

## The Effect of Children's Behavior on Foreign Immigrant Wives' Quality of Life in Korea

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### Abstract

*As the number of international marriages increased in Korea, there have been many new problems, such as the ones that are related to what the foreign immigrant wives go through as well as the problems that they experience as multicultural families. The ones that seem to stand out most are the foreign wives' difficulty dealing with their children, the children's inability to adapt to the society and the social discrimination that both the foreign wives and their children experience. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out how the children's behavior affect the foreign wives' quality of life, thereby attempting to provide basic data for developing new programs to help improve the foreign immigrant wives' and their children's quality of life. The participants were 323 foreign immigrant wives who are taking care of their own children, and some of the factors that may affect their quality of life were children's health condition, wives' degree of satisfaction on their children, themselves, and their relationship with their children. The higher their assessment on their children's behavior, the better their overall quality of life. There needs to be a program development for diagnosing childcare problems, not just for the foreign wives but to educate both the foreign wives and their children as well. Not only will this help improve their overall relationship, but it will also increase the children's self-esteem and pride of their mom.*

**Keywords:** Immigrant wife, Children's Behavior, Quality of Life

### 1. Introduction

South Korea has become a multicultural nation as a result of influx of foreign workers and increasing number of international marriages between socially disadvantaged Korean men and foreign immigrant women from China, Philippines, Vietnam and Mongolia for the past ten years [1]. The number of marriages between Korean men and foreign women has significantly increased since the mid-1990s. 8.0% of the marriages that took place in 2013 were international marriages, and out of all these marriages, 70.5% were between Korean men and foreign wives [2]. Different cultural backgrounds and differences in consciousness have caused conflicts and difficulties among multicultural family members. In particular, immigrant women may have difficulties with communication due to poor language competence, which can lead to difficulties with childcare [3]. The foreign immigrant wives in Korea do not want their children to experience the same discrimination and prejudice that they experience. Rather, they want their children to grow up in a better environment with good education to be accepted by the mainstream society [4]. But,

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children in multicultural families have grown and become a target of alienation, teasing, bullying, and violence among peers at school due to poor Korean language proficiency and poor academic achievement ability [5], had lots of problems related to social maladjustment due to school maladjustment, the increasing dropout rate, and the low rate of school attendance and higher education [6, 7], and suffered serious social discrimination [8]. Mother-child interaction is a bidirectional interaction between mothers and their children [9], and it builds a foundation of the mother-child relationship.

Many foreign immigrant women in Korea struggle with parenting methods and family-related problems caused by cultural difference [10, 11]. Many multicultural families struggle to understand each other with two different cultures coexisting. Parenting difficulties and children's reactions affect their mothers in various ways, and not only will this affect the quality of life of the foreign immigrant wives negatively, but it will also make it more difficult for them to adapt into Korean culture.

This study was designed to examine the foreign immigrant wives' children's daily behavior and reactions and find out how they affect the overall quality of life of the immigrant women as a result. This study also attempts to solve some of the problems that the immigrant women go through on a daily basis; thereby attempting to provide basic data for developing programs for both foreign immigrant women and their children to be well settled in Korean society.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Research Outline**

This is a descriptive survey study that explores the daily lives of the foreign immigrant women's children and examined how they affect the overall quality of the immigrant women's lives in Korea. Through this study, many parenting-related difficulties that the foreign immigrant women go through can be observed.

### **2.2. Participants**

This study was conducted on immigrant wives caring for their children in S, H, J, and P Cities. 323 immigrant wives, who understood the purpose of this study, gave a written consent to participate in the research. They could read and complete the questionnaire in their own language, and they were selected through convenience sampling.

### **2.3. Tools and Materials**

The main tool used for this study was the survey designed to grasp the general characteristics and child characteristics of the immigrant women, their QOL. The contents of the characteristics included the immigrant women's age, age of their husbands, their native country, tenure of residence in Korea, level of education, family's monthly income, employment status, their Korean skill level, their husbands' language skill of the wife's country. The contents of the child characteristics included bodyweight at birth, current BMI, health problems, main caretaker, any previous experience of alienation, children's difficulties expected by their mothers, difficulties relating to parenting, and daily behavior. The quality of life is a very subjective measurement of individuals based on their purpose, expectation, principles and interests within their surrounding culture and society (World Health Organization Quality of Life [WHOQOL] group, 1995). This study utilized the Korean version of scale from (World Health Organization Quality of Life: WHOQOL-Bref), developed by Min, Lee, Kim, Suh and Kim (2000) based on the scale of WHO. This scale included 2 questions about general health awareness, 7 questions about physical health, 6 psychological, 3 sociological, and 8 environmental health related questions, totaling 24 questions. Each question was scored from 1 to 5, and the score of the negative

questions was calculated by subtracting the number from 6. The higher the scores, the higher the quality of life, and the validity of the tool was Cronbach's  $\alpha=.914$ .

There were 13 questions on children's behavior, and there were five answer choices given to the participants, which were: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. Three of those were positive questions whereas ten were negative. The higher the reverse-calculated scores, the more positive their children's behavior is.

#### **2.4. Data Collection Method and Ethical Consideration**

This study obtained the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (No. 2009-09) and the data were collected from March to June 2011. The researcher and the assistant researcher personally visited immigrant women's centers and health centers in Seoul and Gyeonggi Province, explained the purpose and purport of the research to women in multicultural families, and obtained their consent to collect data from the women who visited this institution by the institutional help. The subjects were given an explanation of the purpose and methods of the research and anonymity of participation in the research and were asked to complete the questionnaire according to their autonomous decision-making.

#### **2.5. Data Analysis**

All the collected data were computerized with SPSS Win 20.0. Characteristics of the immigrant women were indicated by frequency and percentage, and the Quality of Life by different characteristics was analyzed by t-test and ANOVA and Scheffe's test.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. General Characteristics of Participants**

The participants' average age was  $29.76\pm 5.81$ , 63.8% of the participants were 21~30years old and 31.8% were 31~40years old. Their husband's average age was  $41.39\pm 5.26$  and the average age difference with their husbands' age was 11.73. 50.3% of the couple's age gap were 11~20years.

61.0 % of the participants were Vietnamese and 31.0% were Chinese. 8.5% of the participants lived less than 2 years in Korea, 45.9% lived longer than 2 years and less than 4 years, and 45.6% lived longer than 4 years.

46.6% of the participants were high school graduates, 13.3% were college graduates. And the average income for the family was 2,388,900 won and 38.7% of the participants had job (Table 1).

**Table 1. Differences of QOL to General Characteristics**

(N=323)

Characteristics	Categories	n(%)	M±SD	QOL	t or F(p)	Post-Hoc
Age(year)	21~30	203(63.8)	29.76±5.81	3.10 .41	2.131 (.121)	
	31~40	101(31.8)		3.22 .47		
	≥41	14(4.4)		3.13 .40		
Age of husband (year) n=313	24~40	150(47.9)	41.39±5.26	3.17 .42	1.361 (.258)	
	41~50	148(47.3)		3.08 .43		
	≥51	15(4.8)		3.13 .26		
Couple's age gap(year) n=308	-8~0	19(6.2)	11.73±7.01	3.28 .50	2.233 (.085)	
	1~10	107(34.7)		3.20 .43		
	11~20	155(50.3)		3.07 .39		
	≥21	27(8.8)		3.11 .46		
Native country	China	100(31.0)		3.21 .44	7.492 (.001)	b<c
	Vietnam	191(61.0)		3.07 .40		
	others	22(7.0)		3.45 .55		
Length of residence in Korea(year)	< 2	26(8.5)	59.77±39.81 (month)	3.11 .41	1.576 (.209)	
	2~4	141(45.9)		3.01 .38		
	≥4	140(45.6)		3.11 .42		
Education	Middle school	120(37.5)		3.09 .42	4.120 (.007)	a<b,c
	High school	149(46.6)		3.11 .39		
	College	44(13.8)		3.34 .46		
	Others	7(2.2)		3.41 .74		
Family's monthly income n=158	200 or less	87(55.1)	238.89±132.09 (Unit: 10,000won)	3.18 .46	3.907 (.023)	b<c
	201~300	49(31.0)		3.12 .38		
	Over 301	22(13.9)		3.44 .34		
Job n=323	Yes	108(38.7)		3.15 .40	-0.48 (.962)	
	No	171(61.3)		3.15 .45		

### 3.2. Characteristics of Immigrant Women's Child

Out of all the participants' children, 139 of them (43.0%) marked that they had some kind of health problems, such as atopy, asthma, anemia and depression. 154 of them answered their children's school grades were higher than average, and 64.3% of them took care of their children by themselves. 104 of them (35.7%) said their husbands, other family members, or daycare facilities took care of their children. 21.6% of the participants indicated that their children had experience being left out or being alienated by their peers. For the section that discussed the difficulties that children experienced, 18.6% answered mom's absence, 16.5% said the fact that mom's a foreigner, 14.8% said having no friends. Others included having no desire to study, having bad grades and being alienated.

79% of the participants were satisfied with their children's behavior, 6.8% were dissatisfied, and 14.2% said they didn't know. 65% of them were satisfied with themselves, 9.5% were dissatisfied, and 25.4% said they had no idea. 83.8% said they were satisfied with the relationship with their children (Table 2).

**Table 2. Differences of QOL to Child Characteristics**

(N=323)

Characteristics	Categories	n(%)	M±SD	QOL	t or F(p)	Post-Hoc
Child health problem	Yes	139(43.0)		3.04 .35	-3.332 (.001)	
	No	184(57.0)		3.21 .47		
School grade n=154	High	72(46.8)		3.15 .49	.371 (.691)	
	Average	78(50.6)		3.14 .34		
	Low	4(2.6)		2.93 .05		
Main caretaker	Mother	187(64.3)		3.02 .73	1.150 (.252)	
	others	104(35.7)		2.90 .89		
Experience being alienated	Yes	56(21.6)		3.12 .40	-.699 (.485)	
	No	203(78.4)		3.16 .41		
Bodyweight at birth			3.21 .45			
BMI			17.45 .719			
Children's difficulties	Having no friends	35(14.8)				
	Bad school grades	22(9.3)				
	Being alienated	14(5.9)				
	Mom's a foreigner	39(16.5)				
	Don't want to study	28(11.8)				
	Mom's absence	44(18.6)				
	Others	55(23.2)				
Satisfaction on their Children	Satisfied	222(79.0)		3.25 .41	12.103 (.000)	a>b, c
	Dissatisfied	19(6.8)		2.92 .30		
	Don't know	40(14.2)		2.94 .30		
Satisfaction on themselves as a mother	Satisfied	184(65.0)		3.25 .41	9.012 (.000)	a>b, c
	Dissatisfied	27(9.5)		2.95 .37		
	Don't know	72(25.4)		3.05 .32		
Satisfaction on their relationship with their children	Satisfied	238(83.8)		3.21 .40	3.635 (.028)	a>c
	Dissatisfied	12(4.2)		3.08 .38		
	Don't know	34(12.0)		3.00 .38		

### 3.3. Quality of Life According to General Characteristics

According to the result, the immigrant wives from the Philippines, Cambodia and Mongolia showed higher quality of life than the ones from Vietnam ( $F=7.492$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The women who graduated from high school showed higher quality of life than the ones who graduated from middle school, and the ones that graduated from college showed the highest quality of life ( $F=4.120$ ,  $p=.007$ ). The families whose monthly income was over 3 million won showed higher quality of life than the families whose monthly income was in between 2 million and 3 million won ( $F=3.907$ ,  $p=.023$ )(Table 1).

The immigrant wives whose children had health problems showed lower quality of life ( $t=-3.332$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The women who were satisfied with their children's behavior showed higher quality of life than the ones that were satisfied ( $F=12.103$ ,  $p<.000$ ), and similarly, the ones that were satisfied with themselves as moms had higher quality of life than the ones that were satisfied with themselves ( $F=9.012$ ,  $p<.000$ ). Finally, the ones that were satisfied with their relationship with their children showed higher quality of life than the ones that weren't sure about their relationship with their children ( $F=3.635$ ,  $p=.028$ )(Table 2).

### 3.4. Children's Behavior Observation

Table 3 shows the result of the participants' observation on their children's behavior. '(The child) Seems happy and comfortable' was 3.31 out of 5, 'Gets along with others' was 3.24, and 'Helps others' was 2.95.

The negative questions include 'Cannot concentrate', 'Doesn't complete homework assignments', and 'Gets angry too easily'

**Table 3. Children's Behavior Observation**

Variables	n	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Seems happy and comfortable	323	3.31	1.06	1.00	5.00
Gets along with others	313	3.24	1.18	1.00	5.00
Helps others	313	2.95	1.14	1.00	5.00
Deceives others	310	1.59	0.90	1.00	5.00
Bullies others	316	1.66	1.01	1.00	5.00
Doesn't get along with others	317	1.72	0.99	1.00	5.00
Cannot control emotion	312	1.81	0.95	1.00	5.00
Says something weird and acts strangely	318	1.82	1.02	1.00	5.00
Seems very weak or ill	312	1.90	0.96	1.00	5.00
Doesn't open up to others easily	323	1.98	0.99	1.00	5.00
Gets angry too easily	317	1.99	0.97	1.00	5.00
Doesn't complete homework assignments	303	1.99	1.00	1.00	5.00
Cannot concentrate	323	2.02	0.99	1.00	5.00

### 3.5. Quality of Life According to Children's Behavior

The result is shown on Table 4, divided into 3 groups: high, middle and low. The immigrant wives who see their children's behavior positively showed higher quality of life than the ones that see their children's behavior negatively.

**Table 4. Quality of Life According to Children's Behavior**

Children's behavior	Immigrant women's Quality of Life				
	N(%)	Mean	SD	F(P)	Scheffe
Low	77(30.2)	2.88	.27	30.848	a, b<c
Middle	79(31.0)	3.02	.39	(.000)	
High	99(30.7)	3.36	.43		

## 4. Conclusions

In modern society, maintaining the quality of life with physical, psychological and sociological secureness is deemed as one of the rights that people should have. [12]. The purpose of this study was to examine the foreign immigrant wives' children's daily behavior and reactions and find out how they affect the overall quality of life of the immigrant women as a result. All of the participants, the foreign immigrant wives, were in their 20's, and 61.3% of them were housewives [13]. Many similar studies that dealt with foreign immigrant women focused on participants who were also in their 20's [14, 15], but many of them are starting to have a job according to the social trend. Although the number of foreign immigrant women who are working has increased a lot, most of them are not working in a field that they are interested in. The average gap between their age and their husbands' age was 11 years, but the age difference didn't seem to affect the wives' quality of life [16], although a previous study conducted by Lim, Ari showed that the larger the age gap, the lower the quality of life. The women who had higher levels of education also showed to have higher quality of life, which coincided with the result of the study conducted by Lim [16]. The women whose children had health problems showed lower quality of life as well. Other studies have shown that the childcare stress negatively affect the wives' quality of life [17, 18], and the stress level and the quality of life seemed to be inversely proportional [19], so the overall result seemed to coincide with this notion as well. The women who were satisfied with their children's behavior, with themselves as moms, and with the relationship with their children showed higher quality of life than the ones that marked they weren't sure. This also coincided with the result of the study that said the wives' satisfaction level of their relationship with their children plays a big role in determining their quality of life [20]. Overall, this study confirmed that the childcare stress and the relationship between the moms and their children are two of the most significant factors that affect the foreign immigrant wives' quality of life. In Korea, there have been many programs recently developed and designed to educate the foreign immigrant wives, such as language course, job fair, policy education, and other educational programs related to pregnancy, childbirth, postmortem care and nursing the new born; however, there should be more detailed programs designed to improve the relationship between the moms and their children for the foreign immigrant wives. The results of these programs will not only help the children understand their moms and their identity, but it will also improve their relationship with their moms and other family members as well, thereby improving the quality of life of the entire family members.

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