

The Subjective Experiences of First-Time Chinese Parents' Transition to Parenthood and the Impact on Their Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract : The arrival of a new baby to first-time parents is an exciting and joyous occasion, yet, the daunting task of raising the baby and the uncertainty of how it will affect the lives of the couple present a great challenge to them. This study examines the causes of conflicts and needs of the new parents through a qualitative research of five pairs of new parents in Hong Kong. Semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted to explore the changes babies brought to their marriages, sources of support they received and found important and assistance they felt would help with their transition to parenthood. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the commonalities and differences between the five couples' subjective experiences. Narrative analysis was used to compare the experiences of two parents who are the under-functioning parent of the couple, to study the different strategies they employed in response to the over-functioning parent and to analyze how the marital relationships were affected. Four main themes emerged from the study: 1) Change and adjustment in marital relationship, 2) parents' level of involvement, 3) support in childcaring, and 4) challenges faced by the parents. Results from the study indicated that father involvement in childcaring is an important element in mother's marital satisfaction. Father's marital satisfaction is dependent upon the mother - her satisfaction with father involvement, which affects the mother's marital satisfaction. Marital convergence and co-parenting alliance acted as moderators for marital satisfaction. Implications from the study include: i) offering programmes that improve couple relationship and enhance parenting efficacy in tandem to improve overall marital satisfaction, and ii) offering prenatal counselling services or provide education to new parents from prenatal to postnatal period that can help couples reduce discrepancies between expectations and realities of their marital relationship and parenting responsibilities after their baby is born.

Keywords : co-parenting alliance, father involvement, marital convergence, maternal gatekeeping, new parents, transition to parenthood

Conference Title : ICMFT 2018 : International Conference on Marriage and Family Therapy

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : December 13-14, 2018