

Chinese Couples And Professional Help

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We have witnessed the serious problems facing the Chinese married couples in the States; however very few are willing to seek professional help.

First of all is the feeling of shame; the behavior of individual members of a Chinese family is expected to reflect credit on the whole family. Mental illness in a family member is considered a failure of the family, of the family system itself. Problems arising in the family such as children failing in school, husband and wife having marital problems and others are generally kept hidden from public view and handled within the family. These factors may explain why there are low official rates of divorce and low utilization of marriage counselors among the Chinese.

The notion of going to a psychologist is quite frightening to most of the Chinese. For example, a wife discovered that her husband was romantically involved with a younger woman. Instead of confronting her husband, she discussed the situation with her adult children, her relatives, and her friends, as well as the family

and the superiors of the young woman involved.

Then there is the problem of finding qualified Chinese marriage counselors to work with the couples. It is very difficult for the Caucasian counselor to effectively conduct a counseling session with the Chinese couple.

In reviewing the minority group literature on counseling, it was found that the Caucasian counselors do not give the same amount of energy and time in working with minority as they do with white-middle-class clients.

Even clinicians who differ in culture or language from clients may encounter difficulties in face-to-face relationships. Among the most difficult aspects are formulating appropriate clinical inferences about the client and understanding the non-English speaking client. In one study, distortions of the interpretive process by Chinese speaking interpreters were recorded on audiotapes. Three major forms of distortions were found. The first involved omissions, substitutions, condensation, and change of focus.

Even if one were to find a "licensed" Chinese counselor, there are

basic barriers which would create hesitations for the Chinese couples to receive individual counseling. The whole concept of counseling is quite western and Chinese may resist having another person listen to "family secrets" let alone paying for such services. Even if one were to find "licensed" Chinese counselors, there remain basic barriers for Chinese couples to accept individual counseling. Some of the common inhibiting characteristics of the Chinese immigrants are shyness and lack of expressiveness. Sometimes counseling a Chinese would be like pulling a tooth; it takes a long time for the counselor to get any meaningful feedback from the client. A poor verbal response may lead the counselor to impute inaccurate characteristics or motives to him/her. The first session is extremely important as it is the point at which the individual will determine if counseling can help. Thus, it is important that the couple feel that they are understood, that their views of the problems are respected, and that their difficulties in seeking help are understood.

Unfortunately the non-Chinese speaking counselor may not be able to gain the trust of the new immigrant couple in the first session due to the barriers of language and culture. Oftentimes the structure of the first one hour session can be taken up by evaluation questions and observation. If

the counselor bases the end of the session on the clock time, then there is the potential danger that the couple may not come back for the follow up counseling sessions.

In summary, the Chinese are rather practical and less able to tolerate ambiguity. When they seek help, they want direct answers and solutions to their problems. It is inconceivable for them to come in once a week and talk about "feelings". The Chinese are notorious for being slow to warm up in friendship building. It is not easy for the couples to tell of their intimate secrets to a total stranger unless friendship is developed. Without the proper support, the counselor would have a hard time to secure any commitment from the counselee. This explains why the Chinese (especially the males) terminate counseling after only one contact at a rate of approximately 50%. They find it to be impersonal and inappropriate.

Counselor (Para) -the one who comes alongside, is the one who is able to understand and help. Those that are trained as counselors in the States might not be able to understand the internal world of those who have migrated to this country recently. The counselor has to seek to understand the counselee's world view (how he/she perceives his/her relationship to the world nature, institutions, people, things, etc.) 