:

      i. Divorce decided by *Kadhi* (Syariah Judge)

      ii. *Khulu’* (Divorce by Redemption)

      iii. Decree of *fasakh* (dissolution of the marriage requested by a wife) issued by a Judge

In the event, a husband pronounces divorce three times in a single occasion, the current Islamic practice follows the Caliph Umar Ibnu Khattab – third Rashidun Caliphate, who ruled that all three divorces pronounced were effectively three divorces and were thus irrevocable. When such a situation occurs, the Judge shall hear the case of the couple concerned and make a ruling on the divorce.

3. **Talak Sunni** - *Talak Sunni* is a divorce in accordance with the tradition of the Prophet (pbuh) where a husband utters the *talak* on his wife in the presence of two witnesses at a time when she is not menstruating and they have not had sexual intercourse after her last menstruation.

4. **Talak Bid’i** - *Talak Bid’i* is a divorce uttered by the husband:

   a. at a time when the wife is having her menstruation;

   b. during the wife's postnatal period; or

   c. during the period when the wife is not menstruating but the husband has had sexual intercourse with her.
If a husband utters the *talak* to his wife, the marriage between the two of them would automatically be dissolved and they become a divorced couple. At this stage, the wife would be in a state of *iddah*. If, during *iddah*, both parties wish to reconcile, the divorce may be revoked without having the couple to go through the process of *nekah*. Allah says,

> When you divorce women and they fulfill the term of their (*Iddah*), either take them back on equitable terms; but do not take them back to injure them, (or) to take undue advantage; if anyone does that, he wrongs his own soul. Do not treat God’s Signs as a jest, but solemnly rehearse God’s favors on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom, for your instruction. And fear God, and know that God is well-acquainted with all things. (Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah 2:231)

This excerpt means that once the interim is fulfilled, a husband may reconcile with his wife equitably, or go through with the equitable separation. The couple shall have two equitable witnesses who witness the divorce before Allah. In accordance to Holy Quran: At-Talaq, 65:2.

Thus when they fulfill their tem appointed, either take them back on equitable terms or part with them on equitable terms; and take for witness two persons from among you, endued with justice, and establish the evidence (as) before Allah. Such is the admonition given who believe in Allah and the Last Day. And for those who fear Allah, He (ever) prepares a way out. (Holy Quran: At-Talaq, 65:2)

According to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the law of divorce is *makruh* (disapproved). This is in line with what the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "The lawful thing that is most detested by Allah is divorce". However, there are different laws for divorce when it comes to certain marital situations and problems. Therefore, the law for divorce can be obligatory (*Wajib*), recommended (*Sunat*), forbidden (*Haram*) or disapproved (*makruh*). In other words:

1. **Wajib**: Divorce becomes obligatory when the marriage involves such a conflict between husband and wife that two judges agree the dissolution of the marriage is appropriate.

2. **Sunat**: Divorce becomes a recommended practice when a husband can no longer provide adequate *nafkah* or maintenance to his wife (sexual, financial and emotional maintenance) or when she has engaged in forbidden behaviors such as adultery.
3. *Haram*: Divorce becomes a forbidden practice when these two situations occur: a) during menstruation, or b) immediately after marital consummation (Haron Din, 2007).

Divorce should not be treated lightly. However, if staying married brings more harm than good, then a divorce can ease the upheaval in the house. Hence, the couple may part and move on with their own lives. As Allah says,

"...retain her on reasonable terms or release her with kindness......” (Holy Qur’an, Al-Baqarah2:229)

Islamic law forbids a wife from asking for a divorce from her husband without solid and approved reasons. In line with this, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “Any woman who asks for divorce from her husband without any reason permitted by syara’, the sweet smell of paradise shall be forbidden to her.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud). The hadith also applies to a husband who divorces his wife without good reasons.

It is clear that Islam strongly discourages divorce because the negative effects of divorce outweigh the positive effects on the affected couples, their children, families and the community at large. Children from broken homes are often associated with social related problem such as substance abused, early initiation in premarital sex and delinquency (Low, 2009). However, there are real-life scenarios that highlight the positive effects of divorce (refer to Namou, 2010, pp. 30-31 for details). This will be discussed in the following section after the review on the MFT theories. The purpose of review is not only to understand the applicability but to also assess the suitability of selected theories to be used as framework for counseling Malay-Muslim clients.

**UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE FROM ATTACHMENT THEORY, STRUCTURAL FAMILY THEORY AND BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEM THEORY**

Attachment Theory, Structural Family Theory and Bowen Family System Theory (Bitter, 2009) are each used widely in the literature to conceptualize divorce cases (Nichols, 2010). Indeed, they are the most cited theories in couple and family journals (Shaker, Heshmati & Rahimi, 2010; Terimourpour,Bidokhti, & Pourshahbaz, 2011; Egeci&Gencoz, 2011).
Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, founded by John Bowlby (1969), is a widely used approach for counseling couples and family members. The theory operates on the basis of behavioral and quality of attachment between couples or family members (Day, Gilbert, Settles, & Burr, 1995). Therefore, this theory is suitable for counseling Malay-Muslim couples during marital separation because Malay-Muslim culture emphasizes strong attachment and cohesion among married couples and family members. In response to marital separation, spouses frequently experience a wide range of contradictory and confusing emotions. These uncertain feelings are often the result of an attachment response that spouses draw upon as they deal with the stress associated with divorce. The attachment to the former spouse is composed of emotional bonds of ease, comfort and security that develop between marital partners (Kitson, 1992).

Divorcing Malay-Muslim couples experience attachment issues during Iddah. Insecure attachment behaviors such as anxious, ambivalent, and avoidance are most likely to occur when couples are distressed, ill or afraid (Egeci & Gencoz, 2011). For example, high avoidance in insecure behaviors means to create an emotional distance or gap between couple and reliance on self. This behavior is common to the Malay-Muslim culture whereby they tend to avoid any discussions on marital issues when they are in distress, resulting in emotional gap between spouses. Therefore, attachment behaviors and the quality of attachment between spouses are normally re-assessed before reaching the final decision to divorce during the critical stage of iddah (especially for Talak Raj'ie).

Structural Family Theory

Another culturally relevant theory for counseling Malay-Muslims is Minuchin’s structural family theory (Minuchin, 1974). This theory emphasizes three key concepts: subsystems, hierarchical arrangements and boundaries within a family (Nichols, 2009). Subsystems refer to two or more people or an individual member who must have both autonomy and interdependence with other subsystems. Hierarchy is the rank or order in the family, an appropriate separation of generational family subsystems resulting in members playing a different role. The concept of boundaries is essential because it is believed that various types of boundaries separate the subsystems of the families in different ways. It determined the kind of territory and shared space within the family. A flexible boundary system results in the family being functional at its optimal level of functioning.
From a Malay-Muslim perspective, a couple who has divorced needs to create a new structure within the family, for example, a newly divorced woman will have to play an individual role in the parenting subsystem, be the head of the new family hierarchy, and negotiate different boundaries with her former spouse.

Bowen Family System Theory

Bowen Family System Theory (1976) is another suitable theory that can be applied for counseling Malay-Muslims divorcing clients. The theory focuses on the notion of eight interlocking concepts: differentiation of self, triangle, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, emotional cut-off and societal emotional process (Bowen, 1976). However; for the purpose of this paper, only multigenerational transmission will be discussed due to its importance in the Malay-Muslim family system. Multigenerational transmission can be defined as a process “occurring over several generations, in which poorly differentiated persons marry equally immature partners, ultimately resulting in children suffering from severe psychological problems” (Nichols, 2009 p.462).

In a Malay-Muslim family, the concept of multigenerational transmission is evident where the woman who marries the man is considered married to the family and the rules and regulations within the family (Banks, 1974; Djamour, 1959). The man, considered as the head and leader of the family is also responsible for taking care of his parents especially his mother. At times, conflict occurs among the husband, his wife, and his mother. The husband's relationship with his mother is considered fused once he cannot readily balance the needs of his mother, wife and children.

Although these theories are popular in the literature, there are cultural issues and challenges in terms of their application in the specific cultural context of Malaysia. In order to highlight these issues, we present a divorce case study from a client’s perspective as a platform for further discussion. The case is presented with the following aims:

1. To understand the meaning of being a single parent
2. To explore the experiences as a single parent
3. To understand the impact of divorce on the life of a single parent
The Case of Fatimah

Fatimah, a 29 year old postgraduate student was formerly married and currently lives with her 6-year old son. She was married in 2005 at the age of 22. Her marriage lasted approximately four and a half years and her divorced was finalized in December 2009. A custodial arrangement between both partners was observed. The divorce was precipitated when Fatimah discovered her husband was having an extra marital affair. Subsequently, both partners experienced lack of intimacy and diminishing love for one another.

After her initial feelings of isolation, humiliation, depression, and anger, Fatimah decided to try to save her marriage. She asked her husband to join her in seeking the counseling advice from the Malaysian Islamic Development Department. Her husband refused and divorced her via a Short Message Service not long after. Fatimah then plunged into depression, blaming herself for the failed marriage and isolated herself from friends and community. After the divorce, Fatimah moved in with her mother and other family members to help her recover from her breakdown and emotional turmoil. Fatimah’s divorce case can be diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – The process of Fatimah’s divorce Case

The interview with Fatimah revealed that during the first stage of divorce, she appeared to be in self-denial and her defense mechanism was on the alert (Corey, 2005) resulting in irrational thoughts. On the other hand, the emotional and moral support from her mother provided Fatimah some insights and the acceptance of being a single parent. At the early stage, Fatimah was
overtaken with depression, became emotionally unstable and unprepared to accept her new status (Wade & Cairney 2000). According to the McKenna model (1999), using the Stages of Survivor Grief, Fatimah was in Stage 1 and Stage 5. Stage 1 involves the shock, sadness, fear of being alone and dissociation from the society. At this stage, it is important to have a strong familial support to boost the healing process. Stage 5 is a depression stage where Fatimah was unable to work either effectively or efficiently. Fatimah needed all the support, empathy and attention to ensure she understood and accepted her new status, that of a single parent. The post-divorce taught Fatimah to always instill a positive behavior towards life. In order to push herself forward, she was more focused into the spiritual need, read personal growth and motivational books, joined a support group as well as embarking on pursuing her postgraduate degree. As a consequence of the divorce, Fatimah found her freedom: freedom from spousal duties, her confidence level remained intact, she was well-groomed, and most importantly, she found a new meaning to happiness. These were the results of accepting her new life.

On the other hand, she is still fighting with some negative emotions when dealing with the emotion of her only child as she constantly fears for the safety of her child and his well-being. Facing the society resulted in a social stigmatization: a lack of self-esteem and fear of being labeled incompetent in her marriage. Her irrational belief and thoughts towards men added to her problems.

Accordingly, it is a natural development in the family life-cycle process whereby divorce is one of the major disruptions to the normally healthy development phase as experienced by Fatimah (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999). The Family Life Cycle Stage for Divorcing Families has four main phases: the decision to divorce, planning the breakup of the system, separation and the divorce. The second stage was the post-divorce which involved the single parenting with or without the custody of the children. At each stage, there is a transition of emotion which includes the development process of each partner and their child. In this study, the emotional transition could be seen as the adjustment for Fatimah to accept her new status as a single parent and to get herself out from the depression, emotional turmoil and self-denial. The development process has its effects on Fatimah as a single parent.

In relation to Fatimah’s case, according to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) her child is grouped in the elementary-school age which is most affected by the impact of divorce. The child will experience the hardest time compared to the other age group since he could already grasp what is happening around him. However, he does not have the adequate skills and knowledge to face the problems.
Hence, the child may feel guilty, responsible; go into self-blaming, grieving and yearning for the other parent who lives apart from them. Concurrently, Fatimah’s child might develop fantasies that he could remedy the relationship between his parents. Psychologically, the child will be most affected once the divorce gets bitter and out-of-hand. He may develop school and/or peer problems characterized by poor performance, problematic behavior with peers or authority, and/or somatic symptoms (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

FROM NASTY TO HEALTHY DIVORCE: TRANSFORMING THE SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES

In a Malay-Muslim family, the man is the head and leader of the family (Holy Qur’an, Surah An-Nisa 4:34). Therefore, the Malay-Muslim family can be considered as a structured family system. In the process of divorce, the theory says that the changing structure should be given extra attention to avoid a severe disequilibrium within the family subsystems (Simons & Sprenkle, 1985). However, this is not applicable to the Malay-Muslim culture. The Malay-Muslim family unit does not involve a structural change in the family unit, but only involves the change in roles and responsibilities. For example, although the woman in the family is the breadwinner, the house-husband remains the head of the family. This does not mean the role of the wife is not recognized because Allah SWT says:

O mankind, indeed. We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted. (Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Hujurat 49:13)

In most divorce cases, the Malaysian society tends to view divorce in a negative manner. This leads to mistreatment of divorced couples and their children. For example, a single mother is negatively viewed as a home-wrecker. These stereotypes can easily affect the psychological well-being of children who come from broken or divorced families. Divorced families are often associated with conflicts and issues which revolve mainly around financial problems, social problems faced by their children, and dysfunctional families (Anjli Panalal, 2005; Mellott, 2010; Mohd Ismail, Robiah, Syarifah, Kamarul Azmi, & Ahmad Kilani, 2006; Sassler, Cunningham, & Lichter, 2009).

However, there are attempts to change the negative view of divorce (Kasim, 2007; Namou, 2010). For example, there was a case of Norma, a Malay-Muslim divorced wife, who looked at divorce in a
positive perspective after empowering herself in the early stage of divorce. According to Norma, healthy divorce can be achieved by allowing for healthy relationships with her mother in law, former husband and his new wife. She realizes the importance of raising children well, having the insight not to be led by personal insecurities and, most importantly, confiding in God to walk a loving and strong path. She mentioned that “Even though my marriage ended with a divorce, it was a good marriage as my ex-husband was responsible in his duties as a husband and father” (Namou, 2010, p.31). This highlights the healthy side of a divorce in one of the Malay-Muslim clients. The factors that contribute to this healthy divorce, as communicated by Norma, are “a healthy attitude towards marriage and love” and "look[ing] at any failed love relationship ... as the responsibility of both parties involved” (Namou, 2010, p.31). Norma’s thoughts and perspectives on the current issues and challenges faced by many Muslim women, especially those in the specific cultural context of Malaysia, have been published in a book, A Walk Through Life (2007).

Such depiction of a healthy divorce story is a platform for us to help divorcing Malay-Muslim couples deal with their divorce issues in a positive and constructive manner, especially couples with children. However, most existing MFT therapies are based on Western theories and this poses some challenges for Malaysian counselors to use the models as a framework for working effectively with Malay-Muslim clientele. Therefore, the following model is proposed. We believe that the model is culturally sensitive to the needs and values of Malay-Muslim client population. The model can also be used as framework in family counseling.
Based on Figure 2, the proposed counseling process model for divorced families is divided into three different stages: pre-divorce, during and post-divorce stages. In the pre-stage of conducting counseling sessions with divorcing couples, it is important for the counselors involved in the sessions to be multiculturally competent (awareness, knowledge and skills) so that he or she can understand the uniqueness of each client's background and be well equipped to conduct the sessions. Ethical issues are an iterative and dynamic process that needs to be given an importance.
in the entire data collection and analysis period (Silverman, 2005). A counselor conducting the session will get involve in some ethical issues that have the potential to re-stimulate painful memories or unresolved emotional conflicts (Ravindran, 2003). It is highly important for a counseling session to be conducted in an ethical manner, whereby; confidentiality is given a high regard. The work culture and counseling setting play a major role in molding the early sessions with clients.

Accordingly, it is essential for the counselor to be aware of the possible issues, presenting problems and emotional turmoil faced by clients. In the proposed model, the client will experience a transition which involved emotions and reorganization of self and family. The counselor will have to redefine the emotion of the client, empathize, and ultimately allow the client to achieve catharsis. By achieving catharsis, the client is able to understand her individual cognition by changing the way she thinks, feels and behaves towards her ex-spouse and others. The acceptance of the family plays a major role in assisting the client to go through the process of divorce. The systemic separation is another issue that the counselor has to consider while conducting a session with the client. By understanding this structure, it enables a healthy relationship between the client and counselor to achieve the objective of assisting and preparing the client going through the divorce process. Another transition phase is the reorganization process faced by clients – former spouse relationship, co-parenting relationship and establishing new boundaries. It is crucial for the divorcee to understand and respect the new role that they each played with the new boundaries (Minuchin, 1981). Meditation, psychoeducational workshops, co-parenting seminars and divorce therapy are amongst the proposed strategies to assist clients in the process of divorce.

Finally, it is hoped that the proposed model will introduce a healthy behavior, positive emotion and cognition of the clients. However, it is to be noted that the stabilization process will take approximately 1 to 3 years depending on the psychological well-being of the client. Once the client has achieved catharsis, accepted his or her new roles and established new boundaries, the clients will more often than not, assist in advocacy and act as a consultant for other divorced couples.
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE PRACTICE OF FAMILY THERAPY IN MALAYSIA

Although the model looks promising, there are some issues and challenges that counselors need to be aware of in the practice of family therapy in Malaysia. First, MFT is an emerging specialty in the Malaysian counseling profession (See & Ng, 2010). This poses some issues and challenges in the practice and training of MFT among local counseling practitioners. Second, among the reported issues and challenges in the practice of MFT was a lack of trained professionals in the specialized field of MFT (Salim, 2004; Salim & Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2005). Most professionals among the counselor educator community have training in general counseling and psychotherapy, however; very few of them are speciliazed in MFT. Third, there is a lack of trained and qualified educator/trainers in MFT in counselor education and training institutions for the training of MFT professionals (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2008; Ng & Stevens, 2001; See & Ng, 2010). This explains why there is a lack of counselor education programs with a specialized focus in MFT in the local universities. In most institutions that offer counselor education programs, marriage and family counseling is offered as one of the elective subject/courses. Only recently, MFT is being newly introduced as a specialised counseling program at graduate level at USIM (1990s).

In addition, most practitioners involved in counseling divorced couples are not formally trained in counseling or psychotherapy fields, but their training is mostly in religious studies or law. According to Doherty (2002), one of the dangers faced by married people is having individually trained therapists who are incompetent in working with couples. If an incompetent trained therapist can harm their clients, what about practitioners who have never been trained in counseling and psychotherapy?

This poses some issues regarding their competencies in working effectively with divorcing couples or families. How do they engage with marital issues and divorce when counseling Malay-Muslim clients who seek help from counselors? This highlights the need for more available resources and outreach programs for divorcing family and more research in MFT area in the Malaysian context. At present, Malay-Muslim couples are required to attend a two-day pre-marital course organized and conducted by Malaysian Islamic Development Department. However, there are no available courses or programs targeting those who are already married and those who intended to file for divorce. Those who filed for divorce are required to come for counseling as part of the legal proceeding for divorce. However, as mentioned earlier, there are issues regarding the qualification and competencies of Malaysian Islamic Development Department counselors in providing effective counseling for divorcing couples and families. This explains why we propose the model or
framework discussed earlier so that it can assist practitioners who are working with divorcing couples.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to promote a positive outcome of divorce because Malaysian culture generally views divorce as unhealthy. It is undeniable that some marriages can be saved if the couples are ready to make changes. However, if either parties cannot stay within the marriage, divorce may be the only available option. Thus, if divorce takes place, divorcing couples should be helped and guided to make sure that the negative effects of divorce can be avoided.

In summary, not all divorced couples and children suffer from the divorce. If divorcing couples, especially those who have children, understand the tasks and responsibilities as parents, they can adjust and function well over time. According to Hetherington (1982), empirical studies have shown that women excel in being more competent, fulfilled, better adjusted and are more often happier compared to when they were in the first marriage, by being married to a new man from a higher socio-economic background and found a partner whom they believe complements them.

Divorce also provides an option for people in miserable marriages. Montenegro (2004) states that women are more likely to mention that they enjoyed their new found freedom and status, and being freed from their domineering husband. For children, parental separation might be better than remaining in an intact family where there is a continuous conflict. Two people who are antagonist to each other will have an adverse effect on the children. It is also believed that permanent separation and divorce are better to creating a healthier relationship. For men and women, it could mean to be better off financially and the freedom of carrying on with their hobbies as well as meeting new people.

Finally, divorce may be a good lesson for the couple to improve themselves in the future. If one or both of them remarry, they can use their past marriage experience as a guide to develop a healthier and better relationship. Their failure in the first marriage does not mean that they will fail in the new marriage. Hence, learning from failure is an important quality that separates winners from losers.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALAYSIAN COUNSELORS’ MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING COMPETENCE AND CLIENT SATISFACTION

Voon Siok Ping & Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin (Ph.D)

ABSTRACT

The study investigated Malaysian counselors’ self-perceived Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) and its relationship with clients’ satisfaction. A total of 104 participants (52 counselor-client dyads) completed the survey. Of the 52 dyads, 26 were registered and licensed counselors in Malaysia (professional counselors) and another 26 were internship students (paraprofessional counselors). The Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills-Survey-Counselor Edition-Revised (MAKSS-CE-R) and Client Satisfaction Questionnaire-8 (CSQ-8) were the primary measures utilized. Main findings revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between counselors’ MCC and client satisfaction, r = .418, p = .002 and there was no significant difference between professional and paraprofessional counselors on MCC and client satisfaction. Future directions in research based on the limitations of current study and implications for counseling were discussed.

Keywords: Multicultural Counseling Competence, Professional Counselors, Paraprofessional Counselors, Counseling Dyads, Client Satisfaction.
INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a culturally diverse country, especially in term of ethnicity and religion. With about 28.3 million people, Malaysia consist of 67.4% Malys and indigenous groups, 24.6% Chinese, 7.3% Indians and 0.7% others (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2010). According to the Malaysian Population and Housing Census 2010, Islam was the most widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3%. As a multi-racial nation, other religions embraced were Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.3%), Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions (1.3%) and others (0.4%). The counseling field is one of the domains that has been influenced by the diversity and demographic changes. Nonetheless, despite being a multicultural society, it is argued that the counseling services in Malaysia seem to reflect the low degree of cultural and social integration (See & Ng, 2010) and the Malaysian counseling profession has overlooked the importance of addressing culture and diversity in mental health practices (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013).

In providing counseling services to a population practicing diverse aspects and levels of cultural, religious, language and other socio-economic activities, counselors in Malaysia need to be aware of, sensitive to and have an understanding of cultural norms and differences as well as expectation of the populations they deal with. In other word, the cultural diversity of Malaysians has almost made it impossible to ignore the importance of being a multiculturally competent counselor. Pedersen (1997) stated that counselors are increasingly confronted with pressure from culturally different climates that challenge them within the field of counseling. Additionally, the importance of cultural variables in all counseling has been acknowledged (Marsella & Pedersen, 1981). Therefore, it is vital for counselors to be multiculturally competent (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) when providing counseling services to diverse populations. However, there is still a dearth of understanding of and research in multicultural counseling competency (MCC) among counseling professionals in Malaysia.

Sue et al. (1992) proposed a 3 (characteristics) x 3 (dimensions of MCC: (a) beliefs and attitudes, (b) knowledge and (c) skills) matrix model to conceptualize MCC. According to the model, a culturally skilled counselor is one (1) who is actively in the process of becoming aware of his or her own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations and so forth; (2) who actively attempts to understand the worldviews of his or her culturally different client without negative judgments; and (3) who is in the process of actively developing and
practicing appropriate, relevant and sensitive intervention strategies and skills in working with his or her culturally different clients. Although the model seems popular in the multicultural counseling literature, most researchers tend to conceptualize MCC to include three core components: (1) multicultural awareness, (2) knowledge, and (3) skills (e.g., D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Khawaja, Gomez, & Turner, 2009).

Recently, a qualitative interview study with 12 professional counselors in Malaysia, highlighted the challenges and barriers faced by Malaysian counselors in dealing with culturally diverse clients (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013). The study found five emerging themes to summarize the challenges and barriers encountered by the respondents and these include:

1. Challenges related to counselors’ characteristics;
2. Challenges related to clients’ characteristics;
3. Challenges related to presenting issues;
4. Challenges related to third-party characteristics; and
5. Challenges related to characteristics of specific contexts.

Of particular importance to the present research is the most reported category of counselors’ perceived incompetence in multicultural counseling practice (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013). However, in 2011, Aga Mohd Jaladin conducted a nationwide survey and a semi-structured interview on 508 registered practicing counselors in Malaysia. Results from surveys revealed that counselors, as a group, perceived themselves to be multiculturally competent (M = 3.55, SD = .34). This conflicting finding highlights the need to further explore the perceived MCC of Malaysian counselors, perhaps by using a slightly different approach. After all, the MCCs have been conferred as a necessary and helpful ingredient for practitioners to successfully working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013; See & Ng, 2010; Sue et al., 1992). However, a basic question remains unanswered: Do counselors who possess these competencies evidence improved counseling outcomes with clients across culture?

Indeed, clients are the consumers of therapy. One of the ways for counselors to identify the efficacy of the services they provide is through client evaluations. Particularly, client satisfaction has been identified as a primary outcome measure for evaluating mental health services. Furthermore, the evaluation of services is often considered to be incomplete and biases toward health care providers’
own perspectives when clients’ reports of satisfaction regarding therapeutic services are not considered (Gaston & Sabourin, 1992; Larsen et al., 1979; Paulson et al., 1999, as cited in Constantine, 2002). Thus, measuring client satisfaction would be an effective way to corroborate the accuracy of counselors’ perceived MCCs. In multicultural literature, there is a dearth of multicultural studies examining the client satisfaction within a cross-cultural counseling dyad. The lack of conclusive research findings regarding the usefulness of counselors’ MCC also warrants further research.

The multicultural counseling competencies represent one evolutionary step in the movement towards equal treatment and greater inclusion of minorities in the mainstream society. Although those currently being trained as counselors are more likely to have experienced significant multicultural educational experiences and training, they are lacking information about their level of multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills and the effects of multicultural training (Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings & Ottavi, 1994). Counselor trainees, who lack actual life and training experiences with diverse individuals outside of their mainstream social encounters, may experience uneasiness and discomfort in multicultural counseling situations (Kitchens-Stephens, 2005). On the other hand, professional counselors may be expected to experience less intellectual and emotional discomfort when engaged in cross-cultural counseling. It is then valid to ask whether professional counselors who have completed the graduate level counseling course perceive themselves as being more multicultural competent than those who have not completed the course. Is there any significant difference between professional and paraprofessional counselors in serving culturally different clients? Researchers who actually assess the current level of multicultural competencies among counselor trainees are vital to the edification of the next generation of counselors so that they are multicultural competent. This study represents one attempt to measure the progress of multicultural competence in the counseling field by comparing professional and paraprofessional counselors.

Fuertes and Brobst (2002) conducted an exploratory study investigating client satisfaction with counseling. They found that clients’ ratings of their counselors’ multicultural competence explained a significant amount of the variance in client satisfaction beyond clients’ ratings of their counselors’ expertness, empathy, trustworthiness and attractiveness. The study was clearly significant in attempting to connect process and outcome variables as they associate to the evaluation of therapists’ general and multicultural counseling competence.
Another study of therapy dyads on therapist multicultural competency (TMC) was carried out by Fuertes and colleagues (2006). The study illustrated that significant positive relationships were evidence between client ratings of TMC and therapist empathy, ratings of TMC and of the working alliance for both client and therapist, clients’ combined ratings of therapist expertness, attractiveness and trustworthiness and therapists’ ratings of their TMC and ratings of TMC and satisfaction, for both clients and therapists. Would similar findings emerge in a study conducted in Malaysia, using Malaysian samples to constitute counselor-client dyads?

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between Malaysian counselors’ self-reported MCCs and client satisfaction by using a dyad approach. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

2. What is the clients’ satisfaction regarding counseling services they received as measured by Client-Satisfaction Questionnaire-8 (CSQ-8: Attkisson & Larsen, 2006, 2011)?
3. Is there a significant relationship between counselors’ self-reported MCC and client satisfaction?
4. Is there any significant differences between professional counselors and paraprofessional counselors in term of
   a) Self-reported MCC?
   b) Client Satisfaction?
METHODOLOGY

Design
A quantitative correlational study was used to investigate the degree to which counselors’ MCC is related to client satisfaction. Two scores, i.e. MAKSS-CE-R scores and CSQ-8 scores, were collected from the counselor-client participants (counseling dyads). The data were collected at one time from a single group of participants.

Participants
A total of 104 participants (52 counselor-client dyads) completed the survey. The 52 counseling dyads were recruited for the present study by using purposive sampling. The 52 counselors consisted of 26 professional counselors and 26 paraprofessional counselors. Only registered and licensed counselors in Malaysia were recruited for professional counselors whereas paraprofessional counselors involved currently enrolled counseling internship students at their respective internship sites. For client participants, only those who over the age of 18 and had at least 3 counseling sessions with the counselor were included. The third session was selected as a point for data collection because at this point in counseling, enough time had passed for the clients to be able to make valid assessments of their counselor and the counseling session. Also, the third session seemed early enough in counseling to provide with the ratings from clients who might otherwise discontinue their counseling session (Fuertes et al., 2006).

Measures
Two measures were used in the study. These are:

1. MAKSS-CE-R (Kim et al., 2003).

The MAKSS-CE-R is designed to provide a measure of an individual’s level of MCC based on Sue et al.’s (1992) model of cross-cultural counseling competence. The MAKSS-CE-R is divided into two sections: demographic items and 33-item on MCC. The MAKSS-CE-R consists of three subscales: Awareness (10 items), Knowledge (13 items), and Skills (10 items). Three different 4 point Likert scales are used to measure the responses on the MAKSS-CE-R (Awareness subscale, 1= very limited, 2 = limited, 3 = fairly aware, 4 = very aware; Knowledge subscale, 1 = very limited, 2 = limited, 3 = good, 4 = very good; Skills subscale, 1 = strongly agree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree),
with higher score representing greater competence. The MAKSS-CE-R provides a “total multicultural counseling competence” score as well as awareness, knowledge and skills subscale score. The MAKSS-CE-R scores can be divided into four quartiles (1) Poor, (2) Fair, (3) Good and (4) Excellent self-reported competence. Table 1 showed the interpretation for the MAKSS-CE-R total score and each of the MAKSS-CE-R subscales (Kim et al., 2003).

Kim et al. (2003) have found that the MAKSS-CE-R to be a reliable and valid measure of multicultural competence. The MAKSS-CE-R reported coefficient alphas of .80, .87, .85, in term of the reliability, for the scores across two separate samples on the Awareness, Knowledge, Skills subscales respectively and .81 for the entire 33-item scale (Kim et al., 2003). It is the shortest (33 questions) self-report MCC instrument and easily administered.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAKSS-CE-R Interpretation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Self-reported MCC Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 44</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Total</td>
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<td>&lt; 120</td>
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The MAKSS-CE-R has gone through revision, thus, it has addressed previous limitations in the original measure. The availability of a psychometrically improved and shorter version of the MAKSS total and subscales is useful to researchers studying multicultural counseling competence (Kim et al., 2003). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .88. This is consistent with reliabilities reported in previous studies. Positing the cultural context of Malaysia and the complexion of the Malaysian society, the MAKSS-CE-R was slightly modified for the scope of this study. The word of Item No. 8, “In counseling, clients from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds should be given the same treatment that White mainstream clients receive” was changed into “In counseling, clients from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds should be given the same treatment that Bumiputra mainstream clients receive.”
For the demographic section, a few items such as religious/spirituality affiliation, language, marital status, sexual orientation, status of disability were added. Besides, counselor’s name, registration number and years of practicing counseling were included to ascertain that participants are registered and licensed counselors and are actually involving in counseling. Permission for use of the MAKSS-CE-R was granted.


The CSQ-8 is a self-administered questionnaire which takes only 3-8 minutes. It is about self-report statement of satisfaction with health and human services (Attkisson, 2012). It comprises 8 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale with higher score indicating higher satisfaction. The rating scale uses four anchors of varying types to evaluate the dimensions of client satisfaction. For instance, “How satisfied are you with the amount of help you have received?” the response options are “1 = Quite dissatisfied, 2 = Indifferent or mildly dissatisfied, 3 = Mostly satisfied, 4 = Very satisfied”, and “Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problem?” which has the responses “4 = Yes, they helped a great deal, 3 = Yes, they helped somewhat, 2 = No, they didn’t help, 1 = No, they seemed to make things worse.” Scores for each item range from 1 to 4, for overall score, sum item responses, range from 8-32, higher score indicates higher satisfaction. The CSQ-8 has no subscales and reports a single score measuring a single dimension of overall satisfaction. In various studies, the internal consistency of the CSQ-8, as measured by coefficient alpha, ranged from .83 to .93, with values of .86 and .87 in two of the largest samples (Attkisson, 2012). The CSQ-8 is employed due to the major strengths of this instrument which include its utility as a standard measure, excellent reliability and internal consistency, acceptability to clients and services providers (Attkisson & Greenfield, 1996, 2004; Attkisson & Pascoe, 1983; Attkisson & Zwick, 1982; Greenfield, 1983; Larsen et al, 1979; Nguyen et al., 1983, as cited in Attkisson, 2012). The CSQ-8 scale is available in various versions and languages (Attikission, 2012). Permission to use the CSQ-8 was granted.

Procedures

Web-based survey (i.e. Google Docs) was utilized as the major source of data collection. According to Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold (1999), there are a number of advantages to use web-based
survey as a means of data collection. First and foremost, mail surveys are relatively inexpensive and additional money can be saved through the use of web-based surveys that avoid postal fees. Additionally, web-based research gives the researcher the opportunity to collect data on his or her own without the need for additional staff. Moreover, the dissemination of surveys via the web can reach farther than surveys that use face to face approach. Furthermore, Granello and Wheaton (2004) highlighted some advantages of using online data collection. First, data entry is facilitated and it lowers the chance of researcher error in keying in responses. Likewise, online data collection tools, like the one utilized here (Google Docs), allow data to be transferred directly into statistical analysis packages (e.g. Statistical Package for the Social Science, version 17.0; SPSS 17). Second, there is ever more societal acceptance of computer use for data collection, especially with college educated individuals (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). In sum, the web-based survey was suitable for the current research for the reason that it is an easier and convenient way to collect data from geographically dispersed counselors in Malaysia. Besides, it allows participants to have ample time to answer questions. Web-based design is also appropriate for this study’s use of university intern students since every one of them has institute email account and they tend to have more familiarity with computers.

To assist in the dissemination of questionnaires, a listing of the registered and licensed counselors throughout Malaysia was obtained from the Malaysia Board of Counselors while a listing of currently enrolled counseling program internship students was obtained from institutions’ counseling program director. The registered and licensed counselors and internship counselors-in-training were electronically mailed an email containing (a) a cover letter explaining the study and (b) two links to the questionnaires to be accessed via Google Docs. Once the counselor-participants received the cover letter with the links to the survey, they accessed the consent information and chose to participate or not. Those who agreed to participate were requested to access to the link of the survey (for counselor) and invited one of their clients who had at least 3 sessions with them to complete another set of questionnaire by accessing to another link provided (for client).

There were 2700 registered and licensed counselors participants provided by the Malaysia Board of Counselors. However, over hundred emails were undeliverable leaving approximately 2000 participants who were potential participants in the study. The low response rate of the study was due to the time constraint in completing this research. The data collection period only took two and a half months which was set from the mid of January 2013 to March 2013. In addition, it was hard
to invite clients to be involved in the study. Clients seemed reluctant to voluntarily take part in the research, which asked them to provide information about themselves as well as their perception toward their counselors’ services. Some counselors also chose not to participate because they said they wanted to protect their clients.

RESULTS

Demographic

The 52 counselors-participants comprised 26 (50%) professional counselors and 26 (50%) paraprofessional counselors. They were 11 (21.2%) males and 41 (78.8%) females. The age range for the sample was 21 to 56 years, with the mean age of 28.56 (SD = 7.94). They came from various states but mostly from Selangor (n=10, 19.2%), Kuala Lumpur (n=8, 15.4%), Pahang (n=5, 9.6%), and Kelantan (n=5, 9.6%). The ethnicity compositions were 35 (67.3%) Malays, 12 (23.1%) Chinese, 4 (7.7%) Indians and 1 (1.9%) Bumiputra. In term of their religion, participants reported that 37 (71.2 %) were Muslims, 6 (11.5) were Buddhists, 4 (7.7) were Christians, 2 (3.8) were Hindus, 2 (3.8) with other religion and 1 (1.9) has no religion. They were mostly single (71.2%), heterosexual and abled counselors who spoke Malay (n=35, 67.3%), followed by Mandarin (n=10, 19.2%), English (n=3, 5.8%) and other language (n=4, 7.7%). In term of their educational level, 39 (75%) held Bachelor’s degree and 13 (25%) held a master’s degree. Their practicing experience in counseling field was ranging from 1 year to 29 years, with the mean year of 4.15 (SD =5.16).

For the 52 client-participants, 12 (23.1%) were males and 40 (76.9%) were females. Their age range was ranging from 18 to 39 years old with the mean age of 23.4 (SD = 5.29). Overall, 31 (59.6%) participants were Malays, 15 (28.8%) Chinese, 1 (1.9%) Indian, 4 (7.7%) Bumiputras, and 1 from other races. They were mostly single (92.3%), Muslims (61.5%) and their household income status were mostly below RM3500 (86.5%). Their reported sexual orientation was heterosexual and with no disability condition. Most of the participants spoke Malay (n=35, 67.3%), followed by Mandarin (n=13, 25%), English (n=2, 3.8%) and other language (n=2, 3.8%). Of the sample, more than 23 (44.2%) completed previous education up till Pre-University or Diploma level. Table 2 provides a summary of the participants’ demographic background.
### Table 2
Summary of Demographic Information for Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Counselor-Participant</th>
<th>Client-Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11 (21.2)</td>
<td>12 (23.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41 (78.8)</td>
<td>40 (76.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>28.56 (7.94)</td>
<td>23.42 (5.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;21</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>25 (48.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>40 (77.0)</td>
<td>23 (44.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>8 (15.2)</td>
<td>4 (7.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State (top four)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selangor</td>
<td>10 (19.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>8 (15.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelantan</td>
<td>5 (9.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pahang</td>
<td>5 (9.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>35 (67.3)</td>
<td>31 (59.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>12 (23.1)</td>
<td>15 (28.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4 (7.7)</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bumiputera</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
<td>4 (7.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Counselor-Participant</td>
<td>Client-Participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>37 (71.2)</td>
<td>32 (61.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>6 (11.5)</td>
<td>15 (28.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>4 (7.7)</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>37 (71.2)</td>
<td>48 (92.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14 (26.9)</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>52 (100.0)</td>
<td>52 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disability status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52 (100.0)</td>
<td>52 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>35 (67.3)</td>
<td>35 (67.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>10 (19.2)</td>
<td>13 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 (7.7)</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12 (23.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-University/Diploma</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23 (44.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>39 (75.0)</td>
<td>14 (26.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>13 (25.0)</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic | Counselor-Participant | Client-Participant |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing year</td>
<td>4.15 (5.16)</td>
<td>No info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>42 (80.7)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2 (3.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>7 (13.4)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>No info.</td>
<td>26 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below RM1500</td>
<td>26 (50.0)</td>
<td>19 (36.5)</td>
</tr>
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<td>RM1500-RM3500</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM3500-RM5500</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM5500-RM7500</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM 7500 and above</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Other states include Kedah (7.7), Perak (7.7), Penang (7.7), Terengganu (5.8), Negeri Sembilan (5.8), Johor (5.8), and Sarawak (5.8).

**Malaysian Counselors’ Self-reported MCC**

To answer Research Question 1, descriptive statistics were computed on the MAKSS-CE-R total and the three subscales scores. The MAKSS-CE-R was scored on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher score representing greater multicultural competence. Table 3 presents information on the descriptive statistics from MAKSS-CE-R and CSQ-8 scores. As shown in Table 3, as a group, the counselor-participants in this study reported poor overall multicultural counseling competence as well as on the three aspects of MCC evaluated by the MAKSS-CE-R subscale (Awareness, Knowledge and Skills). The mean score for Awareness, Knowledge and Skills subscales were 20.19 (SD = 2.72), 35.81 (SD = 7.11) and 26.19 (SD = 5.09), respectively, with a mean of 82.23 (SD = 10.78) for total MCC.
Table 3
Mean Scores of Counselors’ MCC and Client Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales/Sub-Scales</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Scales (n=52)</td>
<td>82.23</td>
<td>10.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Awareness</td>
<td>20.19</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Knowledge</td>
<td>35.81</td>
<td>7.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R Skills</td>
<td>26.19</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSQ-8 (n=52)</td>
<td>28.08</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clients’ Satisfaction
In term of Research Question 2, descriptive statistics were computed on the CSQ-8 scores. Results (Table 3) showed that, as a group, client-participants reported high satisfaction regarding the counseling services they received, with a mean score of 28.08 (SD = 3.23).

Perceived MCC and Client Satisfaction
To answer Research Question 3, the relationship between counselors’ self-reported MCC and client satisfaction was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The mean scores for counselors’ MCC and client satisfaction were 82.23 (SD = 10.78) and 28.08 (SD = 3.23), respectively (refer to Table 4). The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between counselors’ self-reported MCC and client satisfaction, r = .418, p = .002, with high counselors’ multicultural counseling competence associated with high client satisfaction. Figure 1 shows a linear positive correlation between the two scores. The correlation coefficient (r = .418) indicated that there was a moderate correlation between the two variables.

Table 4
Mean Scores of Counselors’ MCC and Client Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselors’ MCC</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>82.23</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>.418**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Satisfaction</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28.08</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05, **p<.01
To address Research Question 4(a) and (b), two independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the MAKSS-CE-R and CSQ-8 scores for professional and paraprofessional counselors. Table 5 presents results of the compare means tests for these two sets of scores: the MAKSS-CE-R and CSQ-8.

Table 5
T-test Comparisons of MCC and Client Satisfaction between Professional and Paraprofessional Counselors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselor</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKSS-CE-R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>83.69</td>
<td>9.93</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>80.77</td>
<td>11.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSQ-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27.73</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>-.770</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.42</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Correlation between counselors’ MCC and client satisfaction.

*Professional vs. Paraprofessional Counselors*

To address Research Question 4(a) and (b), two independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the MAKSS-CE-R and CSQ-8 scores for professional and paraprofessional counselors. Table 5 presents results of the compare means tests for these two sets of scores: the MAKSS-CE-R and CSQ-8.
Results revealed no significant difference in MCC between professional (M = 83.69, SD = 9.93) and paraprofessional counselors (M = 80.77, SD = 11.57); t (50) = .977, p > .05 (refer to Table 5). There was also no significant difference in client satisfaction between professional (M = 27.73, SD = 3.05) and paraprofessional counselors (M = 28.42, SD = 3.42); t (50) = -.770, p > .05 (refer to Table 5).

DISCUSSION

Malaysian Counselors’ Self-reported MCC

Surprisingly, the results of the current study revealed that counselors reported poor overall multicultural counseling competence. Nonetheless, counselors reported themselves being most competent in multicultural Knowledge, followed by Skills and Awareness subscales.

The current findings are inconsistent with the nationwide study by Aga Mohd Jaladin (2011) on 508 registered practicing counselors in Malaysia which demonstrated that counselors perceived themselves to be multiculturally competent. The results of the study also contradicts Aga Mohd Jaladin’s findings (2011) who found that counselors perceived themselves to be most competent on the Multicultural Knowledge, followed by Multicultural Understanding, Multicultural Skills and Multicultural Awareness subscales (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2011). [Note: The findings of this investigation are also inconsistent with most of the past studies (Granello & Wheaton, 1998; Holcomb-Mccoy & Myers, 1999; Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Pope-Davis and Ottavi, 1994).] The results suggested that both professional counselors and paraprofessional counselors in Malaysia showed that there are deficiencies in the awareness, knowledge and skills that made them not fully prepared to deal with culturally diverse clients.

The small sample size of the current study may appear to be one of the explanations of the inconsistencies. In the nationwide study by Aga Mohd Jaladin (2011), a total of 508 registered practicing counselors in Malaysia were involved. However, the current study involved only 52 counselors. It is probably that the small sample size that had brought an effect on the findings. Moreover, contradicted to the Aga Mohd Jaladin’s Malaysian study (2011) which used a particularly designed questionnaire, the instrument utilized in the present study was adapted from past research. Although the MAKSS-CE-R showed good reliability coefficient for the current study, it was initially developed based on the Western country. Thus, the values and beliefs, presenting style and the English proficiency can also be the issues. Another concern is that the standards and requirements for their MCC in the MAKSS-CE-R may also be stricter and higher due to the
diversification of America. Therefore, the MAKSS-CE-R may not accurately measure the Malaysian counselors’ MCC and thus contributed to the poor self-reported MCC of Malaysian counselors.

Clients’ Satisfaction

Even though counselors reported poor overall multicultural counseling competence, the findings of the current study revealed that clients reported high overall satisfaction with the counseling services they received.

One explanation may be that clients have the luxury to choose their counselors to work with, whether it is same-sex, race or religion and thus they feel more satisfied with the counseling services they received. Also, it is possible that client view their counselors as more or less competent because of unique client-based variables such as biases (Constantine, 2001, Paulson et al, 1999, as cited in Constantine, 2002) which in turn increased their satisfaction with counseling. Additionally, it is probable that people tend to seek counseling services for self-development and they feel satisfied about it. It is especially true in nowadays’ world where most people’s psychological need is not met.

Perceived MCC and Client Satisfaction

Accordingly, correlational analysis demonstrated that there was a significant moderate positive relationship between counselors’ multicultural counseling competence and client satisfaction.

The results of the correlational analysis indicated that the counselors’ multicultural counseling competence are somewhat related to client satisfaction. Taken together, the results suggested that although the counselors’ multicultural counseling competence was relatively poor, however, it has an influence on client satisfaction. Client satisfaction increased as their counselors’ multicultural counseling competence increased. Generally, the result obtained in this study is consistent with prior research findings which examined the role of multicultural competence in client satisfaction (Fuertes & Brobst, 2002; Fuertes et al., 2006).

However, the results need to be interpreted with cautions. It is good to remember that clients come with problems, feeling vulnerable and may in pain or discomfort; counselors who are willing to work with them will help the client feel at ease by attending to them and listening to them. The climate of respect and acceptance make them feel comfortable. Could these clients have been so
grateful to have someone being there for them that this contributed to their overall satisfaction, rather than the multicultural counseling competence of their counselors? In addition, it is important to consider that client’s initial positive attitudes about counseling may play some role in the perceived effectiveness of counseling services and hence positively predict their satisfaction with counseling (Jones & Markos, 1997, as cited in Constantine, 2002). Furthermore, it is probably that other therapeutic variable such as clients’ help-seeking behavior, clients’ actual motivation for change or counselors’ ability to form meaningful and culturally sensitive therapeutic alliances with clients may also influence the client satisfaction (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998; Deane & Todd, 1996; Kelly & Achter, 1995, as cited in Constantine, 2002).

**Professional vs. Paraprofessional Counselors**

In an attempt to further understand multicultural counseling competence and client satisfaction, the research questions asked if there is any significant difference between professional counselors and paraprofessional counselors in term of their multicultural counseling competence and client satisfaction. Contrary to expectation, professional counselors and paraprofessional counselors were found to have no significant difference in terms of their multicultural counseling competence and client satisfaction.

The current findings may perhaps explained by the tendency to stay in the “comfort zone” of both counselors and clients. The low level of cultural and social integration in counseling agencies in Malaysia reinforced the scenario wherein professional counselors have less opportunity to work with culturally diverse clients on account of the categorization of counseling agencies based on specific language and religion in Malaysia.

One reason that there is no significant difference in multicultural counseling competence between professional and paraprofessional counselors may be owing to the fact that counselor development of appropriate intervention strategies takes more time in the real world. It is difficult for professional counselors to improve the multicultural counseling competence, especially the skills domain (D'Andrea et al., 1991).
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There were several limitations of the current study that need to be taken into consideration. First and foremost, the sample was relatively small. Only 52 counseling dyads were involved in the current study and this sample of 52 subjects was not representative of the population as a whole.

The web survey was utilized as the source of data collection due to the time constraint; yet, the response rate was very low. For future study, the data collection period should be extended. Research assistants should be recruited and assigned to the organizations in order to invite counselors and clients to participate in the study face-to-face. Not only the larger sample could be obtained but helped to increase the sincerity of the research team as well. Moreover, the questionnaires can be completed and collected immediately. Participants can also ask questions instantly if they encountered any problems in completing the questionnaires.

In spite of the attempts to solicit a broad representation of Malaysian counselors, it is to be expected that numerous factors influenced a counselor’s decision to participate or not participate in the research. The topic of the study may possibly also have influenced a counselor’s decision about participation. Counselors who are more familiar with multiculturalism may have been more likely to involve than those who are less familiar with multiculturalism. Additionally, counselors who involved through web-based survey may have a tendency to select “good” client who are more likely to give good feedback to complete the client-version questionnaire. It is possible that clients viewed their counselors as more or less competent because of unique client-based variables such as rating or response biases (Constantine, 2001, Paulson et al., 1999, as cited in Constantine, 2002).

Another potential limitation of the current study is that clients may have been cued to the research purpose and endorsed responses that may have presented their counselors in a more or less favorable light. Future researchers can overcome several of the hurdles present in the current study by using single-blind method of study to prevent research outcomes from being influenced by the “good participant” effect or bias. In the blinding study, the participants do not know the critical aspects of the research. Researchers and administrators do not tell participants the actual purpose of the study in order to ensure that participants don’t bias the results by acting in ways they think they should act.
Future research may need to identify aspects of the counselors as well as the counseling process that are most beneficial in helping clients to address their needs and eventually in predicting their satisfaction with treatment. It may also be good to explore simultaneous client and counselor perceptions of therapeutic processes and the subsequent impact of these processes on counseling outcomes and satisfaction to better understand the effectiveness of counseling.

Implications of the Study
The current research provided straightforward practical implications for multicultural counseling especially the counselors’ preparation in the field of professional counseling in Malaysia. Counselor in Malaysia should have a clear understanding of multicultural counseling in which they must understand, respect and appreciate differences in socio-cultural background of a client, beliefs and values. By having clear understanding, counselors are able to avoid multicultural issues such as racism, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping and ethnocentrism; develop flexibility in thinking and behavior as well as develop culturally sensitive skills, interventions and strategies to adapt professional tasks and work styles to respectfully provide services to individuals through appropriate systems, agencies and organizations.

Multicultural theorists suggest that before one attempt to learn about the other, one must first learn about themselves to in order to avoid assuming that their clients see and experience the world as they do (Pedersen, 2001). Attaining MCC requires that one choose interventions that are respectful of a cultural group's intact beliefs and values (McCormick, 1996; Morissette & Gadbuis, 2006). Failure to implement an appropriate degree of self-awareness increases the risk of a number of cultural transgressions within the counseling relationship, such as ethnocentrism and racism.

Counselors in Malaysia usually rely on counseling model or theories, strategy or technique that originated in the West such as United States but work with clients who are culturally different than the West population, moreover, many counselors are trained outside the country; therefore, it is important for counselors to have creativity in the adaptation of skills, knowledge and techniques learnt in order to contribute to the sensitivity, efficiency and effectiveness of services provided. Any model or theory, technique or strategy can never be wholly imported from another culture with expectations of similar results; culturally appropriate modifications will always need to be made.
It is essential to know that counselors learn the most from practical experience rather than from former counseling education in order to be multiculturally competent. Therefore, experiential teaching-and-learning process should be designed by integrating the practical training into the existing curriculum of theory-based counseling programs in Malaysia. Other than the concepts or theories, multicultural counseling course in university should equipped student counselors by having field visit, program, forum, individual and group counseling at related centers or homes to gain hands-on experience in working with culturally diverse clients, ultimately enable students to be better counselors.

Internship is a good starting place, it is important for paraprofessional to go beyond and implement multicultural training and translating multicultural awareness and knowledge into effective skills performance. Self-perceived MCCs may increase more significantly if counselor-in-training are required to spend a certain percentage of contact hours working with clients from different backgrounds than their own. It is also recommended that certain number of contact hours should be allocated in dealing with minority groups for both bachelor and master's counseling programs in order to ensure sufficient exposures and practical experience for trainees in working with minority groups.

Additionally, counselors should place emphasis on continuous education and training pertaining to multicultural competence, especially on the culturally sensitive issue such as religion, sexuality and LGBT. Because counselors’ level of MCC associated significantly to clients’ satisfaction with counseling services in the current study, it appears that multicultural training may serve an important role in increasing counselors’ ability to work effectively with diverse cultural populations. The quality training programs is warranted so that professional and paraprofessional counselors are able to meet their needs effectively when they seek help. Specifically, such training may allow counselors to bridge potential gap between themselves and their clients, and consecutively increase the client satisfaction.

Further, a context-specific instrument should be developed to accurately measure the counselors’ multicultural counseling competence in the Malaysian context. To date, there is no standard measurement to assess the level of Malaysian counselors’ MCC. A psychometrically sound instrument in measuring counselors’ MCC is warranted and it should be designed based on the
ASEAN or Malaysian setting in order to better understanding Malaysian counselors’ MCC instead of directly adopting instruments from the West.

In line with the concept of One Malaysia, research on the multicultural counseling in Malaysia is of central importance as to provide an in-depth understanding of issues related to multiculturalism to counselors. More research is needed in order to help counselors further define and improve its purpose and directions, theory and practice as well as training framework. Empirical findings are needed to improve the professionalism of counseling. Counseling professionals and researchers need to work toward shaping the future of multicultural counseling and not rely on the government to classify what is and what will be counseling.

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ACCEPTANCE, FORGIVENESS, AND GRATITUDE: PREDICTORS OF RESILIENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
Low Kah Hwei & Haslee Sharil Lim Bin Abdullah (PhD)¹

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine whether acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are significant predictors for resilience among university students. An electronic mailed questionnaire which consisted of demographic information, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, The Gratitude Questionnaire and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was sent to students at one of the public universities in Malaysia, of which 162 students responded. Results revealed a statistical significant result supported the hypothesis that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were significant predictors for students’ resiliency. The three predictors contributed 56% of the total variance of students’ resilience model whereby gratitude illustrates the highest predictive value for resilience, followed by forgiveness and acceptance.

*Keywords:* resilience, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude
INTRODUCTION

What makes some people flourish despite facing adversity or stressful life events while the others stagnate in such condition? According to Tugade and Fredrickson (2004), demonstrating the ability to thrive in the face of negative stressors illustrates the concept of resilience. More specifically, resilience can be defined as “the personal qualities that allow one to thrive in the face of adversity” (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p.76). Resilience is considered as a dynamic process whereby people exhibit the capacity to adapt to negative life events over time. Thus, resilience involves the adaptation to adversity with opportunity for positive growth and development while returning to the optimal functioning level which is known as a process of reintegration (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The concept of resilience is grounded in the paradigm of positive psychology, which is a strength based approach that assists people to obtain well-being in order to live a fulfilling life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Over the years, growing attention on positive psychology which shifts the attention away from pathology provides an opportunity for mental health researchers and practitioners to explore the role of resilience in predicting one’s psychological health (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This encourages researchers to identify the resources available on human in conjunction with the process involved that are crucial to nurture human strengths rather than merely attending to deficiencies. This strengths based perspective allows mental health practitioners to obtain a more positive approach towards human psychological health in order to enhance human’s general quality of life in the aspects such as happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being. As such, the present study examines the predictors of resilience, primarily focusing on a number of personal qualities which hypothesized to be associated with resilience.

ACCEPTANCE, FORGIVENESS, GRATITUDE AND RESILIENCE

By reviewing past researches regarding the study of resilience, two types of factors have been identified to be involved in overcoming adversity, namely risk and protective factors. Risk factors are known as the variables that enhance the possibility of negative outcomes while protective factors enhance the possibility of positive outcomes (Werner, 2000). The central focus of early resilience studies were focused on examining various risk factors such as parental impacts, caregiver and children relationship in conjunction with socioeconomic status (Axford, 2007).
Nonetheless, recent resilience research has placed greater interest on further exploration of protective factors as it helps to examine specific elements or conditions that foster the process of resilience. For example; reintegration, high expectancy/self-determination, positive relationships, social support, flexibility, sense of humor, self-esteem/self-efficacy, positive emotionality, hardiness, cognitive flexibility, altruism and religious beliefs are some identified attributes that are associated with resilience (Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Thompson, Arnkoff, & Glass, 2011).

Among the wide variety of protective factors that have been recognized, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude appear to be three personal characteristics that have been found to be closely related to psychological well-being (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Nakamura & Orth, 2005). Specifically, a number of studies supported the premise that forgiveness and gratitude are related to resilience (Broyles, 2005; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004) in which forgiveness and gratitude play a part as effective adaptive coping in order to deal with negative stressors.

Forgiveness is conceptualized as an adaptive behavior or trait that might be one of the possible reactions to interpersonal harm as well as a positive response which encourages one to let go anger and give up the thought to seek for revenge (Bono & McCullough, 2006; McCullough, 2000). Forgiveness is known as the motivational changes of oneself toward a transgressor. It involves adjustment of negative emotions and enhancement in positive thoughts when the desire to seeking revenge or avoiding offenders has been overcome. As interpersonal transgressions are commonly known as a source for personal distress resulting in resentment, forgiveness can also be understood as a way that individuals attempt to cope with hurt following a relational conflict (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Breen, Kashdan, Lenser, & Fincham, 2010; Sandage & Jankowski, 2010). The current study conceptualized forgiveness as “the framing of a perceived transgression such that one’s responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequel of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of a transgression, and therefore the object of forgiveness, may be oneself, another person or persons, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone’s control (e.g., an illness, “fate,” or a natural disaster)” which is based on Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen, Billings, Heinze, Neufeld, Shorey, Roberts, and Roberts’s (2005, p.318) definition of forgiveness.

Previously, the study of forgiveness has been confined to religious teachings until its association with psychological well-being and therapeutic values have been supported by empirical research within the last decade (Hong & Jacinto, 2011). A number of recent findings demonstrated that forgiveness is related to positive physical and mental health outcomes such as greater self-rated
health, lower risk for cardiovascular disease, greater life satisfaction, lower level of depression, anxiety and anger as well as higher self-esteem (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004).

Not only that, several studies have suggested that forgiveness is closely associated with people's mental well-being, by proposing that forgiveness acts as a source of human strengths to assist people to sustain well-being (Karremans, Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003). In a study conducted by Thompson, et al. (2005), the researchers found that high dispositional forgiveness seemed to be related to lower level of depression, anger and anxiety along with high life satisfaction. The results demonstrated that forgiveness appeared to be a coping method which allowed participants to deal with adverse life experiences and moved towards achieving higher satisfaction in life. This finding is in line with the study of Maltby, Day, and Barber (2005) which reported that forgiveness plays a role as a protective factor which fosters people's ability to deal with psychological stressors.

As for gratitude, it is known as a cognitive-affective state that is associated with attitude, emotion, moral virtue, personality trait as well as coping response. Gratitude generates a number of benefits in terms of personal or collective, monetary or nonmonetary, material or interpersonal. It can be defined as a “generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains” (McCullough, et al., 2002, p.112). Based on this definition, gratitude is known as an enduring characteristic which prompts the grateful individuals to elicit certain emotional responses. Therefore, grateful individuals are those who have a lower threshold for experiencing gratitude and there is greater likelihood for them to experience gratefulness in their daily life (McCullough, et al., 2002).

Emmons (2010) further elaborated that gratitude allows people to celebrate the present by amplifying positive emotions. As researches on emotion reported that positive emotion wear off easily, gratitude enables people to appreciate the value of goodness, celebrate the goodness instead of adapting to it. Besides, gratitude helps to block toxins such as envy, resentment and regret which might be harmful to happiness. The logic is that people cannot feel envious and grateful at the same time as they are incompatible feelings. A number of studies discovered grateful people are able to recover quicker from trauma as they are perceived as more stress resistant. Their ability to interpret negative life events differently guards them against lasting stress and anxiety.
In a study conducted by Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, and Wallace (2006) to investigate the association between resilience and positive emotions, they found that positive emotion acts as a protective factor for people who are facing stressful situations. Positive emotions are more commonly identified among high resilient individuals than low resilient individuals. Individuals who display lower level of resilience exhibit higher reactivity in response to daily stressors in conjunction with greater difficulties to regulate negative emotion. As time goes by, positive emotions appear to facilitate high resilient individuals to deal with adversity effectively. Research findings by Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, and Joseph (2008) illustrated that participants who showed higher level of gratitude demonstrated higher level of perceived social support, lower level of stress and depression at the end of their first term of study. This implies that gratitude serves as a factor to foster resilience at a period of life transition.

There is no study to date examines the direct relationship between acceptance and resilience although acceptance is commonly accepted as an important construct in the process of coping with negative life events. According to Bond, Hayes, Baer, Carpenter, Guenole, Orcutt, Waltz, and Zettle (2011), acceptance refers to “the willingness to experience (i.e., not alter the form, frequency, or sensitivity of) unwanted private events, in order to pursue one's values and goals” (Bond, et al., 2011, p.678). This is particularly essential for those who are attempting to cope with unchangeable life events due to the fact that accepting things as they are and not to linger on the incidents appear to be an effective coping method.

Consistent with this belief, several researches investigated this particular personal quality in a wide variety of psychological issues which included depression, suicide, substance abuse and psychological trauma (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). Due to the positive association between acceptance and favorable psychotherapy outcomes, acceptance-based interventions are currently been formulated and applied in dealing with various psychological problems (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Hayes, et al., 1996). Specifically, Carver, Pozo, Harris, Noriega, Scheier, Robinson, Ketcham, Moffat, and Clark (1993) reported that acceptance served as an important predictor of the psychological adaptation and well-being among a group of breast cancer patients. Conversely, denial which is regarded as the opposition of acceptance was associated with higher level of stress in conjunction with resulting in detrimental impact on participants' psychological well-being.

Thompson, et al. (2011) have postulated if mindfulness and acceptance promote resilience to trauma, the present mindfulness and acceptance based interventions might help to reduce negative
psychological outcomes among individuals who are potentially experiencing traumatic events as well as those who have recently exposed to trauma. More specifically, they proposed that "nonjudgmental acceptance of and compassion for temporary psychological symptoms, increased willingness to experience fear-laden internal and external events, decentering from anxious and ruminative cognitions, heightened distress tolerance, and increased emotional processing of the event through contact with the present moment" (Thompson, et al., 2011, p.231) might be some of the pathways to foster resilience. This suggests the importance of further investigation for the association between acceptance and resilience.

Having known the important implications of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude on one’s mental health outcomes as well as their therapeutic effects, a question has been raised – are these variables play a part as predictors of resilience?

PRESENT STUDY

Despite various empirical studies to support the therapeutic values of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude in assisting people to cope with negative life stressors, limited studies have been conducted to examine their relationship with resilience which is regularly regarded as an adaptation or coping ability to handle threatening circumstances. Furthermore, there was a lack of resilience study which carried out on population that is experiencing less extreme stressors although massive amount of researches have been conducted to examine the underlying mechanism of resilience in a variety of populations that face with extreme hardship in life. For instance, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) pointed out that psychologists demonstrate insufficient knowledge of how non-clinical or normal population thrives under more benign conditions.

University students have been identified as a population who are in the midst of facing with various challenges, changes and adversity in life. This is due to a number of significant life adjustments involved such as the experience of entering university, transition period to enter adulthood along with the need to assume greater responsibility in terms of all aspects in life which might be resulting in higher level of stress and anxiety (Noradilah Md Nordin, Mansor Abu Talib, & Siti Nor Yaacob, 2009).
Hence, the proposed study addressed the existing gaps in empirical research to deal with the construct of acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, and resilience among undergraduate population in Malaysia. More specifically, two primary objectives of the current study are:

1. To measure the level of resiliency among university students.
2. To identify the predictors of resilience among university students.

Based upon the objectives formulated, the present study intends to seek answers for the following research questions:

1. How resilient are university students?
2. What are the predictors of university students’ resiliency?

As such, the present study hypothesizes acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are significant predictors of resilience in which higher level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude predict higher level of resilience.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present study is referred to as a quantitative study which employs a survey design with three predictors and one criterion variable. The predictors are acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude while criterion variable is resilience.

**SAMPLE**

For multiple regressions study, sample size plays an important role whereby insufficient number of sample might violate the statistical results. Thus, a rule of thumb was adopted to determine the minimum number of participants required for the present study: \( N \geq 50 + 8(\text{no. of predictors}) \) (Green, 1991).

An electronic mail regarding the current study was sent to all undergraduate students at a public university in Malaysia, of which 162 responded. Participants’ age ranged from 19 to 28 years old and their mean age was 21.42 years old. Out of the 162 participants, 113 were females which...
constituted to 69.75% and 49 were males which constituted to 30.25%. The ethnicity compositions were 82 (50.62%) Malay, 54 (33.33%) Chinese, 12 (7.41%) Indians, 8 (4.94%) native Sarawak, and 6 (3.70%) native Sabah.

INSTRUMENTS

A total of five major instruments were employed for data collection as stated below:

Demographic information sheet

Participants' background information such as age, gender, and ethnicity was collected through demographic information sheet.

The acceptance and action questionnaire-II (Bond, et al., 2011)

The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II) was developed by Bond and colleagues in the year 2011. AAQ-II is a self-report measure to assess both psychological flexibility and inflexibility. AAQ-II consists of 10-item with 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 which signifies never true to 7 which indicates always true. It is a unidimensional measure, with experiential avoidance loading at one end and acceptance loading at the other end. Higher scores reflect greater acceptance and action. The preliminary evidence suggests that AAQ-II has strong psychometric properties with mean alpha coefficient of .84. The 3- and 12-month test-retest reliability has been found to be .81 and .79 respectively (Bond, et al., 2011).

Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, et al., 2005)

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is an 18-item self-report scale which aims to measure people's dispositional forgiveness of self, others and situations. Respondents rate their levels of forgiveness on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 reflects almost always false of me and 7 reflects almost always true of me. Higher scores on HFS indicate higher levels of forgiveness. HFS demonstrates desirable psychometric properties with adequate internal consistency reliability, test-retest
reliability, and convergent validity. The test-retest reliability is .82 and the range of alpha coefficient is .84 to .87 for the total HFS scores (Thompson, et al., 2005).

The gratitude questionnaire (McCullough, et al., 2002)

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) is a self-report instrument which consists of 6-item, on a 7-point Likert scale range from 1 which reflects strongly disagree to 7 which reflects strongly agree. Higher scores on GQ-6 signify higher levels of grateful disposition. GQ-6 has strong psychometric properties with high internal consistency and a robust one-factor structure. The alpha coefficient of GQ-6 has been found to be ranged from .76 to .84 and the mean score of GQ-6 on a sample of 238 undergraduate students was found to be 5.92 (SD = .88) (McCullough, et al., 2002).

Connor-Davidson resilience scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003)

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) is a self-report measure which consists of 25-item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not true at all, 4 = true nearly all of the time). The total score range from 0 to 100 whereby higher scores reflect higher levels of resilience. The CD-RISC has been tested in both clinical and non-clinical samples. A satisfactory overall internal consistency with alpha coefficient of .89 was established by using the community sample. High test-retest reliability was yielded, with intraclass correlation coefficients of .87 (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

PROCEDURE

Data collection was conducted through electronic mailed questionnaire. A questionnaire packet which consisted of general demographic information sheet, Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, The Gratitude Questionnaire and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was sent to all undergraduate students at one of the public universities in Malaysia. Explanation regarding the nature of the study and specific instruction to complete the questionnaires were attached in the email. A disclaimer states that participants who agreed to answer the survey constituted informed consent for their participation in the study was enclosed. A follow-up email was sent to all potential participants two weeks later, reminding them to participate in the study.
Another two weeks later, a second follow-up email was sent to all potential participants to attain a higher response rate.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The method of data analysis was multiple regressions analysis which defined as making prediction of the association between two or more predictors and a criterion variable (Aron, Aron, & Coups, 2006). A simultaneous method known as Enter method in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) regression analysis was utilized to investigate how much variance in the criterion variable (resilience) was explained by the predictors (acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude) on the basis of statistical criteria. Simultaneous method appears to best suit the nature of the current study as there is a lack of theoretical model in determining the sequence of predictors (Brace, Snelgar, & Kemp, 2012).

**RESULT**

The descriptive statistics revealed that the mean scores for resilience, acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude were 2.78 (SD = .64), 4.36 (SD = .97), 4.82 (SD = .81) and 5.36 (SD = .95) respectively. This indicates that participants exhibited average level of resiliency whereby their total mean score was 69.46.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude significantly predicted participant’s resilience level. By adopting the Enter method in SPSS, results revealed that a significant model emerged, $R^2 = .57$, $F(3, 158) = 69.23, \ p = .000$. The three predictors accounted for 56% of variance in the resilience scores with an Adjusted R Square value of .56. More specifically, it was found that gratitude ($\beta = .39, p = .000$) was illustrating higher relative importance in predicting resilience compared to acceptance ($\beta = .19, p = .011$) and forgiveness ($\beta = .31, p = .001$) which were also significant predictors for participants’ resilience level. In short, statistical results supported the notion that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude appear to be significant predictors for resilience among university students.
Further analysis was conducted to test for mediation. In the first mediation analysis, acceptance and forgiveness were entered as predictor variables and resilience as the outcome variable. Forgiveness’s relationship with resilience remained significant while controlling for acceptance; Beta = .59, t = 7.34, p = .00. The relationship between acceptance and resilience was weaker in this analysis (Beta = .13, t = 1.57, p = .12) compared to the direct relationship (Beta = .54, t = 8.07, p = .00). These results suggest full mediation in which the relationship between acceptance and resilience was mediated by forgiveness.
Table 4. Mediation effect (model 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Forgiveness</td>
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<td>11.67</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Acceptance</td>
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<td>1.57</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>7.34</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

In the second mediation analysis, forgiveness and gratitude were entered as predictor variables and resilience as the outcome variable. Gratitude's relationship with resilience remained significant while controlling for forgiveness; Beta = .37, t = 5.59, p = .00. The relationship between forgiveness and resilience reduced slightly in this analysis (Beta = .46, t = 6.85, p = .00) compared to the direct relationship (Beta = .68, t = 11.70, p = .00). These results suggest there was a partial mediation in the second model of mediation analysis.

Table 5. Mediation effect (model 2)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>11.70</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

As for mediation analysis which gratitude and acceptance were entered as predictor variables and resilience as the outcome variable, acceptance's relationship with resilience remained significant while controlling for gratitude; Beta = .36, t = 6.31, p = .00. The relationship between gratitude and resilience showed a slight decrease (Beta = .52, t = 9.12, p = .00) compared to the direct relationship (Beta = .65, t = 10.69, p = .00). These results suggest that the relationship between gratitude and resilience was partially mediated by acceptance.
Table 6. Mediation effect (model 3)

<table>
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<th>Step</th>
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<th>Beta</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
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<td>6.31</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p< .05

Sobel test was used to determine the significance of the mediation effects observed in the three models. Results of the Sobel test revealed that there was a statistical significant full mediation effect in model 1 whereby forgiveness was mediating the relationship between acceptance and resilience. Furthermore, Sobel test supported the significant partial mediation effects as observed in model 2 and 3.

**DISCUSSION**

Results obtained in the present study showed that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were significant predictors for resilience among a sample of undergraduate students. Thus, the hypothesis which states higher level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude predict higher level of resilience was supported. The current result was relatively consistent with previous findings which proposed by Thompson and colleagues (2011) who found the association between trait acceptance and positive psychological adjustment followed by traumatic events. In the study, people who showed greater acceptance reported better psychological functioning in life. Carver, et al. (1993) reported that acceptance was a significant predictor for psychological adaptation and well-being among cancer patients. This implies acceptance serves as a protective factor which assists people to cope with hardship in life.

According to Thompson, et al. (2011), being able to keep in touch with present moment appears to be the first step of acceptance. It is characterized by the willingness to keep in contact and experience both internal and external events without making judgment. More specifically, the mindful focus on the present moment protects people from ruminating about the past and the
future which are likely to result in distress (Follette, Palm, & Pearson, 2006). By placing the focus on the here-and-now, it helps people to perceive the unpleasant feelings or stress as expectable reactions to deal with adversity in life. This attitude prevents people from engaging in emotional or behavioral avoidance in order to increase the psychological flexibility (Thompson, et al., 2011).

Consistent with past research, the present findings supported the concept that forgiveness appears to be one of the significant predictors for resilience among university students. Thompson, et al. (2005) found that forgiveness is associated to positive psychological well-being and it seems as an effective coping mechanism to deal with negative life events. This is further supported by another study which proposed that forgiveness fosters people’s capacity to cope with psychological stressors (Maltby, et al., 2005).

McCullough (2000) suggested that the therapeutic effects of forgiveness might be mediated by two major mechanisms. One possible explanation of the predictive value of forgiveness for resilience underlies on the restoration of supportive relationships, either with oneself or the transgressors. More specifically, forgiveness helps to facilitate the reestablishment of caring relationship between offender and victim. As social support and caring relationships have been found to be contributing to the development of well-being, it is understandable that forgiveness which fosters reconnection with others might in turn contribute to preserving one’s well-being as well as resiliency.

The second forgiveness mechanism indicates that forgiveness assists in monitoring people’s hostility. People who are forgiving demonstrate a reduction in terms of their motivation to cause harm or avoid the others especially the offenders. Hence, there is less likely that the negative events will place an impact on the relationships with others in which there are less people who can induce negative feelings or motivations on hostility among the forgiving people. By experiencing reductions in revenge and avoidance, people are capable of preserving positive interpersonal relationship with others in conjunction with building up their resiliency to deal with negative events in life (McCullough, 2000).

Considering the predictive value of gratitude to resilience, current finding was consistent with several findings from past researches. Ong, et al. (2006) proposed that positive emotions play a role to foster people's ability to deal with stressors in life and positive emotions are commonly identified among high resilient individual. Therefore, this implies gratitude which appears to be a form of positive emotion serves as a protective factor to enhance people’s capability to thrive under adverse life experiences. Wood, Joseph, and Linley (2007) also reported that gratitude serves as a
buffer of stress by fostering higher level of social support and lower level of stress among undergraduate students during their first term of study.

According to Broaden-and-Build Theory, positive emotions which experience by people during the times of stress encourage people to practice creative thoughts and actions after which assist them to build an effective coping strategy that might help to bounce back against negative life events (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Hence, knowledge and effective use of positive emotions might result in a number of advantages in coping with adversity in life. As the Broaden-and-Build Theory postulates a prediction that positive emotions are beneficial in numerous ways, gratitude which is found to be able to elicit several positive emotional responses is likely to operate based on this particular theory in fostering one’s resiliency.

Gratitude facilitates the broadening of mindsets in conjunction with building personal resources which might be adopted during the times of adversity. By experiencing gratitude, it inspires people to direct their focus on benefits that they have received from others. This helps to foster friendships along with the social bonds which perceive as important sources of social support when people are facing with negative life events. Furthermore, expressing gratitude encourages flexible thinking through broadening the scope of cognition. This is particularly important when people are in the midst of coping with stress and adversity so that they are capable of generating effective coping strategies to thrive under the stressful circumstances (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

A study conducted by Wood, et al. (2007) provided empirical support to this theory whereby their research showed that gratitude was correlated with a number of positive coping approaches such as seeking for emotional social support and utilization of positive reinterpretation. As grateful people generate a more pleasant perception towards the world and tend to focus on the positive aspects in life, it is more likely to increase their willingness to deal with problems by implementing a more active cognitive and behavioral action. Therefore, it shows that gratitude serves as a protective factor which strengthens people’s resiliency in handling with stressors in life.

In terms of university students’ resilience level, it was found that the current sample demonstrated a mean score of 69.46, which represents a close to the mean. This indicates that participants were exhibiting average to good level of resiliency. The result obtained was consistent with other studies which utilized the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale as the instrument to measure resilience level. For instance, Singaporean adolescents with the age range of 12 to 16 years old illustrated mean score of 71.13 in terms of their resiliency (Lim, Broekman, Wong, Wong, & Ng, 2011). Another study
revealed a resiliency mean score of 69.1 among a sample of Australian undergraduate students (Bitsika, Sharpley, & Peters, 2010).

The mediation analysis result demonstrated a full mediation effect when acceptance and forgiveness were entered as predictors and resilience as criterion variable. As abovementioned, the standardized regression coefficient between acceptance and resilience decreased substantially when controlling for forgiveness. This indicates that the relationship between acceptance and resilience is mediated by forgiveness. Hence, the result implies that forgiveness is the key factor to resilience in which forgiveness is essential in order for acceptance to be statistically correlated to resilience.

The importance of forgiveness to resilience among this sample can be discussed from different perspectives. To begin with, one of the possibilities might be due to the fact that undergraduate students who participated in the current study are filled up with high level of hatred. As the undergraduate school experience itself might be associated with vast amount of stress, the challenges that they have encountered during their university life might be directly or indirectly result in anger or dissatisfaction in life. Hence, forgiveness is essential to assist them to let go of grudges and bitterness in order to cope with their difficulties in life.

Another possible reason underlies on the impact of education which emphasizes on the importance of forgiveness in a multiracial country. Malaysia is known as a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country in which people from different ethnic groups have learned to live peacefully with each other while maintaining separate cultural identities. The teaching that one shall learn to forgive the unintentional offences caused by another party due to the lack of understanding about the cultural differences has been blended in the local education system from primary to tertiary education. This helps Malaysians to develop an ability to maintain a respect to the differences among people who are from different cultural background in order to maintain social harmony. As such, forgiveness is vital to the current sample.

**LIMITATIONS**

The present study reveals several limitations that might possibly impair the credibility of the findings. First, the exclusive use of self-report measures appears to be one of the limitations. Information obtained might not be as deep as those obtained through other more thorough
methods such as interviews, observations, and journals. There is a possibility that participants' responses were influenced by their mood when responding to the questionnaires. Also, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are somewhat considered as abstract concepts which required participants to develop a sensibly degree of self-understanding in order to be able to report them in a meaningful manner (Kollman, 2008).

Another limitation of this study is associated with the sample used which was university students in a Malaysian local university. As undergraduate students might exhibit significant differences from the general population in terms of their achievement, intelligence, and perceptions toward acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude (Axford, 2007), the results might not be generalized to other populations.

The lack of control over the other additional variables which might affect undergraduate resilience seems to be a flaw in the present study. Based on the findings from previous researches, a number of personal characteristics as well as external factors place an impact on one's resilience level. However, environmental or other social factors such as attachment, self-efficacy, parental factors, social support, socioeconomic status, and locus of control that might interfere with resilience are not directly measured in the current study (Axford, 2007; Parker, 2006). In fact, the nature of the present study placed the major focus on the predictive values of several personal characteristics which are acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude which operated on the individual level. Hence, it is crucial for the future study to broaden the investigation by including other external variables in order to provide a more comprehensive finding regarding undergraduate's resilience level.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The significant findings from the present study have added to the growing body of research in the field of positive psychology. Resilience research plays an important role in examining and identifying protective factors which lead to the development of one's resiliency in order to cope with hardships in life. Hence, current finding has strengthened the previous finding which suggests that acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude are protective factors that enhance people's resiliency. More specifically, current research serves as groundwork for future resiliency research particularly in the Malaysian context. This is predominantly essential to develop a more comprehensive
resilience framework on campus which encompasses the utilization of both internal and external protective factors that fosters resiliency.

Various resilience interventions can be developed based on current finding which suggests that enhancing students’ level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude may assist to increase their ability to cope with adversity in life. As acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were found to be significant predictors for resilience among university students, psychological interventions which incorporate these components can be implemented to increase students’ resilience level. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the replication of current study in order to validate the current findings. Replication of the present research can be conducted by incorporating a larger population which involves undergraduate students across different universities in Malaysia.

As current study placed the major focus on personal qualities which contribute to resiliency, a more integrative model of resiliency which incorporates broader range of variables might provide a better idea about the variables which predict people’s resilience level. First, this can be done by including more personal qualities which might be associated with resilience as an expansion of current research. For instance, optimistic, self-esteem, self-efficacy, creativity and a sense of humor appear to be other human characteristics that are worth to be examined in terms of their predictive values of resilience among young adults in Malaysia.

Other than merely focusing on personal qualities, numerous demographic and psychological factors which might be associated with resiliency can be explored in the future research. This can be done by integrating family, community and social factors in the model of resiliency. By doing so, the production of a more comprehensive resiliency model for young adults in Malaysia is possible.

Another feasible direction for future research is to focus on examining the effectiveness of implementing various positive psychology interventions which integrate the components of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude with the intention to enhance resilience. By taking into consideration of the preliminary finding about the predictors of resilience, it provides a clearer direction for future research which intends to design resilience intervention program in Malaysian context.
CONCLUSION

The young adult years can be considered as a time of adversity whereby attending university might be associated with moderate amount of stress. This transition period in young adults’ life requires them to cope with various adjustment, financial, and academic issues in order to adapt to the new phase of life. Therefore, a deeper understanding regarding the variables involved in coping with adversity appears to be crucial for university students. The proposed study of examining predictors for resilience helps to achieve the goal. By enhancing the knowledge base regarding factors which influence resilience among university students, interventions for this particular population can be implemented in order to assist them to overcome the hardships in life.

Considering the findings of current study, acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude were found to be significant predictors of resilience among university students. Although the impact of the predictive values differed across the three predictors, gratitude demonstrated highest importance in predicting resilience level among the participants. Hence, interventions which aimed at enhancing students’ resilience can benefit from incorporating strategies to increase one’s level of acceptance, forgiveness, and gratitude. In a nutshell, more future researches should be conducted to validate current findings as well as to introduce relevant interventions which can improve one’s resilience.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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COUNSELOR’S EMPATHY: 
THE PRE-REQUISITE FOR EFFECTIVE COUNSELING 
Ida Hartina Ahmed Tharbe

ABSTRACT

Empathy is essential for quality care of clients. The ability of a counselor to be empathic in a counseling session influences the effectiveness of the counseling session. Carl Rogers listed empathy as one of the core condition of effective counseling (1957). Empathy was said to improve the therapeutic effectiveness of the counseling relationship by providing the condition of acceptance and understanding between the counselor and the client. This article will explore various aspects of empathy, including its definition, its relationship with emotional intelligence, its contribution to the counseling relationship, the level and stages involved and ways of enhancing counselor’s empathic ability. Overall, this article intends to increase the level of understanding of counselors towards this abstract concept of ‘empathy’.

Keywords: Empathy, counseling, emotional competence
INTRODUCTION

Clients entering a counseling relationship are usually accompanied with the hope that the counselor will understand the turmoil and struggle they are experiencing deep within themselves. Self-disclosing to someone they barely knew is not an easy task and clients will usually be very cautious about doing so. Counselor who acts as the agent of change in a counseling relationship has to be able to explore the client’s problem effectively without any constraints and resistance from the client. So what makes a counselor effective? The answer lies in simple term, ‘empathy’, also known as the ability to understand and experience the feeling of another person and communicate it effectively to him/her.

Empathy opens up doors of opportunities for the counselors and the clients to explore overt and covert messages regarding a situation and share it on a deeper basis. With the existence of empathic understanding, clients will feel at ease to share their problems, knowing that the counselors genuinely understand what they are going through. Even resistant clients can be effectively dealt with if the counselors use their empathic skill to its greatest potential. According to Gelso and Fretz (2001), virtually all major schools of counseling recognized the importance of empathy in the counseling session. Therefore this article explores various aspects of empathy and how it contributes to the effectiveness of a counseling session. It will also propose some steps of training novice counselors to become more empathic in their sessions with the clients.

EMPATHY DEFINED

According to Stein & Book (2001), at its core, empathy is the ability to see the world from another person’s perspective, the capacity to tune in into what someone else might be thinking and feeling about a situation – regardless of how that view might differ from our own perception. Rogers (1980) described empathy as follows:

“It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in the others life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments”. (p.142)
Duan and Hill (1996) categorized two types of empathy. The first type is called cognitive empathy or intellectual empathy. It involves the counselor “taking in” the client’s perspectives and comprehending how the client feels. The second type is called effective empathy which entails the counselor sharing emotional identification with the client and actually feeling at least some of what the client feels. Empathy consists of two components, namely empathic understanding and empathic responding. According to Sutton and Stewart (2002) empathic understanding is a subjective experience on the part of the counselor. It means having the ability to perceive the clients’ world as clients see it, to grasp it from their frame of reference and being able to communicate that understanding tentatively and sensitively back to the clients. Meanwhile, a good empathic response is not merely based on the verbal and non-verbal communication of the counselor. A good empathic response must take into account the context of what is said, and everything that surrounds and permeates a client’s statement (Egan, 1994). Empathy can be interpreted as ‘listening with the heart’ followed by the act of conveying the understood meaning to the client.

EMPATHY AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

The notion of competency has always been the topic of discussion among the counseling professionals. Competency in counseling extends beyond skills, knowledge and expertise. Competency of counselors also includes the ability of counselors to think and act as needed by the situation in the counseling session. This competency refers to both cognitive and emotional intelligence of the counselors. Much has been discussed about cognitive intelligence or IQ. However, the notion of emotional intelligence became famous only in the 1990’s by authors such as Mayor and Salovey (1993, 1997) and Goleman (1995, 1998). Since then, empathy has been given much emphasis as an important element of emotional competency in conducting individual relationships.

Goleman (1998) listed empathy as one of the prerequisite of being emotionally intelligent. Goleman also described empathy as our social radar which navigates our interpersonal behavior with others. With regards to empathy, Goleman offers the following description:

“Sensing what others feel without their saying so captures the essence of empathy. Others rarely tell us in words what they felt. Instead, they tell us in their tone of voice, facial expression, or other non-verbal ways. The ability to sense this subtle communication builds on more basic
competencies, particularly self-awareness and self-control. Without the ability to sense our own feelings or to keep them from swamping us, we will be hopelessly out of touch with the mood of others.” (Pg.135)

According to Goleman (1998) the prerequisite of empathy is self-awareness, recognizing the visceral signals of feelings in one own body; among counselors, the most effective and empathic were best able to tune in to their body's own signals for emotion. Goleman (1998) identifies three levels of empathy as follows:

a) First level empathy requires being able to read another's emotion,

b) Second level of empathy entails sensing and responding to a person’s spoken concern or feelings (type of empathy required for counselors),

c) Third or highest level empathy is understanding the issues and concerns that lies behind another’s feeling (also known as advance empathy which is usually an additional competency of experienced counselors)

Meanwhile, Egan (1998) distinguishes between two levels of empathy in counseling; primary level and advanced level accurate empathy. Primary level empathy refers to the interchangeability between the clients' statement and the counselor's responses. Advanced level empathy is built on the primary level base and emphasizes the counselor’s responding in a way that facilitates deeper exploration of relevant issues. According to Covey (1989), empathic communication is one of the seven habits of highly effective people that provides psychological air which helps people breathe more freely in their relationships. Therefore, the ability to empathize is important among counselors in order to ensure the effectiveness of the counseling session. At the same time, it becomes the indicator of how emotionally intelligent the counselor is. Without empathy, the counseling session which is built upon trust and understanding will not be entirely successful.
THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY IN THE COUNSELING RELATIONSHIP

It is impossible to think of therapeutic counseling without linking it to empathy. Over the years, the ability to empathize was considered as one of the necessary characteristics of counselors. The effectiveness of the counseling process hinges on empathy and the ability to focus on our own feelings and share them (Goleman, 1998). According to Goleman (1998):

“Beyond mere survival, empathy is critical for superior performance wherever the job focus in on people, Whenever a an artful reading of a person’s feeling matters, from sales and organizational consulting to psychotherapy and medicine, as well as leadership of any kind, empathy is crucial to excellence”. (pg 139)

One of Rogers's necessary and sufficient conditions for constructive change in counseling requires the counselor to “experience an empathic understanding of the client’s internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate the experience to the client” (Rogers, 1957). In terms of the counseling relationship, Rogers (1957), viewed empathy as:

“To sense the client’s private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ quality – this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client’s anger, fear or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear or confusion getting bound up in it, is the condition we are trying to describe. When the clients world is clear to the therapist and he moves about in it freely than he can communicate his understanding of what is clearly known to the client and can also voice meaning in the client’s experience of which the client is scarcely aware”. (pg98)

According to Gelso & Fretz (2001) it is hard to envision effective counseling if the counselor is not able to empathize with the client and his or her issues. Empathy is the principal route to understanding helpless clients and allowing them to feel understood (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003). Helpers make an active effort to put themselves in this internal perceptual frame without losing their own identity or objectivity. (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003)

Empathic responding is one of the crucial conditions in effecting clients change during the counseling session. Brammer, Shostrom and Abrego (1989) defined empathy as the attempt to think with, rather than for or about the client. Empathy helps to build rapport an elicit information from clients by showing understanding, demonstrating civility (Egan, 1994), conveying that both counselor and client are working from the same side and fostering client goals related to self-exploration (Gladstein, 1983). The counselor can be considered successful if the client benefits from
the empathic understanding and lead to their own self understanding and consequent confidence in their ability to solve their own problems (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003).

According to Egan (1994), as helpers, counselors must be able to enter clients world deeply enough to understand their struggles with problems situations or their search for opportunities with enough depth to make counselors participation in problem management and opportunity development valid and substantial. Okun (1992) was very passionate about empathy, as stated in his writing as following:

“The therapeutic relationship becomes the single most curative variable in treatment. It provides the necessary context in which repressed parts of the ego or self-repressed unbearably painful feelings can surface, become understood and integrated with the help of the therapist’s (support)". (pg 21)

STAGES AND PROCESS OF EMPATHY

Gladstein (1983) points out that several conceptualizations of empathy seem to include some common stages. First empathy is experienced emotionally, through a process of identification with the client. However this is not complete identification. Rather it is a process in which the counselor, to some extend experiences what the client feels and yet maintains the necessary separateness. Second, there is cognitive activity, in which the counselor consciously shifts around the client expressions and considers their meaning to the client. Third, there is a communication of that empathy to the client. Lastly, there exist the client’s sense and perception of the degree to which the therapist is attuned and actually with him/her in immediate personal understanding (Barret-Lennard, 1986). And this process will recycle throughout the counseling session.

Hackney (1978) recommends that “the counselor needs to experience the feelings first, comprehend it as best as you can, then react to it”. According to Sutton and Stewart (2002) demonstrating empathy means:

   a) being able to step into the client shoes and being able to step out again
   b) being able to back stand far enough to remain objective rather than standing too close and risk becoming enmeshed in the client's world
   c) being close yet remaining separate from – it doesn’t mean we become the other person
The following diagram demonstrates the process of empathy. The interchange of messages happens when the client begins to self-disclose to the counselor. The counselor, by listening attentively to the various aspects of the message being conveyed, will try to understand it thoroughly. Simultaneously the counselor enters the frame of reference of the client, putting himself ‘inside the shoe of the client’. Once the counselor truly understands, the counselor will virtually exit from the client’s frame reference. Following this, the counselor will deliver his understanding of the self-disclosure verbally to the client. The techniques and skills used to deliver this understanding might differ among counselors. However, most importantly, the client must experience the sense of being understood. This process will continue throughout the counseling session and it requires the counselor to be alert and sensitive to the reaction of the client towards the counselor’s empathic responds.

Diagram 1: The process of empathy
A skilled counselor is able to enter the client’s frame of reference and exit from it entirely, once the session ends. The failure to retreat from the client's frame of reference usually results from counter transference. Keen (2007) emphasized that empathy means to recognize others’ feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it. The inability to get out of a client’s frame of reference is similar to what Goleman (1998) termed as emotional distress, a situation where one person catches another person’s upset. Goleman described this phenomenon as when someone who is highly empathic is exposed to another person’s negative moods and doesn’t have the self-regulation skills to calm his own sympathetic distress. This will hinders the therapeutic process since the counselor has the tendency of either overtaking client’s responsibility of solving the problem or losing the focus towards the client and began to focus on his own self. The skill of empathizing needs intuition and good imagination. At the same time, the counselor must be able to separate himself from the client’s problem in order to remain calm and stress free.

In order to avoid emotional distress, a good counselor must master the art of emotional management to avoid being overwhelmed by the distress of clients. Too much empathy on the counselor’s part could be a problem since it perpetuates a dependent maturity (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003). Over identification with the client will lead to sympathy which is more of an emotional reaction, immediate and uncontrolled, which inundates when one person imagines himself in the position someone else is (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008) Sympathy can lead to suspension of care and lack of objectivity of the counselor in attending the client. Novice or inexperienced counselors may confused empathy with sympathy. In reality, there exist clear distinction between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy puts the counselor first, by listening actively to the clients self-disclosure, understanding and reflecting the feelings of the client regarding his or her situation. According to Goleman (1998) understanding someone’s point of view or perspective and knowing why they feel as they do, does not inevitably mean embracing it. Empathy is not about being ‘nice’ or accepting and agreeing to everything that the clients expressed in the session. But it is rather a non-judgmental attitude of the counselor who believes that a client has the right to his own perspectives. By expressing empathy, a person (counselor) admits the existence of another's
(client) viewpoint without passing any judgment on its validity (Stein & Book, 2001). Empathy therefore involves a deep understanding of the clients’ feelings and the ability to verbalize it in a way that will make the client feel understood.

**TRAINING NOVICE COUNSELORS TO BE EMPATHIC**

As a counselor educator at a higher learning institution, the author finds that counselor education training mostly focuses on teaching the novice counselors to respond empathically to clients rather than teaching them to feel empathy towards the client. Obviously from the earlier discussion in this paper, there is a glaring difference within empathic understanding and empathic responding. Novice counselor may easily learn the techniques of responding empathically by using the skill of reflection during the conversation with the client. However, the main objective is to get into the client’s frame of reference and understands the true emotions experienced by the client before the counselor can comprehend it back in terms of reflection. Empathy is hard work for those who are not very intuitive (Ida Hartina Ahmed Tharbe, 2005) because empathy works within the conditional framework of ‘as if I were that other person’. Therefore it taps into the listener’s intuition and imagination (Sutton and Stewart, 2002). Goleman (1998) said that intuition and gut feeling bespeak the capacity to send messages from our internal store of emotional memory that is our own reservoir of wisdom and judgment. This implies that some people are more empathic that others by nature. Empathic people are more sensitive towards silence social signals indicating what other people may want or need (Leiberg & Anders, 2006).

Researchers found a significant relationship between the level of counselor emotional intelligence and counselor ability to express empathy towards the clients (Miville,Carlozzi, Gushue, Schara, & Ueda, 2006). However, counselors should not be discouraged if they find themselves lack of this so called ‘natural skill’ because empathy is a skill that can be mastered through learning. As part of emotional intelligence ability, increasing stress was placed on the idea that empathy is observable, measurable and readily trainable – that is often requiring only few hours of training (Carkhuff, 1969; Cherniss & Caplan 2001). The only difference is some individuals might have to work harder at mastering this skill while others (with more intuition) find it quite easy to be mastered. What Rogers and many other seen as “a way of being” was reduced and narrowed to a trainable skill (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Following this, the author recommends several practical ways of enhancing the empathic ability of novice counselors during their course of training.
The ability of being empathic comes from accurate observation and understanding of client’s verbal expression and body language during the counseling session. Research on body language by Sweeney, Cottle & Kobayashi (1980) reveals that nonverbal channels convey more than half the emotional message. Counselors need to be fully aware of the facial expressions and bodily reaction displayed by the clients in order to be more empathic. Therefore, a good counselor training program must include enhancing the competencies to identify facial expressions and read body languages. This will improve counselors’ ability to identify the emotions of the clients accurately thus enabling them to enter clients frame of reference with ease. At the same time the counselors also become aware of their own facial and bodily reaction towards emotional triggers that may exist during sessions with the clients. This ability helps counselors to avoid any possibility of counter-transference due to over involvement in the clients’ feelings. Additionally, the ability to understand the manifestation of emotion through facial expression and body language will increase the counselors’ sensitivity towards false or manipulative expression (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). This helps the counselors to be more aware of negative intentions of the clients (if any) and navigate their counseling session more effectively.

Secondly, a good counselor training program must also help the novice counselors to build their vocabulary of emotions. The counselors must be able to identify various types of emotions and differentiate different range of emotions, both negative and positive, in order to comprehend what has been heard more accurately. According to Buckley and Saarni (2006), the ability to understand others’ emotions are shape by the range and complexity of an individual’s emotional vocabulary, which in turn facilitates or constricts how an individual conceptualize another’s emotional experience. The more words a person uses to describe emotions in his everyday life, the more emotionally aware he is being. Goleman (1995) listed 8 primary emotions and variations which are: anger; sadness; fear; disgust; shame, enjoyment; love and surprise. Each category of these primary emotions consists of emotions which are representing relatively the same meaning but with different intensity. Counselors with limited range of emotional vocabulary may experience difficulty to identify the intensity of different moods and emotions, for example the difference between anger and rage, or between stress and depression. Although the counselors may still technically use reflection as a way to show empathy towards the clients, they will not be able to touch the clients on a deeper level.

Novice counselors should be train to be more empathic by keeping a self-reflection journal during their course of study. They should be encouraged to reflect on any emotional experience during
their practical training in relation to their own problems or the problems brought up by their clients in the sessions. They should also be able to discuss these emotional reflections with their supervisors to increase their understanding towards the experience. In a way, it will also help the counseling trainees to manage their emotions more effectively through discussion and appropriate self-disclosure on top of the reflection journal exercise. A study by Pennebaker (1997) on the effect of writing about emotional experiences shows that when individuals write or talk about personally upsetting experiences in the laboratory, consistent and significant health improvements are found.

A sense of empathy is more difficult to achieve, although not impossible, particularly in helping situations in which client and counselor are far apart in race, culture, age, experience and socioeconomic status (Brammerm, Abrego and Shostrom, 1993). Therefore it is common for counselors dealing with multicultural clients to experience more challenges in trying to understand the struggles of their clients. In a multicultural country like Malaysia, an effective counselor training program must include the involvement and active interaction of counselor trainees with clients from different ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. The involvement can take the form of formal counseling session or informal sharing session from time to time. The recruitment of counselor trainees from various cultural backgrounds for each batch intake will also enable these future counselors to learn and share from each other. These steps will bridge the gap of understanding towards different lifestyles and ways of thinking and increase the competency of counselors to be more empathic towards clients from various backgrounds. Constantine (2001) proposes that the degree to which counselors can appropriately empathize with the concerns of culturally diverse clients may ultimately determine their ability to respond to these clients in a culturally sensitive manner.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an effective counselor is able to empathize with the client by listening to every detail that is being said, understanding it accurately and responding to the client in a way that reflects the understanding. Empathy is not necessarily a natural talent. It can be learned through trainings and direct experiences of dealing with various types of clients. Emotionally competent counselors usually convey empathy better than those who are not emotionally competent. Therefore it is necessary for counselor educators and counselor training programs to incorporate ways of enhancing emotional competency and the ability to empathize among novice counselors.
Regardless of how it is mastered by the counselors, it remains as an important pre-requisite of an effective counseling session.

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THE INFLUENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT TOWARD JOB SATISFACTION AND WORK STRESS AMONG MALAYSIAN WOMEN EMPLOYEES
Fonny Hutagalung, Zahari Ishak & Syed Kamaruzaman

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of sexual harassment experience on job satisfaction and work stress among female employees at three universities in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. A questionnaire consisting of four sections was used to measure sexual harassment experience, job satisfaction, work stress, and respondents' demographic information. A total of 1423 participants were selected through simple random sampling technique. Results show that more than half of the sample has had sexual harassment experience. Female employees aged between 26 to 39 years, married, and who have worked in less than 5 years had more sexual harassment experiences. Results also show a significant negative relationship between sexual harassment experience with job satisfaction and significant positive relationship between sexual harassment experiences with work stress. Results also indicate that sexual harassment can be a predictor of job satisfaction and work stress.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, job satisfaction, work stress, age, length of service and marital status.
INTRODUCTION

Although sexual harassment is now a global problem, most of the available research is conducted in western countries (see e.g., Crocker & Kalemba, 1999, European Commission, 1988; U.S. Merit Systems Promotion Board, 1988). An enormous body of research exists on sexual harassment in the workplace, primarily because sexual harassment negatively impacts employees on the personal level. For example, workplace sexual harassment has been shown to be responsible for undermining job satisfaction and affective commitment (Shaver et al., 2000; Shupe, Cortina, Ramos, Fitzgerald, & Salisbury, 2002); as well as responsible for negative psychological conditions such as stress, depression and decreased productivity (Cortina, Huerta, Magley, Pang, & Torges, 2006).

Previous research reported that more women employees are victims compared to male employees. Approximately, 40 to 70 percent of sexual harassment victims are women. Victims with characteristics, such as single mothers, single women, young women, low educated group, new workers, unmarried, supporting staff group such as clerk experienced more sexual harassment compared to senior workers, the highly educated and those holding administrative and professional posts (Gutek, 1985; Renzetti & Curan, 1999).

There is still a lack of similar studies in developing countries in general (e.g., Lui, 1996; Limpaphayom & Williams, 2006) and Malaysia in particular. The seriousness of the problem has prompted the Malaysian government to officially launch the Code of Practice on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment in 1999. The previous study on sexual harassment in Malaysia focused more on the private sector compared to research in higher learning institutions and other sites such as factories, private companies and organizations (Hishamuddin, et al., 2003; Ishak & Ching, 2004; Ismail, Lee, & Chan, 2007; Rohani, 2005; Syukran, 2004).

Sexual harassment is generally recognized as encompassing all forms of unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal or physical. The Malaysian Code of Practice specifically defines sexual harassment as any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that may be perceived by an individual (a) as a condition on one’s employment, (b) as an offence or humiliation, or (c) as a threat to one’s well-being. The forms of sexual harassment, together with examples, have been comprehensively specified in the Code of Practice as follows:

- a. Verbal (e.g., offensive or suggestive remarks)
- b. Non Verbal or gestural (e.g., leering or ogling with suggestive overtones)
- c. Visual (e.g., showing pornographic materials)
- d. Psychological (e.g., unwanted social invitations)
- e. Physical harassment (e.g., inappropriate touching)

The purpose of this study is to contribute in some way toward enhancing the understanding of the current sexual harassment in public higher learning institutions of Malaysia. Specifically it
examines the level of sexual harassment experienced as well as identifying the relationship between sexual harassment with job satisfaction and stress in the workplace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
A questionnaire survey was used for gathering the primary data for this study. The survey focused on women employees who had experienced workplace sexual harassment by male colleagues. The research design used is simple random sampling technique. Questionnaires were distributed and subsequently collected from female employees in the faculty's office (clerk, tutor, lecturers, and professors) in 3 (three) higher learning institutions in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. A total of 1423 questionnaires were completed.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections that assessed the sexual harassment experience of the respondents in the workplace, job satisfaction, work stress and demographics of respondents. The sexual harassment experience was measured using the Sex and the Workplace Questionnaire developed by Gutek (1985) which was made up of 8 items related to verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment. The marking scheme was rather simple for it only uses 3 scales, ranging from 1 for “never” to 3 for “ever”. The reliability of this instrument as measured by alpha coefficient is .85. Work satisfaction was measured using the Occupational Stress Indicator Questionnaire (from Cooper, Sloan, & Williams, 1988), which includes 22 positive questioning items. To measure work satisfaction, a six-point scale was used, ranging from 1 for “very unsatisfying” to 6 for “very satisfying”. Alpha reliability for this instrument is .96.

Work stress was measured using the Job Stress Survey questionnaire from Spielberger and Vagg (1992), which consists of 30 positive questioning items. To measure work pressure, a scale of 1 to 9 was used based on the degree of stress resulting from sexual harassment at the work place. Alpha reliability for this instrument is .85.

FINDINGS

Level of Sexual Harassment

The research findings show that a majority of 750 women employees experienced sexual harassment at an average degree (52%), high degree (25.9%) and low degree of sexual harassment (21.4%).

Demographics of Participants

The profile includes information about subject’s age, length of service and marital status. The total number of female workers involved is 1423 persons. According to age, the majority fall between 26 to 39 years (70.1%) while a substantial minority (43.9%) has a length of service less than 5 years and 64.8% are married. A complete result is shown in Table 1.
Table 1.
Respondents’ demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 25 years old</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 39 years old</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years old onward</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of service</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 5 years</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 years</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years and above</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Mother</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA one-way statistical analysis shows that there is a significant difference in sexual harassment experience based on different age [$F(2,1420) = 3.210, p < .01$] and length of service [$F(2,1420) = 7.325, p < .05$]. The complete results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Difference in Sexual Harassment Experience Based on Age and Length of Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>127.016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63.508</td>
<td>3.210*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Groups</td>
<td>28092.828</td>
<td>1420</td>
<td>19.784</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of service</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>288.160</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>144.080</td>
<td>7.325*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Groups</td>
<td>7931.684</td>
<td>1420</td>
<td>19.670</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * $p < .01$

To further understand the significant differences in age and length of service, a Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons Scheffe test was used. The findings show that there are significant differences between the mean score of the highest degree of sexual harassment experienced by employees aged 26 to 39 years and having length of service less than 5 years compared to those aged 40 years with
length of service of 10 years and above. The research findings based on the $t$-test revealed a significant difference between married women who were more harassed than single women. The complete findings and information are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Differences in Sexual Harassment Experience According to Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>9.68</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1401</td>
<td>-5.374*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01

Findings of Pearson Correlations

Significant correlation was found between sexual harassment and job satisfaction and work stress. Pearson correlation analysis result shows a significant negative relationship between the experience of sexual harassment and job satisfaction ($r = -.565^*, p < .01$). This means that employees experiencing sexual harassment more frequently can feel lower job satisfaction. Results also show a significant positive relationship between the experience of sexual harassment and work stress ($r = .646^*, p < .01$). This means that job stress will increase as employees encounter more frequent sexual harassment experiences.

Findings of Regression Analysis

To further investigate the prediction of sexual harassment experience on work satisfaction and work stress, Regression Analysis was used. The study result indicates that sexual harassment variable can be a predictor of job satisfaction and work stress variables [$F(2,1420) = 6.201, p < .01$]. Contribution of sexual harassment to job satisfaction is 33% and for work stress 17%. The whole contributions of sexual harassment as predictor are 50%. According to the findings, it is understood that if sexual harassment occurs more frequently, the job satisfaction will be much more affected than work stress. The total contribution is 50 percent. Therefore, sexual harassment in the workplace influences work satisfaction and work stress of an individual. The complete findings and information on Regression Analysis are shown in Table 4 and Table 5.
Table 4. Regression Analysis for Sexual Harassment Experience and Work Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual harassment experience</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-4.415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sum of Squares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression</th>
<th>8577.280</th>
<th>24.040*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>253317.893</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261895.172</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary for Sexual harassment with work satisfaction

$R = 0.181^*$

$R^2 = 0.33$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.031$

a. Predictor: Sexual harassment experience
b. Dependent Variable: Work satisfaction

Table 5. Regression Analysis for Sexual Harassment Experience and Work Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual harassment experience</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Stress</td>
<td>5.808</td>
<td>3.288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sum of Squares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression</th>
<th>255484.494</th>
<th>26.224*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>2761026.220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3016510.714</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary for Sexual harassment with Work Stress

$R = 0.291^*$

$R^2 = 0.17$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.081$

a. Predictor: Sexual harassment experience
b. Dependent Variable: Work stress

Note. * $p <.01$
DISCUSSION
The findings of study indicate that the majority of women employees in public higher education institutions who have experienced sexual harassment at moderate level, are aged between 26 to 39 years old, and have length of service less than 5 years, and are married. According to Feingold (2002) these women with characteristics are physically attractive and they are perceived as sociable, warm, and socially skilled. The results showed similarities with results from studies by O’Connell and Korabi (2000), Rohani (2005), and Yahaya Mahmood and Zulaika (2002).

Furthermore, findings of this study could give negative image towards the institution involved and reflect a negative perception from the public (Sabitha, 1999). Higher learning institution should be free from any sexual harassment elements, and this is similar with Badriyah (1988) in her study that public higher education institute or university is a place where learning and education process took place; and any sexual harassment could interfere with quality objective that has been set by the organization.

This study showed that sexual harassment was a significant influence in decreasing job satisfaction and increasing workplace stress. The results showed similarities with Fister and Gale (2003), Wolfe (2003), Fitzgerald (2005), Merkin (2008) which show that approximately 2.8 million work days are lost each year due to job dissatisfaction and stress, which made up the overall absenteeism measure, were higher for employees experiencing sexual harassment than for employees not experiencing sexual harassment. The whole contributions of sexual harassment as predictor are 50%. These findings have important implications to their dissatisfaction with their job and the costs involved due to stress-related diseases and illnesses, and injury claims are likely to increase employer medical costs. In turn, job withdrawal produces its own set of the costs. Thus, it is incumbent for employers to take note that sexual harassment is a warning sign that threatens workplace productivity and workforce stability.

CONCLUSION
This study confirms that female employees in Malaysia’s public higher education institutions have experienced sexual harassment in a workplace that had negative impact on the victims as well as the organization. A proper system for dealing with sexual harassment cases should be installed at the workplace to prevent women from being victims. The formation of comprehensively structured in-house mechanisms by individual, organizations, together with action committees representing a wide spectrum of workers in terms of levels, occupations and gender are imperative if employers are serious in their intention of circumventing the problem of sexual harassment of their female staff in the short-term. In addition, the university should also spell out clearly the procedure of investigation of the victim and the harasser, the consequent disciplinary action that could be taken, as well as any remedial action for the victim such as counseling for either or both the individuals involved.
REFERENCES


Fister, S., & Gale, S. (2003). Sickened by the cot of absenteeism, companies look for solutions: Internally devised cost-tracking systems, off-the-shelf software and outsourced absence-reporting services are all growing in popularity as employers try to figure out where an estimated 15 percents of the payroll is going. Retrieved from http:www.biomedsearch.com


