This study aimed to explore the pattern of marital power distribution and its association with marital aggression and satisfaction in contemporary Chinese families. A randomized community sample of 1,270 (518 males and 752 females) married Chinese who were 18 years or older and who resided in Hong Kong were telephone interviewed. Approximately half of the respondents reported having egalitarian relationships with their partners regarding decision making. Women’s demographic characteristics, but not men’s, were related to how decision making was distributed in marital relationships. Egalitarian decision making was directly associated with marital satisfaction but inversely related to marital aggression. In particular, verbal and physical aggression was less prevalent in egalitarian marriages, and there was a trend that severe violence was more prevalent in relationships that were husband-dominant. Men tended to have higher levels of marital satisfaction than did women, and marital satisfaction was higher in egalitarian or divided power relationships.

Marital Power and Aggression in a Community Sample of Hong Kong Chinese Families

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Marital power refers to one’s capacity to impose his or her will on the other spouse in various family decisions (Rank, 1982; Salifios-Rothschild, 1970). Several explanatory models have been put forward to explain its distribution between couples. The resource theory proposes that each spouse’s decision-making power varies directly with the amount and value of the resources that he or she provides to the marriage or to the other spouse (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). Resources are often defined as anything that one spouse makes available to the other spouse to help satisfy the needs or attain the goals of the latter. Resources may be classified into personal skills or characteristics and socioeconomic or material resources such as education, employment status, occupational prestige, and income (Lee & Petersen, 1983). Studies have shown that a high level of power differential is found among couples who

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