

## The Experience of Divorce among Hong Kong Families: Implications for Designing Culturally Sensitive Divorce Interventions

Patricia Sullivan, Timothy Leung, Yuk King Lau, and Madeleine Dignam

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### Purpose

- To identify culture-specific beliefs, values and needs of divorcing Chinese families as a basis for developing culturally sensitive psycho-educational interventions to promote their health and well being

### Divorce Education Programs

- Preventive interventions such as divorce education programs have potential for *alleviating stress* for parents and children and *reducing threats* to their health and development
- Divorce education programs have proliferated since their inception in the US in the mid-1970's but *have not yet been developed* in Hong Kong

### Culturally Sensitive Programs

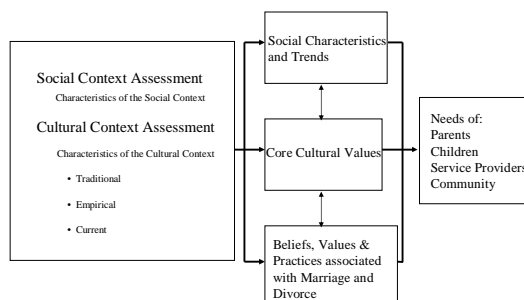
- To be *relevant* and *effective*, education programs should
  - 'Start where people are' and
  - Incorporate the cultural beliefs and practices of the target group
- Culturally sensitive programs should include the primary dimensions of *surface* and *deep structure*

### Dimensions of Surface and Deep Structure\*

- Surface structure
  - Involves the incorporation of *observable cultural characteristics* of a population into program materials and messages
- Deep structure
  - Incorporates *beliefs* about culture, social, psychological, environmental and historical factors, that influence perceptions and behavior
- However, how to achieve culturally sensitive programs has not been adequately described nor empirically examined

\*Resnicow, K., Braithwaite, R. L., Dilor, C. & Glantz, K. (2002). Applying theory to culturally diverse and unique populations. In K. Glanz, B. Rimer, F. M. Lewis (Eds.) *Health behavior and health education Theory, research and practice* (3rd. Ed.). Jossey-Bass, pp.485-509.

### Socio-Cultural Values and Needs Assessment Model



## Social Context Assessment

- Characteristics of the Social Context
  - We identified the *characteristics of Hong Kong society* from a review of published social characteristics
    - Demographics
    - Population density
    - Ethnicity
    - History
    - Language
    - Law
    - Economics
    - Education
    - Employment
    - Housing
    - Family structure and function

## Cultural Context Assessment: (1) Traditional

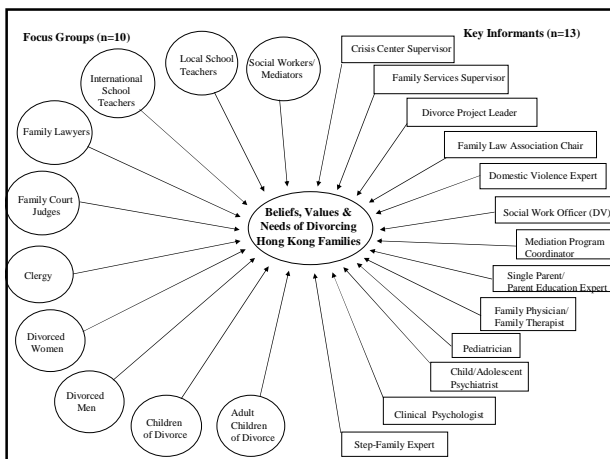
- Characteristics of the Cultural Context
  - We identified the *fundamental beliefs and values* of the target population that influence behavior from a review of published literature on traditional Chinese culture

## Cultural Context Assessment: (2) Empirical

- We identified the *beliefs and values* associated with *family structure, function, child development and the impact of divorce on the family* from a review of published research on family and child development conducted in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong
  - Dating
  - Marriage
  - Childrearing
  - Separation and divorce

## Cultural Context Assessment: (3) Current

- We identified *current beliefs about marriage and divorce and the impact of divorce among Hong Kong families* from *stakeholders of divorce* (n=85)
- We collected primary data through 10 focus group and 13 key informant interviews comprised of:
  - Divorced women and men
  - Children and adult children of divorce
  - Service providers



## Stakeholders of Divorce

### Focus Group Interviews

Local School Teachers  
International School Teachers  
Social Workers/Mediators  
Clergy  
Family Court Judges  
Family Lawyers  
Divorced Mothers  
Divorced Fathers  
Children of Divorce  
Adult Children of Divorce

### Key Informant Interviews

Crisis Center Supervisor  
Family Services Supervisor  
Divorce Project Leader  
Family Law Association Chair  
Domestic Violence Expert  
Social Work Officer (DV)  
Mediation Program Coordinator  
Single Parent/Parent Education Expert  
Family Physician/Family Therapist  
Pediatrician  
Child/Adolescent Psychiatrist  
Clinical Psychologist  
Step-Family Expert

### Data Analysis

- Content analysis of the published traditional and empirical literature
- Thematic analysis of primary data from stakeholders
- Through synthesis of the primary and secondary data, we identified:
  - Major social characteristics and trends impacting Hong Kong families
  - Core cultural values
  - Beliefs and practices associated with separation and divorce

### Data Analysis

- From the social characteristics and trends, core cultural values and beliefs and practices associated with separation and divorce, we identified the needs of:
  - Divorcing parents
  - Children
  - Service providers
  - General community

### Needs

- ***Culturally sensitive divorce education programs*** and materials are needed for ***parents, children, service providers*** and the ***general community***

### Needs of Divorcing Parents

- Normalizing and reframing divorce
  - To reduce stigma and feelings of shame
  - To facilitate use of community resources
- Knowledge of the emotional and practical impact of divorce and adjustment on themselves and their children

### Needs of Divorcing Parents

- Knowledge of child development
  - To understand developmental capabilities
  - To communicate about divorce in simple terms
  - To understand and meet children's emotional needs associated with divorce
  - To differentiate children's needs from own

### Needs of Divorcing Parents

- Knowledge of stress management, coping skills and social support
- Knowledge of co-parenting, communication and conflict resolution skills
  - To enable their planning and participation in co-parenting
  - To enable their management of post-divorce conflict

### Needs of Divorcing Parents

- Knowledge of rights, entitlements, obligations and resources associated with:
  - Legal aspects of divorce
  - Dispute resolution services
  - Social services
    - Financial, housing, childcare and educational support
  - Psychological services
    - Counseling

### Needs of Children

- Normalizing divorce
- Knowledge of emotional and practical impact of divorce on themselves and their parents
- Knowledge of ways to protect themselves from parental conflict and loss of control
- Development of “emotional” communication, stress management and coping skills
- Knowledge of resources for social support

### Needs of Service Providers

- Continuing professional education programs to support evidence-based practice
- Knowledge of existing community resources for divorcing families
- Collaboration among all service providers including:
  - The court and legal professionals
  - Social, psychological, health, educational and religious services

### Community Needs

- Community-wide public education
  - To reduce stigma and discrimination related to divorcing and post-divorce families
  - To develop awareness to the needs of divorcing families
  - To increase knowledge of community resources for divorcing families

### Deep Structure Dimension

**Beliefs/Values**

- Divorce is taboo and heavily stigmatized
- Children are highly valued and families are child centered
- Love and duty of parents to children is intergenerational
- Authority is valued
- Education is highly valued
- Self-reliance is valued and gives face

**Implications for Divorce Education**

- Focus program on children and parental education, not divorce
- Frame program name positively e.g., “Promoting children’s competencies through everlasting parenting”
- Have judiciary recommend programs
- Offer programs in schools and/or universities
- Charge for the programs even if the cost is very low

### Deep Structure Dimension (Con’t)

**Beliefs/Values**

- Respect for expertise and authority of teachers
- Being a student has high status
- Strong work ethic is valued
- Education system is achievement oriented and grade-driven
- Hard work and achievement gives face

**Implications**

- Use expert teachers specialized in divorce
- Use directive teaching
- Relate to parents as students
- Expect students to work hard
  - Assign homework, examination and grades
  - Provide certificate of achievement

### Deep Structure Dimension (Con't)

**Beliefs/Values**

- Communication is indirect and holistic
- Pragmatism is valued
- Correct social and moral behavior gives face; brings honor to the family and kin
- Family harmony is valued

**Implications**

- Use storytelling, metaphors, idioms, analogies
- Deal with practical problems and solutions
- Positively reinforce honorable parental characteristics and desirable parenting behaviors
- Reframe problems to emphasize family harmony; crisis as opportunity

### Deep Structure Dimension (Con't)

**Beliefs/Values**

- Obligation and commitment to shared responsibility for children's well being is valued
- Self-reliance restores face
- Help seeking shows weakness; causes loss of face and shame to family and kin

**Implications**

- Focus on empowering both parents to fulfill parental obligations
- Focus on 'family is forever' but its structure changes
- Focus on using resources to help children and themselves become self reliant. Shows knowledge, strength and good parenting

### Deep Structure Dimension (Con't)

**Beliefs/Values**

- Decisions are made by consensus, cooperation, negotiation rather than conflict/confrontation
- Marriage is the union of two families; grandparents have a strong influence on parents and grandchildren

**Implications**

- Encourage dispute resolution through mediation
- Involve grandparents in programs

### Surface Structure Dimension

**Observable Characteristics**

- Chinese (Cantonese) and English are official languages
- Ability to speak English is associated with being well educated so there is status associated with it
- Mandarin is spoken by new immigrants from mainland China

**Implications**

- Offer programs in Cantonese, English, and Mandarin

### Surface Structure Dimension (Con't)

**Observable Characteristics**

- Distinctive physical, environmental, dietary, and lifestyle characteristics
- Great importance is given to food

**Implications**

- Incorporate relevant cultural content and images in learning resources
- Provide snacks/drinks; ensure consistency with dietary practices
- Use culturally relevant music to create a relaxing learning environment, e.g., traditional Chinese or Cantopop

### Conclusion and Implications

- The model guided the generation of data which permitted an *integrative understanding* of divorcing Chinese families
- It helped us identify the *socio-cultural beliefs and values* of divorcing Chinese families and their *predominant needs*
- It helped to identify the *deep and structural dimensions of culturally sensitivity* that can be incorporated in program design

### Conclusion and Implications (Con't)

- Results are being used to develop *culturally sensitive intervention programs* at the *individual, family, service provider and community levels*
- Program impact on *psychosocial and behavioral outcomes* will be examined empirically
- The model may also be broad enough, conceptually, to *provide direction* for generating an understanding of the *deep and surface structural dimensions of cultural sensitivity* as a basis for developing targeted interventions, messages, programs and materials for *other cultural groups*

- Further information may be obtained from:

Patricia Sullivan  
Department of Nursing Studies  
University of Hong Kong  
21 Sassoon Road  
Pokfulam, Hong Kong  
E-mail: pat@pdi.hk