



Reliability Analysis of an Instrument: A Preliminary Study of Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) among Counsellor Trainees in a University

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to evaluate the reliability and internal consistency of Experience in Close Relationship among counsellor trainees in one of the local universities. The questionnaire had 36 items that were tested on 58 students from Bachelor of Counselling with Honours program. The Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) is used to assess attachment styles. The ECR assesses individual on two sub-scale of attachment which are attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. This study presented listed items and internal consistency reliability analysis of Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) in Malaysian context. The explanation on the items and reliability analysis represents the appropriateness of the instrument to trainee counsellors from public universities. The two sub-scale showed high reliability analysis. The reliability values of two sub-scale are reported respectively as following (i) attachment anxiety $\alpha = .86$; and (ii) attachment avoidance $\alpha = .93$. The instrument is reliable for assessing the attachment styles towards counsellor trainees at public universities. Therefore, the results from the pilot study showed that the questionnaire can be used without any modification in the actual study.

Keywords: Reliability; Experience in Close Relationship Scale; Counsellor Trainees; Preliminary study

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INTRODUCTION

Berita Harian Online (2018) stated that the government aims to produce 11,000

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registered counsellors by 2020. However, in 2018, there were only 8,039 registered counsellors with the Board of Counsellors (Berita Harian Online, 2018). Despite the increasing number of registered counsellors, key questions remain unanswered: i) Are registered counsellors or counsellor trainees aware of their attachment style? and, ii) Did the registered counsellor and counsellor trainees acknowledge that attachment styles affect many aspects of counselling session?

It is imperative to know that many registered counsellors especially counsellor trainees may not be conscious of their attachment style, leading to several pertinent problems in dealing with their counselling sessions. Tyler et al., (2015) conclusively stated that adult attachment significantly affects various aspects of the counselling relationship. However, many counsellors may not be aware of their attachment style, nor know-how this pattern of relating shapes their counselling practice (Tyler et al., 2015).

In addition, adult attachment style appears to affect human relationship including the relationship between the counsellor and their clients. Adult attachment is very important to help counsellor trainees to improve their professionalism. It also gives effect and influences the helping relationship, the development of counselling skills, empathy, depth of interpretation of session content and use of self in counselling (Bartholomew & Thompson, 1995). Therefore, there is an apparent need to produce higher quality and qualified counsellor trainees with the knowledge of attachment styles and skills pertaining to counselling before they become registered counsellors. Clearly, it is important to give early essential elements of attachment style for at the level of counsellor trainees. This should be useful to maintain and enhance the trainee's skills during their practicum. The attachment styles should be developed during the formal process initiated by a counselling program and intended to give awareness to them. Furthermore, the role of counsellor and counseling services are now viewed as an essential necessity, especially for society that faces a variety of pressure. Then, we can observe that attachment style would be one

of the helpful skills to be understand of counsellor trainees.

At present, there are several public universities in Malaysia which offer counselling education programme at tertiary level namely Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), Universiti Science Malaysia (USM), Universiti Science Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti of Malaya (UM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Technology of Malaysia (UTM). These public universities should help counsellor trainees in increasing their competency especially the awareness of attachment styles.

From here on, the importance of adult attachment can be highlighted, especially in improving counsellors' perception and interpretation of past personal and professional relationship interactions in terms of their view of self and self in relation to others. It can also provide valuable insights on how the process of learning about attachment style can affect counsellors' personal and professional growth. So, using Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) will be helpful for trainee counsellor to be aware of their attachment styles whether avoidance subscale or anxiety subscale. Attachment styles will be of good use to trainee counsellor to understand how people it is and how people think about themselves and others. Most importantly, this attachment styles can to improve personal and professionalism of counsellor professions. In hoping, this study will be hailed by demonstrating a good understanding and ideas to the counsellors,

educators and supervisors regarding attachment styles.

ATTACHMENT STYLES

Attachment theory is widely used in psychology area. Throughout this paper, attachment theory is a complex conceptualization of the way in which we view ourselves and ourselves in relation to others (Tyler; et. al, 2015). Attachment theory is a joint work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Initially developed by John Bowlby and further developed by Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). Bowlby (1988) defines attachment theory as a framework for understanding how people organize and think about themselves, others, and, most importantly, their primary relationships. Attachment theory describes infants' proximity-seeking behaviour as a biological predisposition to establish and maintain attachments that can supersede exploration or feeding, especially in times of illness, fatigue, or danger (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment styles describe different ways of operating in the world, specifically different cognitive-affective schemas for experiencing the self, others, and relationships, and for mediating emotions and directing behaviour in the relationship (Pistole, 1993). Attachment styles affect how people interpret interpersonal stimuli, "the nature of the emotional experiences triggered, and the memories that are retrieved" (Fonagy, 1998, p. 148). Hazan and Shaver (1987) presented that these primary patterns of attachment was developed during childhood, are postulated to translate into attachment styles, be it secure or insecure. A secure or insecure occurring in adult relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

ATTACHMENT AVOIDANCE AND ATTACHMENT ANXIETY

Attachment avoidance

The person with an avoidance attachment likely to feel uncomfortable being close to someone, or in a crowd. For instance, this person would feel distressing especially when people rely on them. They tend to feel less comfortable by providing support to close friends or derogate friends who seek their support. Bartholomew (1991) identified avoidance adults as people who denied experiencing subjective distress. They feel subjective distress and discomfort when they become close to others. According to Bartholomew (1991), avoidance attachment can be referred as a fear of intimacy, or to a lack of interest and motivation to enter into intimate relationships as cited by (Zvelc, 2010). Avoidance attachment refers to fearful-avoidance and dismissive-avoidance.

Anxiety attachment

People who possess negative thoughts about oneself and others have low sense of self-worth. Collins and Read (1990) stated that subjects with a higher anxious attachment indicate a very different pattern, consisting largely of negative beliefs about self and others. They often feel suspicious and distrustful of their parent but at the same time they act clingy and desperate (Joyce, 2005). Individuals with preoccupied attachment styles are preoccupied with seeking emotional closeness to others (Zvelc, 2010).

METHOD

Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991)

In this study, the trainees were required to answer the questionnaire which is consisted 36 items. There are two scales of 18 items each which to assessing two-subscale attachment avoidance (e.g., “I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.”) attachment anxiety (e.g., “I worry a lot about my relationship.”). Each odd-items represented attachment avoidance meanwhile even-items demonstrated attachment anxiety. There are 10 reversed key items which are 3, 5, 19, 22, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35. A total of nine reversed items (3, 5, 19, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35) is represent attachment avoidance and 1 reverse item is 22 represent attachment anxiety. The 7-point Likert scale was used to rate the attachment styles, ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 7 (Agree Strongly). For example, if any participants rate 1 for the items “I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep

down” it is means that she or he not agreed about the statement. The final scoring for each subscale is calculated by add up the scores for all represented items.

A mean score from 1 to 7 was obtained where a higher score on a subscale is considered as the dominant style used. According to studies formulated by investigators such as: Lopez and Gormely (2002), McKinley and Randa, (2005), and EL (2008). The Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) instrument showed high reliability. The test-retest had Cronbach alpha rating of .93 for the Anxiety scale and the .86 for the Avoidance scale. The internal consistency estimate of ECR ranged from $\alpha = .86$ to $\alpha = .93$ while the item-scale correlation for two subscales were as follow: attachment avoidance from $\alpha = .84$ to $\alpha = .85$ and attachment anxiety ranged $\alpha = .93$ (see Table 1 to Table 3).

Table 1: Reliability Analysis of Variables

Variables	Cronbach Alpha Value from Pilot Study/ α
Attachment styles	
Attachment avoidance	.86
Attachment anxiety	.93

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Items

Items	Cronbach alpha's, α
Attachment Avoidance	
ECR_1	.84
ECR_3R	.84
ECR_5R	.84
ECR_7	.84
ECR_9	.84
ECR_11	.84
ECR_13	.84
ECR_15	.89
ECR_17	.84
ECR_19R	.85
ECR_21	.85
ECR_23	.84
ECR_25R	.84
ECR_27R	.84
ECR_29R	.85
ECR_31R	.84
ECR_33R	.85
ECR_35R	.84

*ECR: Experience in Close Relationship

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of Items

Items	Cronbach alpha's, α
Attachment Anxiety	
ECR_2	.93
ECR_4	.93
ECR_6	.93
ECR_8	.93
ECR_10	.93
ECR_12	.93
ECR_14	.93
ECR_16	.93
ECR_18	.93
ECR_20	.93
ECR_22R	.93
ECR_24	.93
ECR_26	.93
ECR_28	.93
ECR_30	.93
ECR_32	.93
ECR_34	.93
ECR_36	.93

*ECR: Experience in Close Relationship

Participants

58 counsellor trainees from the selected university were chosen randomly to take part in the pilot study. The questionnaire was self-distributed to the respondents in collecting the needed data. The data are then keyed in manually and analysed inferentially to get the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha).

RELIABILITY

The data collected from pilot test was analysed to find the reliability, in terms of Cronbach Alpha values. The values of Cronbach Alpha for Experience in Close Relationship Scale are ranged from $\alpha = .86$ to $\alpha = .93$ for two subscale attachment styles.

DISCUSSION

In this preliminary study, the result indicated a high internal consistency reliability of Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR). The subscales (attachment avoidance and

attachment anxiety) of attachment styles demonstrated the good and excellence internal consistency of reliability of the instrument in which avoidance attachment at $\alpha = .86$, anxiety attachment at $\alpha = .93$. This study also shows almost the same result as those found in the study by Brennan et.al (1998), results respectively showed that the Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) had high internal consistency in a sample of undergraduates at $\alpha = .94$ and $\alpha = .91$ for avoidance subscale and anxiety subscales respectively. Other study by Lopez & Gormley (2002) also indicated a high internal consistency which ranged from $\alpha = .91$ to $\alpha = .95$ for avoidance subscale while $\alpha = .89$ to $\alpha = .92$ for anxiety subscale. Therefore, the result from the previous study and the current study appears to have similarity of the reliability which has been widely used to assess adult attachment or attachment styles among undergraduate counsellor trainees.

This study also has an excellent internal consistency in comparison to previous studies as it measures the same concept or construct and hence it is connected to the

interrelatedness of the items within the test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This study also indicates excellence and good internal consistency of Experience in Close Relationship Scale (ECR) in Malaysian context.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to determine the reliability and internal consistency of Experience in Close Relationship (ECR) among counsellor trainees. The result of Experience in Close Relationship (ECR) indicated high level of reliability. The subscales (attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety) demonstrated high internal consistency of reliability which at $\alpha = .86$ for avoidance subscale and anxiety subscale at $\alpha = .93$. This instrument is appropriate to be used in gathering information and data from the respondents. Thus, the findings from the pilot study revealed that the questionnaire can be used without any modification in the actual study as the reliability was already showed excellence and good internal consistency. Also, this preliminary study would be useful for other researcher in Malaysia context to compare their reliability and internal consistency of Experience in Close Relationship. On top of that, the researcher is suggested to consider a different population, bigger of sample size and use revised instrument ECR-R for future research.

In addition, this study would help to broaden the knowledge and understanding of attachment styles in counselling field. Specifically, help improve counselling program and professional counselling in Malaysia using this instrument to improve awareness of attachment style among counsellor especially first stage of counsellor trainees. Last but not least, this research study would helpful the

counsellors to tackle the client's issues of attachment in individual session, group counselling and consultation.

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