BARRIERS TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RELIGIOUS INTEGRATION APPROACH IN FAMILY AND MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

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Abstract
The integration of religious approach is an intervention style that is gaining a growing attention from the practitioners or counsellors in the family and marriage counselling field. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that there are barriers which influence the effectiveness of the service delivery processes to clients. This article attempts to explain on the findings of a study on these barriers as well as addressing the needs for the integration training of religious approach in enhancing the effectiveness of a particular counselling intervention. The research approach deployed for this study is qualitative of which semi-structured interview protocol was adopted involving six counselling practitioners. Data analysis was conducted using the Licthman's (2006) 3C Model. This study found that the main aspect obstructing the effectiveness of a particular intervention is the practitioners' competency factor itself. This study also discovered that there is a need for trainings especially on the integration of religious approach in the conventional counselling sessions.

INTRODUCTION
A particular counselling intervention that merely relies on a particular approach might not be able to solve an issue effectively. Hence, therapists have to master various approaches that are suitable to be integrated while sconducting a counselling intervention. Since a decade ago, the integration of religious approach has started to gain a growing attention in the counselling field and debates on this have been taking place among its practitioners (Youngren, 1993). To date, many therapists claim that they are the eclectic practitioners of which they apply various techniques that go beyond the border of a particular approach into a counselling intervention and the integration approach is seen as an openness in the procedures that consolidate various theories and techniques in the counselling session (Corey, 2005). Arkowits (1997) divided this integration approach into three parts namely the technical eclectic, theory integration, and the integration of elements contained in particular theories.

In a study on the integration of religions in counselling practices in Malaysia by Mazidah Mohd. Dagang, Raja Zirwatul Aida Raja Ibrahim and Azlina Abu Bakar (2015) discovered that 50 per cent of its practitioners had integrated the religious approach moderately while 25.8 per cent was found to minimally integrate the religious approach and 24.2 per cent had maximally integrated the religious approach. Based on that study, it was found that there are four main barriers faced by counselling practitioners in integrating the religious approach during counselling sessions. One of the barriers is, as mentioned by a number of respondents, lack of relevant skills to integrate religions in counselling practices. This is mainly due to the fact that there is no training course pertaining to the religious approach in counselling offered in tertiary education's counselling programmes. In addition, Carissa D'Aniello (2015) mentioned that, other than lacking the skills to integrate religious approach in counselling, there is also lack of open discussions on integration approaches in counselling as well as the inexistence of formal trainings to coach counsellors or

therapists on ways to integrate religions into the existing models of counselling.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
The main objective of this study is to identify the barriers that obstruct the application of *Maqasid Syariah* in decision making process in family and marriage counselling. This study also suggests suitable ideas in addressing these barriers.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
In a study by Mohd Suhadi (2018) on the application of the *Maqasid Syariah* elements in family and marriage counselling, there are a few barriers identified. Among them are:

Limited knowledge and appreciation among counselling practitioners.
The objective of counselling is to bring clients to a literate phase on the causes and effects of a particular action taken. In the application of the *Maqasid Syariah* element, practitioners will guide clients to explore the causes and effects of a particular action on life's main aspects namely religion, lives, mind, descent, and property; as well as to determine the level of need of a particular matter or decision based on the levels of *dharuriyyat, hajiyyat* or merely *tahsiniyyat.* Based on the concept in the *Maqasid Syariah* (Al-Shatibi, 2004), of a particular matter is harmful on at least an aspect or more, hence it is categorized under the *dharuriyyat* level. This means that a particular matter has to be done in avoiding harmful effects on the main aspects of life. If a particular matter may cause difficulties in preserving at least one or more aspect of life, hence it is categorized as *hajiyyat* level. Therefore, this matter has to be done in order to avoid the difficulties, while if a particular matter is merely an additional matter that provides pleasure in one or more aspects of life, hence it is categorized as *tahsiniyyat* level. Thus, it is up to the individuals whether to proceed with the matter or not.

Hence, practitioners who do not adequately understand the elements in the religious approach would not be able to guide

clients in exploring the causes and effects of a particular action in a wide perspective. Consequently, the clients will not be able to gain comprehensive information on a particular matter; causing immaturities of the counselling session. At this phase, if a decision is made, it will not provide a wholesome and optimum solution. If there is an integration of counselling and philosophies of the *maqasid syariah,* hence the counselling session conducted is considered successful and consequently will provide benefits to the clients as well as the family members especially in avoiding or minimizing harmfulness. This was mentioned by the participants in this study:

First participant : *"By hook or by crook, a Muslim counsellor assisting a Muslim client has to possess as much knowledge as he could especially the knowledge to identify whether a particular action would constitute a dharuriyyat, hajiyyat or tahsiniyyat category and maqasid syariah"*

Second participant: *"I think that the consultant conducting this consultancy has to master the aspects of dharuriyyat, hajiyyat and tahsiniyat. The same goes to other aspects in th maqasid syariah which is clearly to be more religious-oriented."*

According to Cashwell and Young (2011), the practitioners have to take into account their competency levels on the understanding of religious aspects as well as understanding the importance of knowing an individual's border in exploring the clients during the counselling session. Hence, Cashwell dan Young (2011) believed that practitioners have to understand the attitudes, beliefs as well as values of religions and how these factors influence the clients. It is such a vital matter for the practitioners to take initiatives to learn religious aspects and frequently explore their internal interests as well as evaluating any possibilities for injustice to happen (Cashwell & Young, 2011). This is due to the fact that the practitioners are worried for influencing the clients in making a particular decision based on the practitioners' personal preferences. This is contradicting with the principle of clients' freedom rights (autonomy principle) in decision making (Cashwell & Young, 2011).

In addition, another cause for this barrier is lack of appreciation of the *maqasid syariah* elements in the practitioners'' life itself; as mentioned by one of the participants in this study:

Third participant: *"From the counsellors' part, among the barriers is the counsellors' appreciation of a religious life as well as their understanding on the concept of Maqasid Syariah. Hence, it is difficult for them to practice it if these factors are considered".*

Based on this, Batson and Ventis (1982) stated that trainees who have religious intrinsic orientation would consider religion as an internal aspect that has to be appreciated in daily life as compared to religious extrinsic oriented individuals who make use of religions to achieve personal gains (Elizabeth, 2007). Prest, Russel and D'Souza (1999) conducted an observation on students in family and marriage counselling and found that students who had a high level of religious knowledge and appreciation would have the tendency to integrate religious aspects throughout their training period. The same study was also conducted on the attitude towards religions among the practitioners which found that there was a significant relationship between religious aspects and preferences on using religious aspects throughout their training sessions and clinical practice (Elizabeth, 2007).

Mohd Janib (2007) found the importance of the appreciation of a religious-oriented life among Muslim professionals who were highly educated and possessed special and standardized skills. This is due to the appreciation of a religion-based lifestyle would

form professionals who are able to fulfil and practice religious needs. The appreciation of religious lifestyles will also provide an additional advantage to Muslim professionals while dealing with others as they can practice good deeds especially in the context of mutual assistance during the counselling process (Salasiah Hanim et al., 2016).

The practitioners do not possess the skill of religious approach to be inculcated.
The findings on the application of *maqasid syariah* in family and marriage counselling also discover that there are practitioners who do not possess skills thus not integrating this application in the counselling sessions. If the practitioners own vast knowledge on the concept of *maqasid syariah* but they are not skilled in integrating them, consequently the practitioners would only be practicing it without having a clear structure. This will affect the counselling process as it might not be able to be conducted smoothly and efficiently. Among the reasons leading to unskillfulness of the practitioners include:

a. They do not attend any specific training or course on the application of the *Maqasid Syariah* elements.
b. They do not appreciate the elements of *Maqasid Syariah* in their daily routines.

This is supported by the participants of the study who claimed that the practitioners do not possess the right skills on implementing any religious approach such as *maqasid syariah* during the counselling intervention.

Fourth participant: *"The problem arises among the practitioners in terms of their skills in applying the skills, whether a particular matter has to be referred to the preservation of religions, life, mind, property, and the descent's dignity".*

Elizabeth (2007) in her study on the integration of religions to the trainees of counselling claimed that even though the Americans need religious approach in their counselling practice, the movement of their integration of religions is seen to be moving slowly. This mainly happen due to the absence of specific courses on the integration of religions in counselling sessions. In addition to that, Elizabeth (2007) claimed that, in a study on the influence of religious appreciation and attitudes among counselling practitioners, there was a significant relationship between the tendency to integrate the aspects of religions and religious appreciation in counselling sessions. This means that a counsellor's appreciation of religious lifestyle would affect his preparedness to integrate religious approach in counselling sessions.

The practitioners' needs for trainings
Based on the barriers discussed above, it is found that there is a high importance for the practitioners to attend special training sessions in order for them to understand more om religious approaches that can be inculcated as well as the procedures to integrate them. Karam, Blow, Sprenkle and Davis (2014) suggested that therapists or counsellors have to take initiavtives to understand the models of integration and pay attention to the simple and pragmatic procedures by inculcating the elements that are present in those models into counselling sessions (Carissa D'Aniello , 2015). Karam et al. (2014) also believed that competency in integrating these models would be fruitful after years of practicing various theories or approaches in the counselling sessions conducted. Therapists also have to understand the matters being done during the intervention, know the method of making decisions and the selection style of a particular approach as well as the techniques in intervention, which consequently would gain more potentials to become an effective and outstanding therapist (Tabibi 1996; Nelson & Prior 2003). Nevertheless, it is suggested that new practitioners to

practice the integration in the early stage of their career as a counsellor.

Fifth Participant: *"Therefore, those who do not come from religious background should get more exposure and trainings so that they will understand more about a particular approach."*

Mazidah et al. (2015) also reported the recommendation by her respondents on the measures to be taken in addressing those barriers. Among them is by increasing knowledge and skills on ways to integrate the aspects of religions in the counselling practice as well as be cautious while integrating religious aspects. This is important in order to avoid any perceptions believing that counselling sessions are similar to religious talks or sessions. Kelly and Eugene (1997) reported that based on a research by CACREP, which was conducted through observations, there were less than 25 per cent of programmes that are related to the religious and spiritual aspects. Hence, they suggested that trainings or courses on religions and spirituality are increased and emphasised so that the counselling practitioners' competence on religious counselling and spirituality can be enhanced.

In addition, Cashwell dan Young (2011) suggested a few measures to be conducted. Among them is to understand the background which may cause the value, attitude and belief of a particular client to be shaped. Therapists also have to understand the level of prejudice and fear experienced by the clients. Counsellors are also recommended to observe the feedback or responses given by the clients on the practice of religious aspects in the counselling process as well as understanding its limitations. Cashwell dan Young (2011) also advocated that the practitioners have to first identify the clients' religious inclination in the early stage of the counselling session before taking a more active approach in the session. This is important in order to ensure the therapeutic relationship in the session preserved. In is aligned with some findings that were highlighted by the participants in the study:

First Participant: "*In the client's side, if he or she doesn't have any knowledge on the aspect of maqasid syariah due to his or her educational background or there isn't a need for him or her to understand these concepts, then it is going to be difficult for them to appreciate this concept and to utilise it as a reference in decision making.*"

Sixth Participant: *"This concern refers back to the conditions of a particular client. Among the matters include the inability to see or foresee the impacts of the actions taken. This may be due to their level of understanding on the religious aspects."*

With regard to this, according to Malik Badri (2000), the ability to think has a strong relationship with religious appreciation and the spiritual elements of the individuals (Nik Rosila Nik Yaacob, 2013). This means, individuals that possess good religious appreciation as well as close spiritual relationship with the Creator will make them able to conduct analyses on a particular phenomenon well (Hagedorn & Gutierrez, 2009). In the year 2007, during the American Counselling Association's National Conference in Detroit, this movement suggested that individuals who offer trainings on religious integration in counselling to possess the following criteria:

a) Counselling practitioners have to possess a Doctoral Degree
b) They have to have at least five years of experience as a trainer
c) Counselling practitioners have to be competent in topics related to religions and spiritual (proven with research work, practice and research paper presentations).

Hagedorn & Cutierrez (2009) reported that the challenges faced in the process of integrating religions and spiritual in counselling are:
a) Not taking into account the aspect of value and belief system that is possessed by the clients
b) Failure to identify the resilience and advantages that is possessed by the clients
c) Failure to explore the way the value and belief system having the potential to form a therapeutic relationship
d) Failure to understand the aspect that becomes the clients' care
e) Possibilities of conflicts in the aspect of value and belief system between the practitioners and clients

With regard to this matter, Hagedorn & Cutierrez (2009) stated that the *Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs* (CACREP, 2009) had given a mandate that it should be a need for any counselling training programme to take into account the aspect of religions and spirituality in its programmes. Hence, there should be no reason anymore to say that there is absence of standardized programmes causing the mentioned issues to arise especially in discussing the integration of religions and spirituality in counselling sessions.

Hence, the practitioners' competency will become the factor that determines the effectiveness of the application contained in the ASERVIC (2009) which touches on three categories. The first category focuses on the needs for the practitioners to understand the attitudes, beliefs as well as the values of religions and spiritual. The second category highlights that professional practitioners have to continuously evaluate the influence of attitude and value related to religions possessed in influencing the clients during the decision making process. The third category touches on the ability of the professional practitioners to identify the limitations in understanding the clients' religious and spiritual appreciation level and with this understanding, the practitioners may suggest for further references, if needed. Elizabeth (2007) stated that among the factors that influence the effectiveness of religious integration trainings include the factor of openness in training programmes, programme's mergence, and trainees' personality and religious orientation factors. As for the factor of openness in training programmes, it is proven that training programmes that are open towards religious and spiritual approach will create students who are aware of the importance of religious and spiritual aspects. Martinez & Baker (2000) stated that previous studies found that the religious and spiritual aspect that is expressed openly in counselling training programmes plays an important role in trainees' thoughts on spirituality and religious concerns throughout their training period.

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