The Impact of Doctoral Study on the Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment Level of Doctoral Students and Doctoral Student Partners

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of doctoral study on the relationship satisfaction and commitment level of both doctoral students and partners of doctoral students. The researcher examined length of relationship, gender, financial status, and relationship status to determine if each variable impacts the relationship satisfaction and commitment level of doctoral students and partners of doctoral students.

The majority of literature regarding the impact of doctoral study on relationship satisfaction has focused exclusively on the perspective of married doctoral students. From a systems perspective, it is impossible to understand a system by solely examining one part of it. Few studies have received insight from partners of doctoral students. Also, despite the trend of individuals waiting longer to get married, unmarried doctoral students and their relationship partners have not received much exploration in past studies. The lack of literature on the perceptions of unmarried doctoral student relationships and partners of doctoral students provides sufficient validation for this current study.

The researcher utilized a quantitative research methods approach to conduct this study. The participants of this study were doctoral students and partners of doctoral students from American Psychological Association (APA) accredited psychology, Commission on Accreditation of Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) accredited marriage and family therapy, and Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counseling doctoral programs who
were contacted thru academic listservs and social networking websites. The Couples Satisfaction Index and the Commitment Level subscale of the Investment Model Scale were used to measure the relationship satisfaction and commitment level of both the doctoral students and their partners. Data was collected and analyzed from 89 couples. Both a Hierarchical Multiple Regression and a MANOVA were used to analyze the researcher’s data.

Length of relationship, gender, and relationship status were not found to be predictors of relationship satisfaction or commitment level for doctoral students or partners of doctoral students. A significant decrease in income since entering the doctoral program was found to be a predictor of relationship satisfaction for doctoral students. Significant differences were also found in the commitment level of doctoral students and their partners due to financial status.