

Experiences of Marital Relationship of Middle-Aged Couples in Hong Kong: Implications for Services Interventions

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Abstract : There was evidence that the change of marital quality satisfaction was related to the different stages of the family life cycle. Research studies have been largely based on western contexts, which found a curvilinear U-shaped trend in changes of marital satisfaction over the course of a marriage, but little is known about the marital experiences of Hong Kong couples. Through in-depth interviews, this qualitative study explored the marital relationship of middle-aged couples in a satisfying marriage and to identify how couples maintain a satisfying relationship in the local context. Findings from this study suggested twelve themes with some showing consistency with previous literature, such as communication, companionship, trust, and fidelity. The affective aspects of empathetic understanding and perceived empathy were found to have an enormous effect on couples' bondedness. The high level of differentiation and security served as a basis for unconditional contribution, acceptance, and adjustment to unsolvable issues such that negative emotion would not be escalated. The manifestations of intimacy and commitment in the triangular theory of love were more frequently addressed than passion in striving for marital longevity in the local context. This study challenged the curvilinear trend of marital satisfaction throughout marriage, with couples showing different pathways of marital satisfaction. The study gave insights on marital enrichment, such as facilitating couples to disclose their vulnerabilities, desire for physical intimacy, and passion in the pursuit of enduring marriage instead of an emphasis on skills training on communication and conflict resolution.

Keywords : intimacy, marital relationship, marital satisfaction, middle-aged

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