3.1: The Double ABC-X Model of Family Stress

The Double ABC-X Stress Model

Figure 1. The image above is an adaptation of the ABC-X model by McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M. (1983). The family stress process: The Double ABCX Model of family adjustment and adaptation. In H. I. McCubbin, M. Sussman, & J. M. Patterson (Eds.), Social stress and the family: Advances and developments in family stress theory and research (pp. 7–37). Haworth.

The Double ABC-X model describes the impact of crises on a family. It states that the combination of stressors (A), the family's resources (B), and the family's definition of the event (C) will produce the family's experience of a crisis (X).[1][2]
The family’s multiple environments influence each component of the model, consistent with the human ecology framework. The Double ABC-X suggests that there are multiple paths of recovery following a crisis, and these paths will be determined by the family’s resources and coping processes, both personal and external.

This model is relevant to families that come from another country (e.g., those who self-identify as immigrant or refugee) and live in a new country, as many families experience significant transitions in the process of resettlement. Whether or not this transition, or the events that precipitate it, are interpreted as crises will depend on the family’s other stressors, such as employment, housing, healthcare, and family conflict; family meaning-making, (cultural and family values), and resources (socioeconomic, family support, community).

Key Takeaway

- The Double ABC-X Model describes how a crisis affects a family using environmental and biological perspectives.


2. The Double ABCX Stress Model section is an adaptation of Family Theories: A New Direction for Research with Resettled Populations by Jaime Ballard, Elizabeth Wieling, and Catherine Solheim, used under a CC BY NC license.

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