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Nursing's Focal Points

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Couple Decision Making and Use of Cultural Scripts in Malawi

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Purpose

To examine the decision-making processes of husband and wife dyads in matrilineal and patrilineal marriage traditions of Malawi in the areas of money, food, pregnancy, contraception, and sexual relations.

Methods

Qualitative grounded theory using simultaneous interviews of 60 husbands and wives (30 couples). Data were analyzed according to the guidelines of simultaneous data collection and analysis. The analysis resulted in development of core categories and categories of decision-making process. Data matrixes were used to identify similarities and differences within couples and across cases.

Findings

Most couples reported using a mix of final decision-making approaches: husband-dominated, wife-dominated, and shared. Gender based and nongender based cultural scripts provided rationales for their approaches to decision making. Gender based cultural scripts (husband-dominant and wife-dominant) were used to justify decision-making approaches. Non-gender based cultural scripts (communicating openly, maintaining harmony, and children's welfare) supported shared decision making. Gender based cultural scripts were used in decision making more often among couples from the district with a patrilineal marriage tradition and where the husband had less than secondary school education and was not formally employed.

Conclusions

Nongender based cultural scripts to encourage shared decision making can be used in designing culturally tailored reproductive health interventions for couples.

Clinical Relevance

Nurses who work with women and families should be aware of the variations that occur in actual couple decision-making approaches. Shared decision making can be used to encourage the involvement of men in reproductive health programs.

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Table: Frequent Symptoms in the Identity Subscale

Type of Cultural Script	Husband-Dominant	Wife-Submissive
General	A husband is the leader/head of the family.	Women should respect husbands because God created them first.
	Men do not do things wrongly.	A wife should accept defeat when there is a disagreement.
	A man resolves conflicts	A wife should apologize because she is the one proposed to
Sexual relations	Men are expected to initiate sex.	A woman who initiates sex is looked upon as a prostitute/bitch.
	The man has more power.	The wife has to obey when the husband wants sex.
Money	The husband brings money into the home.	A wife does not bring money into the home.
	The husband is the owner of the money.	Women misuse money.

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