

Acculturation on Stress, Quality of Life, and Self-Esteem in Married Immigrant Women in Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine acculturation on stress, quality of life, self-esteem in married immigrant women in Korea. The participants included 553 married immigrant women who met the eligibility criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Participants were evaluated for subjective assessment of married immigrant-related constructs using a self-report questionnaire, for stress, self-esteem, and quality of life (QOL). Data were collected from August to December, 2014. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics, the variables, ANOVA, T-test for SPSS for Windows, version 22.0.

Women who have a low educational level, poor health and are dissatisfied with their marriage showed low self-esteem, and quality of life. Quality of life had significant negative correlations with acculturation on stress and positive correlations with self-esteem. Developing nursing interventions to enhance self-esteem and to reduce acculturation on stress toward improvement of QOL among married immigrant women is recommended. And to improve the quality of life of married immigrant women, development of nursing strategies according to reducing acculturation on stress is needed.

Keywords: Immigrant, Women, Quality of life, Self-esteem, Stress

1. Introduction

International marriage in S. Korea has been increasing steadily since the 1990s. According to [1], in 2013, 25,963 marriages out of a total 322 807 marriages were internal marriages and among them, 2.4 % (7,656) were marriages between non-Korean men to Korean women and 5.7% (18,307) were marriages between Korean men to non-Korean women. This reflects that one out of every 18 marriages was an international marriage between a Korean male to a non-Korean female, subsequently increasing attention to international marriages by society as a whole.

Meanwhile, phenomenon of non-Korean women's immigrant to Korea through marriage was to pursue a stable life in a developed country rather than staying in their own country due to a lack of economic resources [1].

In conclusion, international marriage between Korean men to non-Korean women resulted from rural Korean men's desire to start a family and non-Korean women's need to pursue a better quality of life and financial stability. Since many women came to S. Korea through marriage and did not have any specific skills, basic knowledge, or preparation to live in a foreign country, they soon faced challenges related to culture shock, language barrier, communication difficulty, disappointment from inability to achieve financial stability, factors related to child bearing and rearing, marital conflict, conflict between in-laws, and discrimination based on society's prejudice [2].

Often times, many immigrant women through marriage (Immigrant women hereafter) are placed on a fine line between their native and foreign cultures, and rather than integrating two cultures, they are forced to adopt and live by the new cultural boundaries [3, 4]. These types of challenges and difficulties that immigrant women experience in Korea during the cultural adaptation process have been described by many scholars [1],

[5].

Berry identified four major types of acculturation: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization that take place during cultural adaptation of immigrant women who are in between boundaries of her own and foreign cultures [6].

Immigrant women are exposed to a new Korean culture and must choose one of four types of acculturation process, which will subsequently affect the quality of their lives [7]. These women may experience a high level of stress because they are required to develop new behaviors and thought processes for adoption to a foreign culture. Society's negative views and discrimination towards immigrant women from under developed countries becomes a major barrier to social adaptation in S. Korea [8]. In addition, loss of familiar environment due to a sudden and excessive change, and loss of support system, can be a huge stressor to the individuals' adaptability in the new society.

According to Berry, immigrant women's psychological and cultural stress were understood as a cultural acculturation stress, which was caused by the differences between individual's existing culture and new culture that they are trying to adopt. This acculturative stress is closely related to the quality of life of immigrant women. Immigrant women's role as wife to a Korean man and mother of their children and potential human resources in the labor force started drawing attention from Korean society, triggered wide array of support and research focusing on cultural adaptation in Korea [9].

However, despite these efforts, immigrant women's problems have not lessened, but have become more in-depth and complicated [6], [7]. To date, not enough research studies focusing on immigrant women exist in the current body of nursing knowledge. Furthermore, research studies focusing on identifying relationships between acculturative stress and quality of care and self-esteem are nearly non-existence.

Therefore, in this research, acculturative stress, quality of life, and characteristics of self-esteem of immigrant women will be closely studied. Furthermore, this would identify general characteristics and its relationship between acculturation stress, self-esteem, and quality of life.

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore acculturation stress, self-esteem, and quality of immigrant women.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study was used a descriptive study.

2.2. Samples and Data Collection

For this study, the data was collected from married immigrant women who received services from the Multicultural Center in six cities. The purpose of this study was explained, permission was asked and granted to access study samples: immigrant women who agreed to participate in this study. Six Multicultural Centers were included in final selection. Data was collected using survey questionnaires written in Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

The primary researcher who fully understood the research and survey information visited facilities and explained the purpose and details of the research process to the immigrant women. The participants independently completed survey questions by following directions. When the participants did not understand the questions, the researcher provided clarification of the question. Data was collected from August to

December, 2014. Six-hundred seventy questionnaires were distributed and collected. Among the 563 returned survey questionnaires, 10 survey questionnaires were incomplete and were eliminated from the final analysis. Total of 553 questionnaires were used for data analysis

2.3. Definitions of Immigrant Women

The National Institute of the Korean Language Standard Korean Dictionary defined international marriage as "marriage between men and women who have different nationalities," and immigrant women as "female in the international marriage".

In this study, definition of immigrant women are those who live in S. Korea through marriage to Korean men including both women who acquired Korean nationality through naturalization and women who did not.

3. Instruments

3.1. Acculturation Stress

Acculturation stress means tension that occurred during the process of cultural adaptation. It also means the stress caused by stressors. To measure identified common questions in a sub-category section, a measurement tool adopted by [10] was used. In this study, (a) social prejudice, (b) communication problems, (c) culture shock, (d) hostility, and (e) home sick make up five sub-regions, means the higher the score, the higher the acculturation stress.

Reliability of the previous study [10] was Cronbach's $\alpha=.932$ and this study was Cronbach's $\alpha=.965$.

3.2. Self-Esteem

In this study, self-esteem was measured by a measurement tool developed by [11] and modified by [12]. A total of 10 questions in this section were used and the higher the total scores the higher the self-esteem.

Reliability of the previous study [12] was Cronbach's $\alpha=.776$ and this study was Cronbach's $\alpha=.832$

3.3. Quality of Life

Quality of life is "individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns." One's expectations for their lives from the point of recognition of individual's life in the future was measured based on recognition and evaluation about present life [13]. In this study, to measure the immigrant women's quality of life subjectively, Life Satisfaction Self-Rating Scale (LSRS) developed by [14].

This tool made it possible to comprehensively measure 10 areas of life satisfaction ranging from the very basic question such as food, clothing and shelter to abstract philosophical questions of life. 10 areas of life satisfaction are areas of food, clothing and shelter, the Friendship, family and kinship, physical and mental health, work, financial, interpersonal relationship, social and recreational activity, happiness, and autonomy and ego.

It consisted of 33 questions using a 5-point Likert scale, responses to each question ranged from "not at all (1 point) to 'Strongly Agree (5)", and the higher the score meant the higher quality of life.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the SPSS WIN (22.0). The steps of statistical analysis to answer the research questions in this study are as follows:

First, the participants' demographic characteristics and acculturation stress, self-esteem, quality of life was analyzed using frequency analysis, and descriptive statistics analysis.

Second, in order to verify the relationship between the variables, ANOVA, t-test was performed.

5. Results

5.1. Differences of Quality of Life according to Socio-demographic Factors

There were significantly differences native place, age, educational level, religion, income level, migratory period, type of family, health level, occupation, and reason for marrying among quality of life (Table 1).

Table 1. Acculturation Stress, Self-esteem, Quality of Life according to General Characteristics (n=553)

	Categories	n (%)	quality of life M (SD)	F/t	p	Post-Hoc
Native place	China	83	3.32 (.59)			
	Vietnam	295	3.39 (.69)			
	Philippines	114	3.81 (.31)	12.534	.000	
	Japan	24	3.92 (.35)			
	Uzbekistan	7	3.73			
	others	30	3.76 (.78)			
Age(year)	20-29	84	3.46 (.82)			
	30-39	231	3.45 (.66)	2.676	.046	
	40-49	197	3.62 (.54)			
	over 50	41	3.52 (.64)			
Academic background (women)	Elementary school ^a	60	3.37 (.50)			
	middle school ^b	125	3.38 (.54)			
	high school ^c	230	3.57 (.72)	4.623	.003	d>a, b
	college above ^d	138	3.61 (.60)			
Academic background (husband)	Elementary school	9	3.68 (.90)			
	middle school	61	3.31 (.44)	6.744	.000	d>b, c
	high school	278	3.45 (.63)			
	college above	205	3.65 (.67)			
Religion	No	313	3.35 (.59)	-7.112	.000	
	Yes	16	3.73 (.65)			
Residence	major city ^a	46	3.42 (.46)			
	small town ^b	340	3.52 (.67)	.631	.532	
	rural area ^c	167	3.53 (.63)			
Income level (10,000won)	< 100 ^a	64	3.11 (.55)			
	100-200 ^b	232	3.52 (.52)			
	200-300 ^c	198	3.59 (.71)	9.839	.000	e> a
	300-400 ^d	42	3.51 (.88)			
	400-500 ^e	17	3.96 (.16)			
Migratory period (year)	0-2 ^a	245	3.36 (.67)			
	3-5 ^b	188	3.65 (.56)	9.741	.000	d>a,b,c
	6-8 ^c	78	3.56 (.60)			
	Over 9 ^d	42	3.74 (.68)			
Type of family	Couple ^a	102	3.69 (.54)			
	Couple+children ^b	196	3.65 (.64)			
	Couple+children+parents-in-law ^c	201	3.40 (.63)	19.557	.000	a,b>c,d
	Couple+children+parents-in-law+grandparents ^d	26	3.52 (.27)			
	Others ^e	28	2.69 (.48)			
	Housewife ^a	433	3.47 (.61)			

Occupation (women)	Farming ^b	59	3.30 (.62)			
	Commerce ^c	25	3.66 (.72)	18.831	.000	d> a,b,c
	Manufacturing ^d	7	4.85 (.00)			
	Office job ^e	29	4.13 (.41)			
Health	Healthy ^a	429	3.57 (.67)			
	Not good ^b	104	3.29 (.55)	8.246	.000	a>b
	Bad ^c	20	3.46 (.47)			
Visit one's mother country	No	249	3.43 (.67)	1.435	.231	
	Yes	304	3.58 (.61)			
Reason for marrying	Korea improves further economically ^a	57	3.35 (.49)			
	She wants an economic support to their family ^b	74	3.32 (.72)			
	She loves her husband ^c	389	3.56 (.64)	6.066	.000	e> c,d
	She wants to leave home country absolutely ^d	21	3.42 (.11)			
	Her family and relatives advised actively ^e	33	4.12 (.60)			

5.2 Levels of Quality of Life and related Variables

The levels of variables were showed acculturation stress 2.26(.64), self-esteem 3.5(.64), and quality of life 3.49(.49)(Table 2).

Table 2. The Average Level of the Main Factors (N=553)

Category	Min	Max	M±SD
Acculturation stress	2.21	2.31	2.26±.64
Self-esteem	3.46	3.56	3.50±.64
Quality of life	3.45	3.54	3.49±.49

5.3. Correlations of related Variables with Quality of Life

Quality of life had significant negative correlations with acculturation on stress and positive correlations with self-esteem (Table3).

Table 3. Correlations of related Variables with Quality of Life (N=553)

Category	Min	Max	M±SD
Acculturation stress	1		
Self-esteem	-.418 [*]	1	
Quality of life	-.404	.353 [*]	1

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the acculturation stress, self-esteem and quality of life of the immigrant women. The significance of this study may provide fundamental data for improving quality of life for immigrant women in Korea.

In the section of general characteristics and the quality of life of immigrant women, native place, age, educational level, religion, income level, migratory period, type of family, health level, occupation, and reason for marrying among quality of life. The results revealed that religion, immigrant period, and presence or absence of visitation to their home country significantly differences quality of life of the immigrant women.

Quality of life of immigrant women with religious beliefs is significantly higher than women who do not. For immigrant period, the longer their immigrant period in Korea, the higher their perception of quality of life. The study also found that women who visited their home country had significantly higher quality of life than women who did not, revealing that the need for offering video conference system by the multi-cultural support

or community center, for the immigrant women to keep in touch with their family in their home country.

Overall average of the immigrant women's acculturation stress was 2.26 points, and among its subcategories, homesickness was the highest averaging 2.58 points, which reflected results of the previous research studies [15] focusing on acculturation stress of the immigrant women. Overall average of the self-esteem of the immigrant women was 3.50 points, among them, positive self-esteem averaged 3.49 points and negative self-esteem averaged 3.36 points, which reveals that immigrant women have more positive than negative self-esteem. In the previous study [16] revealed that the average of the immigrant women's positive self-esteem was higher (3.66 points) than negative self-esteem (2.28 points).

In the quality of life of immigrant women, overall average was 3.49 points. Among them, subcategory of food, clothing and shelter averaged 3.81 points, which was the highest, then friendship was 3.70 points, happiness was 3.55 points, interpersonal relationship was 3.51 points, autonomy and ego was 3.49 points, Social activities and leisure area was 3.41 points, physical and mental health was 3.31 points, and economy was 3.12 points, which was the lowest. This reveals that increasing social activity of immigrant women promotes higher quality of life than factors related to physical and mental health or environments.

In the previous studies [15], variable such as country of origin, career, and average monthly income have significant correlation with the quality of life of the immigrant women. Acculturation stress showed a negative correlation with the quality of life and self-esteem, self-esteem have a positive correlation with the quality of life. Therefore, it is imperative to identify and understand general characteristics and factors influencing the acculturation stress, self-esteem, and quality of life and their relationship when providing counseling services and applying group programs to immigrant women.

In the previous study [16], the quality of life had a positive correlation with the subcategories of self-esteem. Therefore, identifying factors influencing acculturation stress, self-esteem and quality of life of the immigrant women, develop intervention strategies, and apply various strategies when providing counseling and group programs to decrease acculturation stress, increase self-esteem of immigrant women to promote quality of life.

Lastly, the data was collected from the immigrant women who were receiving immigrant women service programs in big and small cities. Therefore, follow-up research that is broad in scale to include array of immigrant women including those who were excluded in this research. The immigrant women who choose not to receive such services or are unable to receive services due to financial reason, or residing outside of these three provinces were excluded from this study. Therefore the limitation of this research is that the study result cannot be generalized.

7. Conclusion

The significance of this study was that the study result provided an understanding of immigrant women's acculturation stress and self-esteem and became a foundation to develop strategies for improving quality of life in S. Korea.

The result of this study of the relationship between acculturation stress, self-esteem, and quality of life of immigrant women, provided practical implications for the need of program development to improve quality of life of the immigrant women. Upon close examination of the relationship between the main variables in relation to the demographic characteristics, acculturation stress was closely related to the immigrant period, presence or absence of visitation to their home country, and reasons for marriage whereas self-esteem was closely linked with the religion, immigrant period, and presence or absence of visitation to their home country.

In addition, acculturation stress, quality of life, and self-esteem was closely related to

each other. Based on the study results, these authors recommend the following: It is necessary to create a social atmosphere of acceptance of the immigrant women's own culture and support for the integration of their own and Korean culture. It is imperative that multi-cultural and community welfare center develop systematic to promote communication between immigrant women and their families in their home country through video conferencing methods (calls) at any time. In addition, countries need to develop international policies and agreement to support immigrant women for visiting their country.

A follow-up study is needed to include immigrant women who are not receiving services from the multicultural or community welfare center, and women residing in other areas of the country. Further research is needed to identify other factors affecting the quality of life of the immigrant women in addition to the acculturation stress and self-esteem.

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