

Kim & Wolpin (2008)

The Korean American Family: Adolescents versus Parents Acculturation to American Culture

This study is used to answer questions on:

Acculturation
Cultural Dimensions
Communication in relationships

Abstract

This study examined the acculturation of Korean American families in America. The researchers wanted to investigate if there were any acculturation differences between parents and their children. 106 families were used as a sample who had a mother, father and child between 11 – 14. All families had been living in America for over 10 years. All participants received a questionnaire that assessed their lifestyle in relation to Korean activities and American activities. It was found that most families were integrating well into American society, however there were differences between parents and adolescents. Parents were more likely to retain the Korean culture and integrate less into American culture whereas adolescents were more likely to be involved in American culture than Korean culture. All members of the family were content with this situation although researchers were concerned that this may lead to problems in the future with communication (e.g. language skills, cultural references).



- To examine acculturation methods of Korean American families in America
- To examine if there are differences between Korean American parents and Korean American adolescents in terms of acculturation

Method

Participants

106 Korean American families in America were recruited through churches and language schools in America. All families had Korean American mother and father and one child aged between 11 and 14. The mean age for the adolescents was 12 years old with the average length of time of living in America of 10 years.

Materials

Questionnaires were used to gather data on the families. Each family member completed a separate questionnaire. The questionnaires were used to measure the daily lifestyles of each family member and how involved their lives were with Korean and American cultures (food, T.V., movies, newspapers, friends, organizations). It also assessed willingness to learn American culture and desire to retain Korean culture.

The parental questionnaires also measured acculturation attitudes and included questions that measured integration, marginalization, separation and assimilation (see the notes on acculturation).

Procedure

The questionnaires were given out by the researchers when visiting Korean communities. Alternatively, the community leader helped to distribute the questionnaires. The questionnaires were supplied with a Korean language and an English language version. The Korean parents almost all (only one mother and one father) answered the Korean language version. Almost all the adolescents answered the English version.

Results

Parents thought that learning American culture was very important for their children. Adolescents believed that their parents were less interested in learning American culture.

Almost all parents thought they should learn English fluently, yet only 20% believed that they were fluent. Adolescents believed it important to learn English and 95% of them had a high language level.

In reverse, almost all parents reported that their Korean language skills were very good, but a much lower level was reported by adolescents.

Korean parents ate Korean food more often than adolescents (who ate more American food). Parents also watched more Korean TV than adolescents (who watched more American TV).

The researchers also examined the questionnaires in terms of levels of acculturation, finding that most families have adopted an integration approach to acculturation.

Conclusion

The Korean families living in America in the study were mostly integrating into their new society (integration). However, there are differences in acculturation between parents and children. Significantly, parents placed a higher importance on their children learning American culture than preserving their Korean culture. This is likely because parents feel their child is more likely to succeed if they can integrate.

Adolescents have low expectations of their parents learning American culture and generally feel that their parents do not (and do not need to) integrate fully into American culture.

It is worth noting that as the children become more proficient in English and less proficient in Korean, there may be communication problems between parent and child.



Evaluation

Generalisability

- There was a reasonable sample of 106 families which is a substantial amount.
- All the families were located in one area in America (the Midwest), so this may not be representative of families in larger cities or more remote places.

Reliability

- The questionnaires were standardised and translated into Korean and English.
- The administration of the questionnaires was not monitored, so families may have discussed their answers.
- Social desirability is a possibility with families wishing to present a positive attitude (this could be particularly true for the parents).

Application to life

- The findings could be useful in helping new families understand the best way to integrate into their new culture.
- The findings could help families be aware of possible problems they may experience in the future as they have different perceptions about their roles in the family.

Validity

- A questionnaire is not a real-life situation.
- The questionnaire used tried and tested data collection tests and methods.

Ethics

- Participants were not asked to partake in any activity that could be damaging to them and were free to not complete the questionnaire at any time.
- One member of the family may have felt pressured to complete the questionnaire if others in the family did so.

