

Examining Marital Flourishing in Intercultural Couples: A Psychological Literature Review

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Abstract: Intercultural marriage has become increasingly common in the era of globalization; however, cultural differences between partners introduce complex challenges in maintaining marital well-being. This literature review aims to explore the concept of marital flourishing within the context of intercultural couples and the psychological factors that support it. Using a narrative literature review method, the study analyzed 12 relevant articles published between 2015–2025 that focus on the psychological aspects of intercultural marriage. The findings reveal that marital flourishing is influenced by a combination of internal factors (such as self-compassion, mindfulness, and life management skills), effective communication, communal values, religiosity, and social support. Cultural differences necessitate ongoing adaptation and cultural negotiation. This study highlights the importance of a multidisciplinary approach and culturally sensitive interventions to support intercultural couples in building a healthy and fulfilling marriage.

Keywords: Intercultural marriage, Marital flourishing, Cultural adaptation

1 INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the primary components of culture, as it shapes how couples from different backgrounds interpret concepts and meanings. The trend of intercultural marriage in the United States can be observed from the increasing number of individuals of mixed heritage. Data from the United States Census Bureau (Lewis Jr. & Ford Robertson, 2010) show that between 1980 and 2007, the percentage of Hispanic-American individuals of mixed heritage increased significantly from 6.5% to 15.1%. Similarly, the percentage of Asian-Americans rose from 1.5% to 4.4%, and African-Americans from 11.1% to 12.2%. On the other hand, the percentage of the white population declined from 80.7% to 66% during the same period (Lewis Jr. & Ford Robertson, 2010).

In Indonesia, there is no official or clear record from government agencies regarding the number of intercultural marriages. The Central Statistics Agency has yet to release data on how many Indonesian citizens are officially married to foreign nationals. Nevertheless, Indonesia does have an organization that supports intercultural marriages, known as PERCA (Perkawinan Campur). A study by Luke & Oser (as cited in Anselmus, 2017) on the mixed-heritage community in America found that 56% of African-American respondents (N=643) expressed willingness to be in a relationship with a white partner. Similarly, a study by Djamban and Kimuna (2014) revealed that 54% of Black respondents in the U.S. (N=227) were willing to marry white individuals, whereas only 26% of white respondents (N=1,064) were open to marrying Black individuals. These data highlight some of the existing dynamics and challenges in intercultural marriage studies.

Hurlock (2003) stated that conflict in marriage occurs due to complexities arising from factors not typically encountered in individual life. Therefore, a continuous adaptation process is needed over time to manage conflicts stemming from cultural differences. Specifically, Apriani et al. (2013) noted that a couple's adaptation process is influenced by personal factors.

In the context of intercultural marriages, particularly interethnic ones in Indonesia, several studies provide relevant insights. For example, a qualitative phenomenological study by Tuapattinaya and Hartati (2014), involving three Javanese women married to men of different ethnicities, conceptualized decision-making as a process of selecting from various available alternatives—incorporating cognitive aspects, motives, and

attitudes. This study aimed to describe the decision- making process among Javanese women who chose to marry non-Javanese men. Results showed that similarities in age and religious beliefs were the main considerations for the women. Two of the three participants faced opposition from their parents, who preferred that their daughters marry Javanese men, while one had the freedom to choose her own partner.

Overall, the global trend of intercultural marriage centers on the potential for conflict arising from cultural differences. Thus, this study aims to address the following research questions: How is the concept of marital flourishing defined and understood in the context of intercultural marriage? What psychological factors play a role in creating and maintaining flourishing in intercultural marriages? The purpose of this study is to explore the concepts and factors influencing marital flourishing within the context of intercultural unions.

The benefits of this research are expected to be both theoretical and practical. Practically, the study offers valuable insights for various stakeholders. For intercultural couples, the findings may provide useful information on factors that support happiness and the sustainability of marriage. For professionals such as family psychologists and counselors, the findings of this literature review may serve as a reference for developing culturally sensitive intervention approaches. Theoretically, the study contributes to the advancement of psychological science and may serve as a foundation for developing new theories related to interpersonal relationships and psychological adaptation in cross-cultural marriages.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a narrative literature review approach as the primary method to explore the psychological factors that influence marital flourishing in intercultural couples. The articles analyzed were obtained through a systematic search in academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Garuda. Keywords used included terms like "marital flourishing" and "intercultural marriage", both in English and Indonesian. To maintain the relevance of the literature review, only articles published between 2015 and 2025 were included.

The inclusion criteria covered articles that explicitly discussed intercultural marriage relationships, particularly those focusing on psychological aspects, marital well-being, and cultural differences experienced within intercultural unions. The selection process involved several stages. The initial search yielded more than 150 publications. Titles were screened to exclude articles that were irrelevant, off-topic, or lacking in completeness and depth. After the filtering process, 20 articles were identified as meeting the criteria. These articles were predominantly qualitative and quantitative in nature. All selected articles were then analyzed to identify the key contributing factors to marital flourishing, as well as the common psychological challenges faced by intercultural couples in their married life.

3 RESULTS

The researchers used a narrative literature review method to examine the psychological factors influencing marital flourishing in intercultural couples. The selected literature was sourced from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Garuda, using keywords like "marital flourishing" and "intercultural marriage", in both English and Indonesian.

Table 1. Data Extraction

No	Title	Research Methods and Samples	Objective	Result
1.	Pengambilan Keputusan Untuk Menikah Beda Etnis: Studi Fenomenologis Pada Perempuan Jawa	Observation and in-depth interviews with 3 adult Javanese women (ages 20–40) married to Batak and Papuan men.	Observation and in-depth interviews with 3 adult Javanese women (ages 20–40) married to Batak and Papuan men.	Key factors: age similarity and shared religion. Two participants faced family opposition; one had autonomy. Decision stages included assessing information, evaluating options, committing, and withstanding negative

				feedback. Love and emotional needs were internal motivations.
2.	Determinants of Marital Flourishing among Married Individuals : An Asian Perspective	Survey of 569 wives and 433 husbands in Pakistan; regression analysis.	To examine communal and emotional factors affecting flourishing marriages	Negative emotions predicted lower flourishing. Positive communal orientation boosted individual flourishing. Wives reported higher flourishing than husbands. Emotional and cultural processes are key.
3.	Correlates of couple among married Individuals in India	Purposive sampling of 98 participants using various scales (love language, intimacy, conflict resolution, couple identity).	To explore flourishing in Indian marriages within a collectivist culture.	Constructive problem-solving improved flourishing; conflict and withdrawal had negative effects. Quality time and affection are crucial.
4.	Komunikasi Lintas Budaya Pernikahan Pasangan Beda Etnis (Studi Kualitatif Deskriptif Tentang Komunikasi Lintas Budaya Pernikahan Pasangan Etnis Sunda Dengan Etnis Minang Di Kabupaten Karawang)	In-depth interviews were conducted with three interethnic couples along with observations. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method, with data analyzed descriptively through a qualitative approach. The study was carried out in Telukjambe, East Telukjambe District.	To examine communication processes in interethnic marriages.	Communication was harmonious. The Minang spouses' fluency in Sundanese eased understanding and mutual response
5.	Flourishing of Marital Relationship: Analyzing Education as Demographic Variable of Pakistani Husbands and Wives.	Cross-sectional study with 1002 married individuals; Psychological Flourishing Scale; ANOVA	To investigate the impact of education level on marital flourishing.	Lower-educated Individuals higher flourishing than Those with education.
6.	Life management and its relationship to Psychological Flourishing marital quality of life	Sample: 300 married female students from rural/urban areas; with/without children.	To examine the relationship between life management, flourishing, and marital quality.	Positive life management correlated with better marital quality and flourishing. Urban and childless women scored higher.
7.	Predicting Marital Happiness Based on Self-Compassion and Flourishing in Married	140 married women in Isfahan; instruments: marital happiness, self-compassion,	To predict marital happiness through self-compassion and flourishing.	Both variables were predictors; mindfulness was the most significant subscale.

	Women	flourishing scales.		
8.	Differences of Marital Flourishing in Married Individuals With and Without Children	189 respondents (17 men, 172 women) aged 21–40 from Java; Relationship Flourishing Scale.	To compare marital flourishing between those with and without children.	Childless participants scored higher. Having no children does not reduce marital quality.
9.	Marriage, religion and human flourishing: how sustainable is the classic Durkheim thesis in contemporary Europe?	European Values Survey in UK, Italy, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Spain, and Sweden.	To study links between marriage, religion, and psychological well-being.	Religiosity and marriage both linked to higher happiness and life satisfaction.
10.	Keeping Harmony of Indonesian-Japanese Intercultural Marriage Interactions	Qualitative interviews; data compared to intercultural communication and acculturation theory.	To explain how these couples maintain harmony.	Use of appropriate language (Indonesian, Japanese, English) reflects mutual respect and balance.
11.	Intercultural relationships: entry adjustment, and cultural negotiation.	Theoretical review using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.	To explain the development and dynamics of intercultural relationships.	Intercultural couples face greater adjustment challenges than monocultural ones.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The results of the literature review indicate that marital flourishing in intercultural marriages is a complex and dynamic psychological construct, shaped by the interaction of internal and external factors that influence the dynamics of the couple's relationship. One of the key findings is that happiness in intercultural marriages does not rely solely on love and commitment but also on the couple's ability to navigate cultural differences adaptively and positively.

Internal factors such as self-compassion, mindfulness, and life management skills play a significant role in supporting marital well-being. A study by Zahraa & Rezanovadat (2017) found that "self-compassion and flourishing significantly predicted marital happiness", and that mindfulness, in particular, was the strongest predictor of marital happiness among women. This highlights the importance of intrapersonal competence in managing emotional challenges in intercultural marriages.

Furthermore, communication is a crucial element in determining the success of intercultural relationships. A descriptive qualitative study on Sundanese-Minang couples by Wahyuuni (2023) showed that the use of a mutually understood language and the willingness to understand each other's culture served as the foundation for effective communication. "Harmonious communication occurred because the Minang spouse was fluent in Sundanese, enabling smooth feedback," as stated in the study's findings. A similar pattern was observed in Indonesian-Japanese couples, where successful interaction was influenced by the ability to choose the appropriate language for the context, reflecting cultural flexibility and mutual respect.

On the other hand, sociodemographic aspects also influence the level of flourishing in intercultural marriages. A study conducted in Pakistan revealed that individuals with lower levels of education reported higher levels of marital flourishing, possibly due to lower expectations and a simpler lifestyle (Fahd & Hanif, 2020). This suggests that in certain contexts, higher education is not always positively correlated with marital well-being, especially in cultures that emphasize simplicity and collectivist values.

Another interesting aspect is the difference in parental status. A study comparing couples with and without children found that "the mean score of marital flourishing was higher among individuals without children"

compared to those with one or two children. This could be explained by the additional burden of childcare and household responsibilities, which require greater adaptation.

In collectivist cultures such as those in Asia and the Middle East, communal values also play an important role. Research by Fahd et al. (2019) concluded that “positive communal orientation contributes positively to the individual dimensions of marital flourishing,” while negative communal orientation has the opposite effect. This indicates that intercultural relationships in Asian regions tend to be more stable when both partners uphold values of togetherness and emotional involvement.

Religiosity also strengthens marital relationships. Based on data from the European Values Survey, married couples who actively engage in religious activities reported “higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction” compared to those who did not. This provides contemporary support for Durkheim’s classic thesis regarding the role of religious and marital institutions in promoting human flourishing (Williams et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, intercultural marriages face greater challenges than monocultural ones. Adjusting to different cultural values, dealing with extended family expectations, and facing social stigma are real barriers. In this regard, the ability to engage in cultural negotiation, openness to differences, and access to adequate social support become protective factors. As noted by Silva et al. (2012), “intercultural couples face a higher risk of adjustment difficulties compared to same- culture couples,” but with proper adaptive strategies, couples can become stronger through these experiences.

In conclusion, marital flourishing in intercultural marriages is the result of a synergy between psychological sensitivity, open communication, social support, and the willingness to continually adapt. These findings underscore the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in understanding the dynamics of intercultural marriages and the need for culturally sensitive professional interventions to support such couples.

The authors are encouraged to convey interesting things from their research, write down the descriptive results along with the comparison of similar previous research findings. Moreover, outline advantages and limitations of this research. Do not rewrite the same equations, numbers, graph, image, or figures that have been implemented in the Results section.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This literature review shows that marital flourishing in intercultural marriages is the result of a complex interaction between psychological, social, and cultural factors. Happiness and the sustainability of intercultural marriages are not solely determined by love or commitment, but also by the couple’s ability to adapt to differences in values, norms, and expectations that stem from their respective cultural backgrounds.

Internal factors such as self-compassion, mindfulness, and life management skills have been shown to play a significant role in supporting the quality of a positive relationship. In addition, effective and open communication between partners serves as a crucial foundation for building mutual understanding and resolving conflicts that may arise due to cultural differences.

Sociodemographic aspects such as education level, the presence of children, place of residence, and religiosity also influence the level of flourishing in marriage. Couples with a simple lifestyle, realistic expectations, and strong spiritual support tend to report higher levels of marital well-being.

Although intercultural marriages have their own unique challenges, the findings suggest that with openness, healthy cultural negotiation, and adequate social support, couples can build a harmonious and fulfilling marriage. Therefore, culturally sensitive approaches are needed in professional practice, both in counseling and psychological intervention, to help intercultural couples achieve optimal marital flourishing.

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