

## **EXPLORING THE ACCULTURATION PROFILES AND ADAPTION OF CHILDREN OF MIGRANT WIVES IN SOUTH KOREA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Korea has recently experienced a large influx of marriage migrants resulting from an increase in multiethnic marriages over the past couple of decades. Specifically, official statistical reports indicate that the proportion of marriages between a Korean national and a foreigner have steadily increased since the 1990s and comprised more than 10% of all annual marriages occurring during the mid to late 2000s. The majority of these multiethnic marriages, defined as the marital union between a Korean ethnic person and a foreign ethnic spouse, are composed of Korean men and migrant wives primarily from China, Japan, and other Southeast Asian countries. The current study is motivated by the concern that Korean public institutions may not be structurally equipped to deal with the large influx of multiethnic children, potentially resulting in strained social relations due to increased competition for limited resources and programs among the formerly ethnically homogenous members of society.

Using latent class analysis approach, this paper examined the acculturation profiles of multiethnic children of migrant wives in South Korea and explored whether youth's psychological and educational adaptation varied across these profiles. The study utilized a nationally representative face-to-face survey of 2,811 native born multiethnic youth (ages 9-15) and identified four styles of acculturation: assimilated, linguistically assimilated but psychologically diffused, integrated, and marginalized. Accounting for socio-demographic background and factors associated with acculturative stress, logistic regressions revealed that, compared to assimilated youth, marginalized youth exhibited significantly higher odds of self-reported depressive symptoms, difficulty in school work, and low educational aspirations; linguistically assimilated but psychologically diffused youth were more likely to express difficulty in school work; while integrated youth did not manifest higher odds of adaptive problems.

In conclusion, this study indicated that acculturation patterns may be of vital importance in understanding the psychological and educational adaptation of multiethnic youth from migrant wives in Korea. The study suggests that it is not so much the availability of more cultural resources, but the lack of incongruence between one's linguistic capability and cultural orientation that promotes better adaptation in these youth. In the Korean context, being fluent in Korean appears to be a necessary condition for healthy youth adjustment, and strong orientation toward the maternal heritage culture should be complemented with a supportive family environment encouraging the use of maternal native language so as to achieve fluency. The practical implications of this study do not include discouragement of strong orientations toward

the maternal heritage culture since Korea is rapidly transitioning into a multicultural society and dual ethnic identity formation has been found to facilitate both the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of youth within these plural contexts. However, it does indicate that policies aimed at promoting better adjustment of multiethnic youth should consider the fact that among youth who are linguistically assimilated there is a sizeable portion of youth who are somewhat confused about their cultural identity and therefore may be at increased risk of adaptive problems if these internal conflicts are not resolved. Lastly, special attention and resources should be targeted towards the marginalized group of youth who without proper intervention seems to be on the path for downward assimilation accompanied by negative long term outcomes.