



# Institutional Supports and Life Satisfaction: The Case of Cross-border Marriage Migrants in South Korea

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## Abstract

The positive influence of institutional supports from social networks on psychological well-being of immigrants is extensively acknowledged in the literature. However, immigration experiences outside the Western societies are underexplored. Using data from the 2012 Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family, I examine how institutional supports for cross-border marriage migration shape life satisfaction among female marriage migrants in South Korea. Findings reveal that levels of life satisfaction among marriage migrants married via commercially arranged marriage agencies are lower than those of female marriage migrants using interpersonal networks from kinship and friends/colleagues. Religion-motivated marriage migrants show lower levels of life satisfaction. In addition, the impacts of institutional supports on life satisfaction are mediated by marriage duration and language proficiency, indicating higher levels of satisfaction are associated with shorter marriage duration and better language proficiency; however, the impacts vary by institutional supports.

## Keywords

cross-border marriage migration, institutional supports, life satisfaction, ordered logistic regression

## Introduction

As an indicator of assimilation and incorporation into the host society, social scientists have highlighted life satisfaction among immigrants (Amit 2010; Chow 2007; DeWind and Kasinitz 1997; Ullman and Tatar 2001; Verkuyten 2008). Relating to sense of belonging, the subjective perception of immigrants on their quality of life affects the social adjustment of immigrants (Amit 2010; McMichael and Manderson 2004). Research indicates that sociodemographic factors, such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, occupation, and income, are associated with levels of immigrant life satisfaction (Jong, Chamrathirong, and Tran 2002; Neto 2001; Safi 2010; Vohra and Adair 2000; Ying 1992).

Scholars further argue that immigrant social networks shape emotional and psychological well-being of immigrant population (Croucher 2011; Hagan 1998; Vega et al. 1991). They demonstrate that social connections and support networks have positive influences on immigrants' wellness, including quality of life, mental health, identity formation, and cultural adaptation (Cheong et al. 2007; Harker 2001; McMichael and Manderson 2004; Silveira and Allebeck 2001; Vidal de Haymes et al. 2011). Among various dimensions of networks, immigrants' strong ties with family members and relatives yield better

psychological outcomes (Harker 2001; Silveira and Allebeck 2001; Vega et al. 1991; Vidal de Haymes et al. 2011).

These studies focus on Western societies, and we thus know far less about international migration in other regions. In East Asia, unlike the Western cases, cross-border marriage migration is the most common form of international migration. The phenomenon is generally comprised of cross-border marriages between bridegrooms from developed regions (South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) and brides from developing regions (China and South Asia countries; Constable 2010; Piper 1999, 2003; Shim 2008; Yang and Lu 2010). Researchers suggest that institutional supports from immigrant social networks are vital for understanding outcomes of cross-border marriage migration (Lee and Jun 2014; Ryu 2018; Seo 2011; Wang and Chang 2002).

Using data from the 2012 Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family, I empirically examine the impact of

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institutional supports on psychological well-being of cross-border marriage migrants. More specifically, I assess how institutional supports for cross-border marriage shape life satisfaction among female marriage migrants in South Korea. This would provide an opportunity to broaden our sociological comprehension in diverse immigration experiences beyond the Western societies and to discuss theoretical implication of institutional supports on immigrants' psychological wellness in host society.

### **Cross-border Marriage Migration into South Korea**

There are two distinctive characteristics of cross-border marriage migration into South Korea. With regard to international migration, the first characteristic is its motivation. For migrants from China and South Asia countries, since those regional differentials in Asia are salient, they are prone to migrate into South Korea as well as Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. For them, a marriage can be a “door opener for migration” (Beck-Gernsheim 2011:63) by reducing uncertainties and maximizing their benefits during the processes of immigration and settlement.

On the other hand, based on social and cultural contexts, the cross-border marriage migration is one possible solution for resolving marriage market problems in developed countries (Davin 2008; Shim 2008). For instance, in South Korea, sociodemographic changes, such as the rises in living standards and prices, growth of women's participation in labor markets, and changes in family formation, have led trends of late marriage and low fertility rate. Furthermore, due to the preference for male offspring motivated by the Confucian culture, the gender imbalance at marriageable ages in South Korea had been aggravated since mid-1970s (Shim 2008). Therefore, the number of brides from China and South East Asian countries began to increase.

Currently, cross-border marriage migration between Korean husbands and immigrant brides is the most ubiquitous form of international migration in Korean society. The Statistics Korea<sup>1</sup> reported that from 2005 to 2014, there had been 245,904 marriages between Korean husbands and foreign-born wives—74.6 percent of all international marriages. Among them, 82 percent of foreign-born wives were from China and South Asia countries. Research shows that a vast majority of female marriage migrants are wives of Korean husbands living in rural areas (Hwang 2009; Shim 2008).

### **Institutional Supports for Cross-border Marriage Migration**

The second characteristic in terms of marriage is institutional supports of cross-border marriage. Since the vast majority of

such immigrant brides have had insufficient information on the receiving country, and even their own husband, their cross-border marriage is mostly mediated and supported by their interpersonal networks or commercially arranged agencies (Beck-Gernsheim 2011; Ryu 2018; Seo 2011; Yang and Lu 2010). Scholarship of marriage and family addresses the idea that institutional supports affect outcomes of the romantic relationship, including mate selection, dating, marriage, and involvement in the relationship (Bryant and Conger 1999; Loving 2006; Zhang and Kline 2009). In what follows, I briefly discuss four types of institutions for cross-border marriage migration: kinship, friends/colleagues, religious affiliation, and marriage agencies.

#### *Kinship Networks*

In South Korea, as well as other Eastern societies, kinship networks are notably regarded as the most effective institutional supports for migrants (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank, 2002; Hugo 1995; K.-M. Kim 2012; Kim, Cha, and Kim 2008; Yeoh, Huang, and Lam 2005). Because of the influences of Confucianism, there is deep-rooted culture of familism that accentuates the value of kinship (Hugo 1995; G.-H. Lim 2014). Thus, kinship networks can create reciprocal solidarity and provide immigrants substantial support to adjust in host country (Kim et al. 2008; Yeoh et al. 2005). For marriage migrants, the “kinship-based marriage arrangements” (Beck-Gernsheim 2011:65) could yield psychological stability and sense of belonging. Thus, research shows that kinship networks are closely connected to the development of quality of life among marriage migrants (K.-M. Kim 2012).

#### *Friends and Colleagues*

Immigration scholarship has primarily focused on immigrant social networks formed by friendship and colleagueship in labor market contexts. A number of studies suggest that interpersonal ties of friends/colleagues have an influence on immigrants' job opportunity, occupational prestige, and wage differentials (Aguilera and Massey 2003; Poros 2001; Saxenian, Motoyama, and Quan 2002).

For the case of cross-border marriage migration in South Korea, marriage migrants who married via friends and colleagues are engaged in more broad ranges of networks that provide connections with various social activities (Kim et al. 2008). Scholars argue that social inclusion and participation reduce stress from acculturation and childrearing and depression among female marriage migrants (K.-M. Kim 2012; Kim and Kim 2016).

#### *Religious Affiliation*

Religious affiliation as institutional supports is mainly associated with cross-border marriages between Korean husband and Japanese wife. Researchers argue that most Japanese

<sup>1</sup>The Statistics Korea. Annual report of marriage and divorce in Korea. 2015.

female marriage migrants in South Korea were members of The Unification Church (or FFWPU, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), founded in 1954 by a Korean man. As its doctrine, the religion has been encouraging its members to engage in a cross-border marriage. Members of the religion can't marry with nonbelievers, and the wedding ceremony is collectively and simultaneously held for hundreds of couples (J.-H. Lee 2012). Since 1961, there have been almost 500 million cross-border marriages by the religion. Although this kind of religion-motivated cross-border marriage has decreased as time passed, it is indisputable that religious affiliation is one type of institutional support for cross-border marriages between Korean and Japanese (Kim et al. 2008; J.-H. Lee 2012; K.-Y. Lee 2015).

### **Marriage Agencies**

In East Asian countries, a high percentage of immigration is cross-border marriage migration intermediated by marriage agencies (Piper 1999, 2003; Yang and Lu 2010). These commercial agencies assist both (foreign) wives and (Korean) husbands with information on qualifications, legal procedures of marriage, and immigration policies (Y.-S. Lim 2013; Seo 2011).

The general matchmaking process of cross-border marriages between Korean husbands and foreign wives through the mediation of marriage agencies is as follows. The first step is making a contract. Marriage agencies are typically paid an initial base fee and additional payment depending on consequences. The next is a Korean husband's journey to the country of the potential wife. In this step, marriage agencies coach the process of matchmaking and support detailed procedures (e.g., booking a flight, deputizing for issuing a visa, etc.). And they arrange group matchmaking dates between Korean husbands and the potential wives. During these dates, a Korean husband chooses his potential wife and makes an agreement of marriage with her. Then, he returns to South Korea and invites his wife with a government-issued marriage certificate. Because of the official invitation permitted from the Korean government, the foreign wife can gain entrance into the country holding a spousal visa. Generally, the contract between the Korean husbands and marriage agencies expires at this point. This process is common in cross-border marriage mediated by marriage agencies not only in South Korea but also in other East Asian countries (Lu 2005; Nakamatsu 2003; Seo 2011).

### **Institutional Supports and Immigrant Psychological Well-being**

As suggested, social scientists examine the association between immigrant social networks and their impacts on quality of life. As well as instrumental and material assistances, they argue that supports from interpersonal networks are helpful for immigrants as emotional and psychological perspectives (Cheong et al. 2007; Croucher 2011; Hagan

1998; Harker 2001; McMichael and Manderson 2004; Silveira and Allebeck 2001; Vega et al. 1991; Vidal de Haymes et al. 2011).

Supports from kinship networks, *inter alia*, as the strongest interpersonal ties, have been highlighted in the literature. For instance, Vega et al. (1991) argue that the most important source of emotional support among Mexican immigrants in San Diego County is family and that supports from family significantly reduce levels of depression. Harker (2001) also suggests that family relationship factors, such as parental supervision and closeness with parents, decrease depression among immigrant adolescences. Silveira and Allebeck (2001) address that depression and anxiety levels of Somali immigrants in London are buffered from family supports. Vidal de Haymes and colleagues (2011) indicate that family cohesion and supports from kinship are protective factors to cope with acculturation stress among Mexican immigrants in Chicago.

Other than kinship networks, the positive effects of interpersonal networks of weaker ties from friends and colleagues, even community members, on immigrant well-being are broadly acknowledged. Studies show that institutional supports from friends and colleagues have an influence on managing stress and mental illness (Croucher 2011), enhancing sense of belonging and social cohesion (Cheong et al. 2007; McMichael and Manderson 2004), and facilitating adjustment and settlement among immigrant population (Hagan 1998).

As an institutional support, religious affiliation also yields subjective wellness among immigrants. Religious institutions provide information for assimilation, and religious identity offers emotional and spiritual supports for immigrants (Harker 2001; Menjivar 2003). Also, building networks from religious congregation could be resources for developing psychological wellness and assimilating into host society among immigrants (Cadge and Howard Ecklund 2007; Lim and Putnam 2010).

Impacts of marriage agencies on immigrants' well-being are still undertheorized. However, a growing body of literature indicates that marriage migrants show lower level of quality outcomes, such as mutual trust and understanding within spousal relationship, stability of marriage, and marital satisfaction (Jo and Ha 2017; C.-S. Kim 2009; Lee and Jun 2014; Ryu 2018).

## **Methods**

### **Data**

I use data from the 2012 Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family (NSMF 2012), which monitors the social adjustment of marriage migrants and multicultural families and is conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of Korea. Through the 2008 Multicultural Family Support Act, the Korean government performs the survey

every three years. The data covers 5.8 percent of multicultural households (15,341/266,547), 5.3 percent of marriage migrants and naturalized Korean citizens (15,001/283,224), 5.5 percent of their spouses (13,859/234,505), and 7.2 percent of their children aged 9 to 24 (4,775/66,536) in South Korea.

For this analysis, I draw a subsample of married female migrants and naturalized female Koreans by cross-border marriages. Total sample size is 8,324. Among the sample, 21.0 percent of respondents ( $n = 1,749$ ) used kinship networks for their institutional support for cross-border marriage, versus 31.4 percent for friends and colleagues ( $n = 2,617$ ), 13.7 percent for religious affiliation ( $n = 1,144$ ), and 33.8 percent for marriage agencies ( $n = 2,814$ ). Regarding national origin, 31.0 percent of respondent ( $n = 2,581$ ) were from China, versus 8.5 percent for Japan ( $n = 704$ ), 53.4 percent for South Asian countries ( $n = 4,442$ ), 3.9 percent for Russia and Central Asian countries ( $n = 322$ ), 2.3 percent for European and North American countries ( $n = 191$ ), and 1.0 percent for other countries ( $n = 84$ ).

## Variables

**Life Satisfaction.** This empirical investigation focuses on the effect of institutional supports for cross-border marriage on the life satisfaction of female migrants in Korean society. To measure life satisfaction, I used a question that asked, "How much are you satisfied with your life in Korea?" The item was coded in a five-category scale ranging from 1 = very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied. I recoded the item so that high values indicate the more satisfaction: 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.

**Institutional Support for Cross-border Marriage.** The primary independent variable of interest is institutional support networks for cross-border marriage migration. I used a variable that asked respondents, "How did you meet your Korean spouse?" I compartmentalized the options into four dummy variables by following their responses: (1) kinship, (2) friendship and colleagueship, (3) religious affiliation, and (4) marriage agency.

**Sociodemographic Variables.** As I mentioned before, some sociodemographic factors could affect life satisfaction of female marriage migrants. Therefore, I controlled female marriage migrants' national origin, age, level of education, residential region, family income, occupation, and subjected socioeconomic status. For national origin of marriage migrants, I included a variable of country of origin using the following categories: (1) China, (2) Japan, (3) South Asian countries, (4) Russia and Central Asian countries, (5) Northern America and European countries, and (6) other countries. A variable for age in years the survey was conducted was also included. Residential region was divided into urban and rural areas based on classification of Korean administrative district. I accounted for education level using a variable that

captures highest degree completed, recoded as (1) lower than high school completed, (2) high school completed, (3) college level, and (4) more than college level. For family income, I included a variable of monthly family income reflecting the exchange rate between Korea and United States and the inflation rate. Also, to account for workforce participation, I used a variable for occupation coded as (1) professional and managerial jobs; (2) white-collar jobs; (3) service jobs; (4) agriculture, forestry, and fishery; (5) blue-collar jobs; and (6) house job or no regular job. A control for subjective socioeconomic status was measured by 11 categories where high values indicate higher socioeconomic status.

**Additional Controls.** Not only characteristics of female migrants themselves, those of their spouse are also important factors that have an influence of female migrants (D.-S. Kim 2006; Kim et al. 2008). First, I used a variable for age gap between female immigrant and Korean husband. Second, to see the educational gap between cross-border marriage couples, I accounted for gap of education level, recoded as (1) husband more educated, (2) same level, and (3) wife more educated. To ascertain the stability of cross-border marriage, a variable for marriage duration in years was also included.

Many social scientists argue that language proficiency would have an influence on the well-being of immigrants (Espenshade and Fu 1997; Mesch 2003; Tienda and Neidert 1984). I included a variable for language proficiency that asked respondents how well they could speak, write, read, and understand Korean. Each item was coded as a five category scale ranging from 1 = do very well to 5 = not do very well. I also recoded the item so that high values indicate the better proficiency in Korean language and combined them into one variable, language proficiency. The range of language proficiency, hence, is from 4 to 20, and the larger number represents better proficiency in Korean language. The alpha coefficient for this variable is .937.

Health condition may also affect levels of life satisfaction of marriage migrants. Ying (1992) argues that self-reported health is directly correlated to immigrants' life satisfaction in the host country. To account for health condition, I used a variable that asked respondents, "How do you feel your overall health condition?" The variable was coded as (1) very good, (2) good, (3) moderate, (4) bad, or (5) very bad. I recoded the items so that high values indicate more positive recognition of their own health condition. Among these variables, missing values were excluded.

## Analytic Strategy

For this investigation, I employed an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and ordered logistic regression. First, ANOVA was conducted for comparing the differences among female migrants on levels of life satisfaction by institutional supports for cross-border marriage and other factors. Tables 1 and 2 present the results of the ANOVA.

**Table 1.** Differences among Female Marriage Migrants on Levels of Life Satisfaction, by Selected Variables, Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family 2012 (n = 8,324).

Variable	N	Percentage	Life Satisfaction (0 to 5)	
			Mean	F Ratio
Institutional supports				27.89***
Kinship	1,749	21.0	3.78	
Friendship/colleagueship	2,617	31.4	3.77	
Religious affiliation	1,144	13.7	3.50	
Agency	2,814	33.8	3.75	
National origin				20.40***
China	2,581	31.0	3.68	
Japan	704	8.5	3.48	
South Asian countries	4,442	53.4	3.78	
Russia and Central Asian countries	322	3.9	3.80	
European and North American countries	191	2.3	4.07	
Others	84	1.0	3.61	
Education				3.59*
Lower than high school	2,669	32.1	3.75	
High school completed	3,661	44.0	3.71	
College degree	1,902	22.9	3.73	
More than college degree	92	1.1	4.00	
Region				.05
Urban	4,919	59.1	3.73	
Rural	3,405	40.9	3.73	
Occupation				16.25***
Professional and managerial jobs	524	6.3	3.74	
White-collar jobs	143	1.7	3.85	
Service jobs	896	10.8	3.65	
Agriculture, forestry, and fishery	389	4.7	3.55	
Blue-collar jobs	2,027	24.4	3.62	
Housework/no job	4,345	52.2	3.81	
Educational gap with husband				30.18***
Husband more educated	2,742	32.9	3.83	
Same levels	3,395	40.8	3.72	
Wife more educated	2,187	26.3	3.63	

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

Also, I conducted an ordered logistic regression analysis to estimate the effect of institutional supports on female marriage migrant's life satisfaction, controlling other variables. Table 3 shows the results of ordered logistic regression models predicting levels of life satisfaction among female marriage migrants by showing the odd ratios. In Table 3, from the baseline effect of institutional supports on levels of life satisfaction, sets of covariates are added in each model.

## Findings

### Bivariate Results

Table 1 shows the difference on levels of life satisfaction among female migrants in South Korea. In terms of institutional supports for cross-border marriage, Table 1 indicates

33.8 percent of the female marriage migrants in the sample were married via marriage agencies versus 31.4 percent for interpersonal networks from friendship and colleagueship, 21.0 percent for kinship networks, and 13.7 percent for religious affiliation. This pattern indicates the most common pathway for cross-border marriage migration into South Korea is using marriage agencies. However, the average level of life satisfaction among marriage migrants married via marriage agency is 3.75, which is lower than the life satisfaction of those married via kinship networks (3.78) or their friends or colleagues (3.77). That is, the common option is not generally associated with higher levels of life satisfaction among marriage migrants.

For national origin, the highest level of life satisfaction, in order of the degree, were European and North American countries (4.07), Russia and Central Asian countries (3.80), South Asian countries (3.78), China (3.68), other countries

**Table 2.** Differences among Female Marriage Migrants on Selected Variables, by Institutional Supports, Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family 2012 (n = 8,324).

Variable	Sample	Institutional Supports				F Ratio
		Kinship	Friend/Colleague	Religion	Agency	
Age (years)	34.0	34.9	36.4	41.8	28.0	889.43***
Age gap with husband (years)	11.4	10.3	9.6	5.5	16.1	988.86***
Marriage duration (years)	7.8	8.3	7.5	13.1	5.4	649.50***
Family income (\$)	2,333.1	2,410.1	2,582.1	2,204.7	2,106.0	62.10***
Subjective socioeconomic status	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.6	5.9	9.59***
Language proficiency	13.4	14.5	14.3	13.7	11.8	227.20***
Self-reported health	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.7	4.2	67.46***

\*\*\*p < .001 (two-tailed tests).

**Table 3.** Odd Ratios from Ordered Logistic Regressions Estimating Levels of Life Satisfaction among Female Marriage Migrants, Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family 2012 (n = 8,324).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Kinship <sup>a</sup>	1.050	1.224***	1.267***	.946
Friendship/colleagueship <sup>a</sup>	1.032	1.210***	1.195**	.895
Religious affiliation <sup>a</sup>	.616***	.879	1.012	.388***
Japan <sup>b</sup>		.915	1.135	1.090
South Asian countries <sup>b</sup>		1.104	1.279***	1.276***
Russia and Central Asian countries <sup>b</sup>		1.005	1.204	1.234
European and North American countries <sup>lb</sup>		.972	.925	.905
Other countries <sup>b</sup>		.692	.887	.882
Age		.985***	1.010***	1.010**
High school completed <sup>c</sup>		.948	1.030	1.025
College degree <sup>c</sup>		.956	1.076	1.075
More than college degree <sup>c</sup>		.956	1.072	1.042
Family income		1.000***	1.000***	1.000***
Professional and managerial jobs <sup>d</sup>		.884	.879	.885
White-collar jobs <sup>d</sup>		.933	.813	.837
Service jobs <sup>d</sup>		.752***	.746***	.760***
Agriculture, forestry, and fishery <sup>d</sup>		.681***	.672***	.701***
Blue-collar jobs <sup>d</sup>		.712***	.699***	.716***
Subjective socioeconomic status		1.252***	1.214***	1.214***
Age gap with husband			1.000	.999
Husband more educated <sup>e</sup>			1.228***	1.212***
Wife more educated <sup>e</sup>			.884*	.887
Marriage duration			.963***	.968***
Language proficiency			1.036***	1.033***
Health status			1.728***	1.724***
Institutional support × marriage duration				.951***
Institutional support × language proficiency				1.048**
Log likelihood	-10,518.64	-10,187.55	-9,824.68	-9,812.07

<sup>a</sup>Kinship excluded.

<sup>b</sup>China excluded.

<sup>c</sup>Less than high school excluded.

<sup>d</sup>Housework/no job excluded.

<sup>e</sup>Same educational level excluded.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

(3.61), and Japan (3.48). This shows that female migrants' lifestyle and adaptation in Korean society could differ depending on their national origin (D.-S. Kim 2006).

In terms of education level, the findings generally present that female migrants with higher levels of education would show the higher levels of life satisfaction. For occupation, as

well as house jobs or no regular jobs, female migrants who have professional and managerial and white-collar jobs report higher levels of life satisfaction than those of having service; agriculture, forestry, and fishery; and blue-collar jobs. For educational gap between couples, the more educated the husband and the less educated the wife, the more levels of life satisfaction.

Along with Table 1, Table 2, which shows the differences among female marriage migrants by institutional supports for cross-border marriage, demonstrates the importance of analyzing institutional supports as a reference for understanding lives of female immigrants in Korean society. Regarding age, age gap with husband, and marriage duration, it is found that female marriage migrants who married via marriage agencies are the youngest (28.0 years) but report the biggest age gap with husband (16.1 years). They generally report shorter marriage duration (5.4 years) than other groups. On the other hand, those who married via religious affiliation are the oldest group (41.8 years), showing the smallest age gap with husband (5.5 years). And they present the longest marriage duration among all (13.1 years). Female migrants with kinship networks and non-kin interpersonal networks (friends and colleagues) report modest levels of age, age gap, and marriage duration.

However, the result from differences on family income and language proficiency seems to be different with that of age, age gap and marriage duration. Compared to religious affiliation and marriage agency groups, female migrants married via kinship and non-kin interpersonal networks present higher levels of family income and language proficiency. For monthly family income, female migrants with kinship networks (\$2,410) and non-kin interpersonal networks (\$2,582) report higher income levels than those with religious affiliation (\$2,205) and marriage agency (\$2,106).

In particular, female marriage migrants with marriage agency show 11.8 level of language proficiency versus 13.7 for religious affiliation, 14.3 for friends or colleagues, and 14.5 for family member or relatives. These disparities may show shortcomings of commercially arranged cross-border marriage migration by marriage agencies (Y.-S. Lim 2013; Seo 2011). Female marriage migrants who married through marriage agencies don't have enough information on Korean language and culture. However, since marriage agencies focus on profitability, they are interested in as many cross-border marriages as possible in a short period, not in the quality of marriages and/or wellness of the couples. Thus, for marriage migrants, supports from agencies are limited and insufficient. It sometimes results in female migrants' difficulties in relationships and assimilation processes (Jung 2012; Ko and Jeong 2012).

### **Multivariate Results**

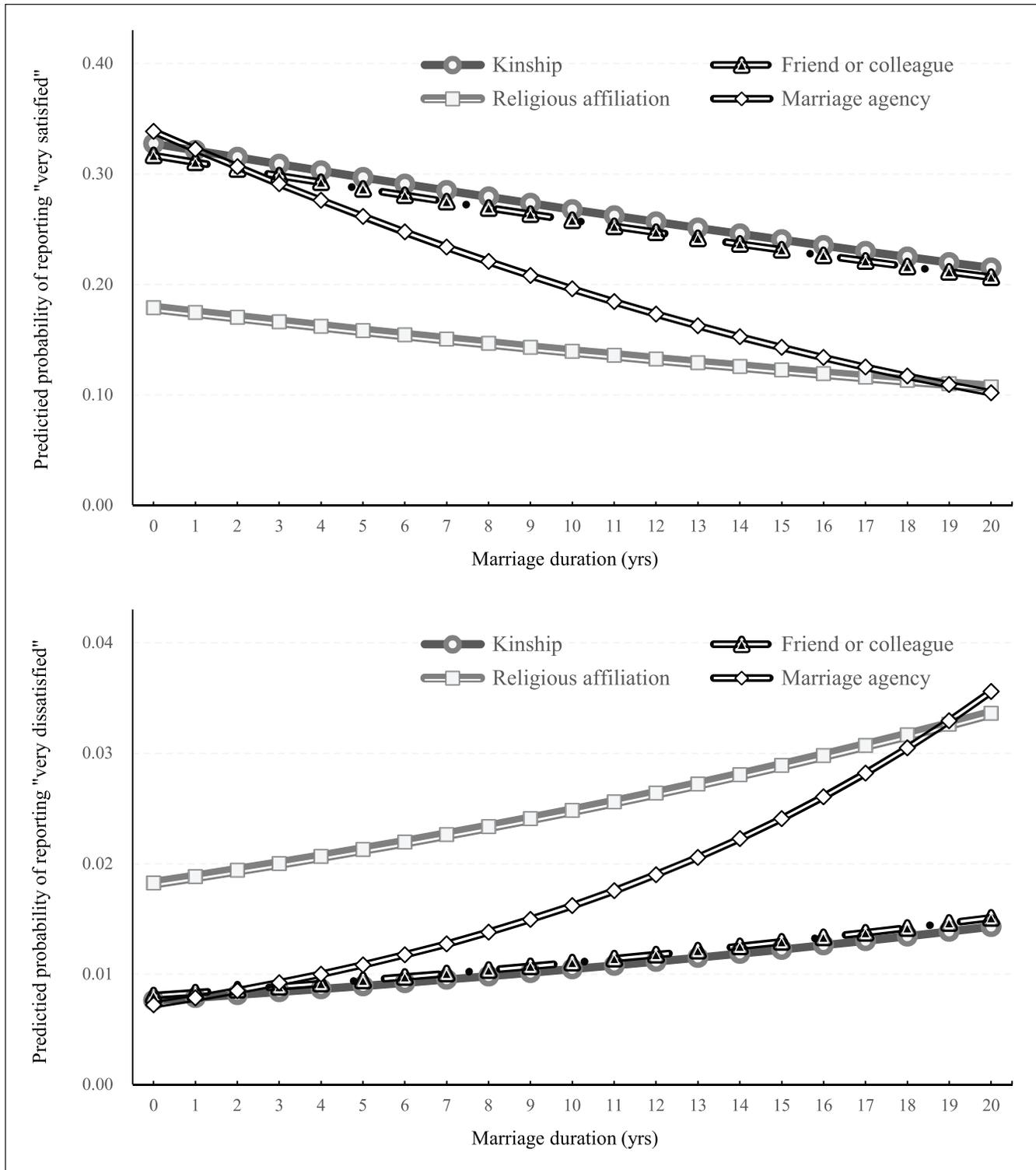
Table 3 demonstrates the odd ratios from ordered logistic regression models predicting levels of life satisfaction among

female marriage migrants. Model 1 deals with the baseline effect of institutional supports for cross-border marriage on life satisfaction. It reveals, all else equal, female marriage migrants using religious affiliation for their marriage are about 61.6 percent less likely to report a high level of life satisfaction compared to those with marriage agency.

Adding national origin and sociodemographic variables, Model 2 shows that kinship and friendship/colleagueship as marriage options are statistically significant, indicating female marriage migrants using kinship and friendship/colleagueship are more likely than those who using a marriage agency to be associated with a high level of life satisfaction. National origins have no significant impact on female marriage migrants' life satisfaction. Among sociodemographic variables, age and three occupational dummies (service jobs; agricultural, forestry, and fishery jobs; and blue-collar jobs as compared to house job or no regular jobs) are negatively associated with higher levels of life satisfaction among marriage migrants. Rather, family income and subjective socioeconomic status have a positive effect on higher levels of life satisfaction.

Model 3 includes additional control variables. Regarding characteristics of marital relationship, when husband's education attainment is higher than that of wife's, it is expected to show higher levels of life satisfaction, *ceteris paribus*. Likewise, self-reported health is positively associated with higher levels of life satisfaction. In Model 3, the variable for marriage duration is negatively significant, indicating that every additional year of marriage duration is associated with reporting lower levels of life satisfaction among marriage migrants. It reflects that the longer the cross-border marriage lasts, the lower the life satisfaction for female marriage migrants.

However, the effects of marriage duration differ from institutional support for cross-border marriage. Model 4 shows there is an interaction effect between institutional supports and marriage duration. Based on the interaction effect, the first panel of Figure 1 shows the probability of reporting very satisfied by institutional supports of cross-border marriage. With one year of marriage duration, the predicted probability of reporting very satisfied for marriage migrants using kinship is 32.8 percent versus 31.7 percent for those with friend/colleague, 33.9 percent for marriage agency, and 17.9 percent for religious affiliation. It suggests that as the marriage duration lasts, the probability of reporting very satisfied decreases across all institutional supports. However, compared to other options, the probability of reporting very satisfied for marriage agency is drastically declined. With 4 years of marriage, 27.6 percent of marriage migrants using agency would report that they are very satisfied with their life, versus 30.3 percent for those with kinship, 29.3 percent for friendship/colleagueship, and 16.2 percent for religious affiliation. After 10 years of marriage, only 20.0 percent of marriage migrants using an agency would report that they are very satisfied with their life, versus 26.8 percent for those with kinship, 25.8 percent for friendship/colleagueship, and 13.9 percent for religious affiliation; after 20 years of marriage,



**Figure 1.** Predicted probabilities of reporting very satisfied and very dissatisfied, by institutional supports and marriage duration.

only 10.2 percent of marriage migrants using an agency would report that they are very satisfied with their life, versus 21.5 percent for those with kinship, 20.7 percent for friendship/colleagueship, and 10.7 percent for religious affiliation.

The second panel of Figure 2 presents the probability of reporting very dissatisfied by institutional supports. Consistent with the first panel, it suggests the same interactional effect between marriage duration and institutional support on life

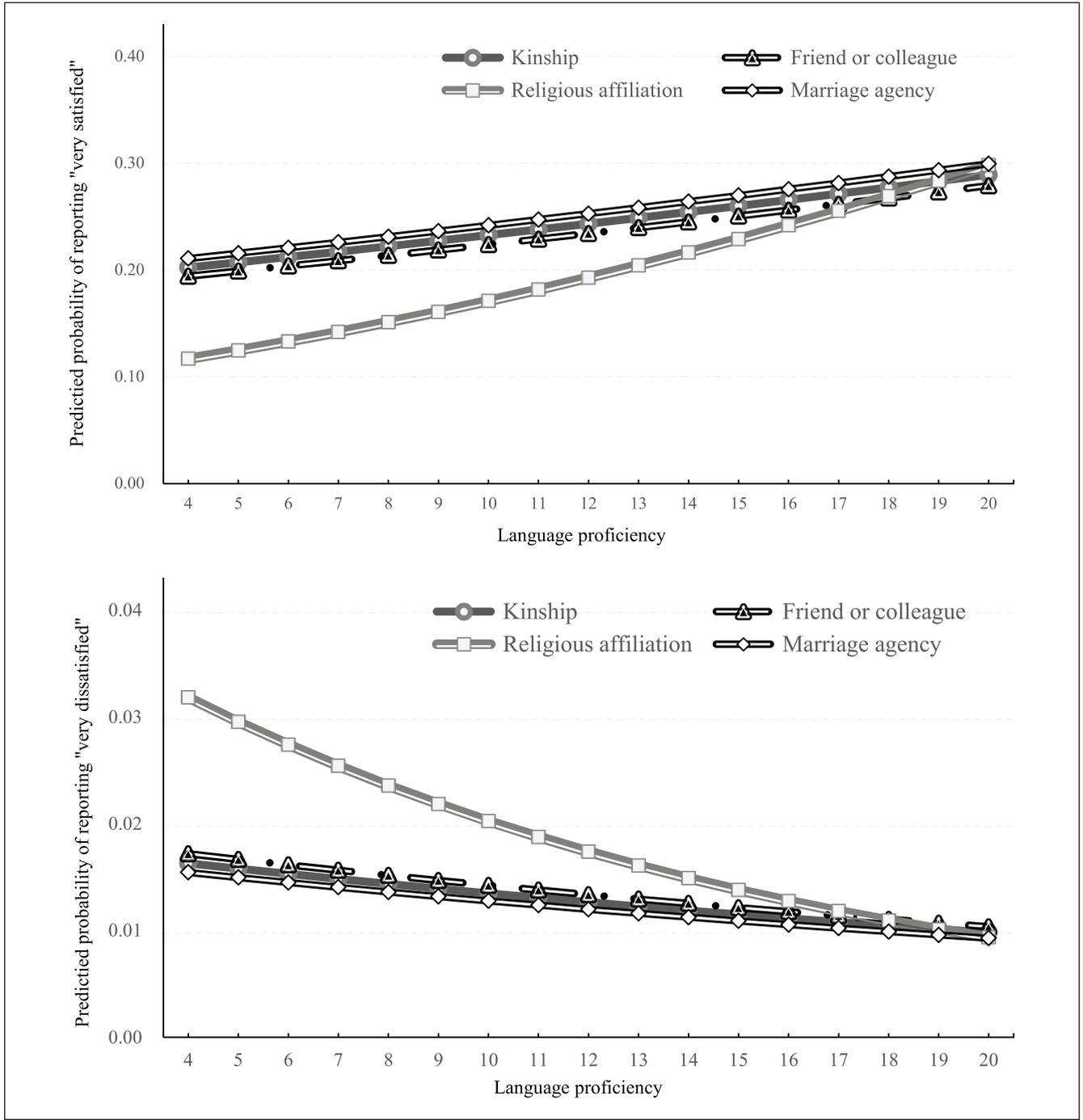


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of reporting very satisfied and very dissatisfied, by institutional supports and language proficiency.

satisfaction. As the marriage duration lasts, the predicted probability of reporting very dissatisfied increases across all marriage options. But in the case of female marriage migrants using a marriage agency, it is rapidly increased.

Those results reveal that levels of life satisfaction among marriage migrants by institutional supports are influenced by marriage duration; compared to kinship, friendship/colleagueship, and marriage agency, female migrants using religious

affiliation show lower levels of life satisfaction. At the earlier years of marriage, levels of life satisfaction between kinship, friendship/colleagueship, and marriage agency are statistically indistinguishable, while marriage agency is distinctive, and that only becomes apparent after the marriage has lasted four years.

Model 3 also suggests that higher levels of life satisfaction are also influenced by better language proficiency of

marriage migrants. In Model 4, the interaction between the institutional support and language proficiency is significant, showing that the impact of language proficiency is not identical across institutional supports for cross-border marriage migration. This interaction effect is graphically represented in Figure 2. The first panel of Figure 2 predicts probability of reporting very satisfied by institutional supports and language proficiency. While marriage migrants using religious affiliation (11.7 percent) start out with the lowest level of reporting very satisfied, the probabilities rise sharply as levels of language proficiency increase. At the highest level of language proficiency, the probability of reporting very satisfied for religious affiliation (29.8 percent) is almost similar to other marriage options and even surpasses those with kinship (28.9 percent) and friendship/colleagueship (27.9 percent).

The second panel of Figure 2 also demonstrates that the effect of language proficiency on life satisfaction is salient for marriage migrants using religious affiliation. At the lowest level of language proficiency, the predicted probability of reporting very dissatisfied for marriage migrants using kinship is 1.6 percent versus 1.7 percent for those with friend/colleague, 1.5 percent for marriage agency, and 3.2 percent for religious affiliation; however, at the highest level of language proficiency, only 0.9 percent of marriage migrants using religious affiliation would report that they are dissatisfied with their life, versus 1.0 percent for kinship and friend/colleague and 0.9 percent for marriage agency.

These imply that the better language proficiency, the more satisfaction. Yet the impacts of language proficiency on levels of life satisfaction among female marriage migrants are significantly different per each option of institutional support. For marriage migrants using religious affiliation, the effect of language proficiency stands out the most.

## Conclusion

Emotional and psychological well-being of immigrants has been studied by social scientists who are interested in immigrants' assimilation and incorporation into the host society (Amit 2010; Chow 2007; DeWind and Kasinitz 1997; McMichael and Manderson 2004; Ullman and Tatar 2001; Verkuyten 2008). Scholarship suggests that institutional supports from social networks shape life satisfaction among immigrants (Cheong et al. 2007; Croucher 2011; Hagan 1998; Harker 2001; McMichael and Manderson 2004; Silveira and Allebeck 2001; Vega et al. 1991; Vidal de Haymes et al. 2011). However, immigration experiences outside the Western societies have not been frequently discussed. Despite distinctive characteristics, cross-border marriage migration and experiences of marriage migrants are still unexplored in immigration research.

Using data from the 2012 Korean National Survey for Multicultural Family, I ascertained how institutional supports for cross-border marriage migration shape levels of life

satisfaction among female migrants in Korean society. My findings indicated that the most common institutional support for cross-border marriage migration into South Korea is using marriage agencies. However, the common path was not associated with higher levels of life satisfaction; the average level of life satisfaction among marriage migrants married via marriage agency was lower than that of marriage migrants with kinship and friends/colleagues. And marriage migrants with religious affiliation showed the lowest level of life satisfaction. These results linked with the literature that suggests that marriage migrants whose marriage was arranged by commercial marriage agents and the Unification Church demonstrate lower levels of psychological outcomes (Jo and Hoang 2017; C.-S. Kim 2009; J.-H. Lee 2012; Lee and Jun 2014; Ryu 2018).

Moreover, I found patriarchal aspects of cross-border marriage migration. Female marriage migrants who are housewives or lack regular employment reported higher levels of life satisfaction than those who have service, agriculture/forestry/fishery, or blue-collar jobs, which are typical types of paying jobs of them. Also, when husband's education attainment was higher than that of wife's, they show higher levels of life satisfaction. That is, marriage migrants who stay at home with lower level of education would show higher level of life satisfaction. Along with its cultural motivation, those results imply that cross-border marriage migration facilitates domestic gender inequalities and reinforces male hierarchy within a patriarchal family (Hwang 2009; Shim 2008).

However, the effects of institutional supports on levels of life satisfaction differ by marriage duration. At the earlier years of marriage, levels of life satisfaction of marriage migrants using kinship, friendship/colleagueship, and marriage agencies were statistically indistinguishable and higher than those with religious affiliation. However, after four years of marriage, life satisfaction of marriage migrants married via marriage agency had dramatically decreased. Additionally, there was an interaction effect of language proficiency and institutional supports on life satisfaction, showing that better language proficiency is associated with more satisfaction and the effect of language proficiency is maximized for marriage migrants married via religious affiliation.

Those findings call into question the meaning of cross-border marriage migration arranged by religious affiliation and commercial marriage agencies. As agencies, religious affiliation and marriage agencies monopolize information on both partners of marriage, procedures of cross-border marriages, and immigration policies of sending and receiving countries. Since both immigrant brides and Korean husbands lack such information, various problems may occur, such as marriage instability, domestic violence, and runaways (Ko and Jeong 2012; H. K. Lee 2005; Shim 2008).

Investigating cross-border marriage migration in South Korea, I showed that institutional supports matter for improving psychological well-being among marriage migrants. This

investigation could contribute to the literature on immigration and social networks by suggesting a new framework for understanding immigration experiences outside the Western society and discussing the impact of social networks on subjective wellness for immigrants.

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