Stress and Coping Techniques in Successful Intercultural Marriages

Abstract
The number of intercultural marriages has grown significantly in the past few decades, as have the numbers of intercultural couples presenting for marital and family therapy. Current literature on intercultural relationships states that they are at a high risk for failure, with higher divorce rates and lower marital satisfaction reported than for same culture marriages.

Few actual research studies have been conducted to prove or disprove these theories, and no studies have looked at how successful couples have dealt with the stressors stated in the literature such that they remain married and report high marital satisfaction. This study was an exploratory study on the stress and coping techniques successful couples have utilized in their relationships, based on the ABCX model of stress and coping. Six couples were interviewed on what stressors they have faced, what resources they have accessed and built to combat those stressors, and what their perceptions of their challenges have been.

Several themes emerged. Couples revealed common stressors from family and society disapproval, language barriers, logistics, cultural barriers and traditions, and children. Coping resources included humor, learning about the other's culture, support, communication, personal preparation, working towards common goals, and religion. These couples were found to have attitudes of commitment to their marriage and each other, and a belief that they were not that different from their partner.

Clinical implications include support for the idea of strength-based intervention for intercultural couples. This study will provide a beginning framework for others interested in doing more research on intercultural relationships, and designing models for work with this population.

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