

Socio-demographic characteristics of intercultural marriage : a study of a multi-ethnic community in Malaysia.

Abstract

Due to increased levels of social contact and loosening of traditional social norms between peoples from different races and religious backgrounds in South East Asia, there has been an increase in the prevalence of intercultural marriages over the past fifty years (Hassan & Benjamin, 1973; Djamour, 1965; Kuo & Hassan, 1976). Despite the cultural diversity in Malaysia, systematic research on intercultural marriage, specifically concentrating on intercultural marriages among the Malay Bumiputras (natives), Chinese, Indians and Other Bumiputras and their socio-demographic characteristics, are still lacking. This study thus explored the socio-demographic characteristics of intercultural marriages among Malay, Chinese, Indian and Other Bumiputras mixed-married couples from Malaysia. Based on data from 357 mixed-married couples, significant differences were found between husbands' and wives' personal characteristics, namely religion-of-origin, current age, age-at-marriage, and personal income. Results from Cramer's V test of association further showed a significant association between the husband-wife ethnic background and their religion-of-origin, indicating that intercultural marriages in Malaysia also tend to be inter-religious marriages. Findings provide support for the theory of homogeneity and structural theory. The paper discusses the impact of ethnic and religious factors on variations in socio-demographic characteristics between intercultural couples.

Keyword: Intercultural marriage; Multi-ethnic community; Malaysia.