

## **Does Upward or Downward Mobility Matter? An Explanation of Fertility among Foreign Wives in Korea**

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the direction of mobility and socioeconomic differentials in fertility among foreign wives in Korea. Special attention is focused on the effects of foreign wives' perception for upward mobility on fertility. Changes in relative economic status through marriage are referred to as the direction of mobility, as highly influential factors to explain the fertility behavior of foreign wives. An analytical model of the causal structure was set up with direction of mobility, and socioeconomic level as explanation variables for this study. *The 2009 Korean National Multi-culture Family Survey* was used. The study sample is composed of foreign wives (Korean-Chinese, Han-Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipina and Cambodian) under the age of 49 married to Korean men. Preliminary results of the analysis are found to be consistent with the hypothesis of the direction of mobility. The perception for direction of mobility exerts an independent effect on fertility, apart from socioeconomic and demographic variables. The results show that foreign wives who perceive their marriage as upward mobility tend to have a greater number of children.

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The rapid increase in cross-border marriage has significant consequences and implications for society. However, previous studies on foreign wives who have immigrated to Korea have focused mostly on the marriage process and adaptations of marriage immigrants, while only scant attention has been given to the level of fertility among foreign wives. The nature and theoretical basis of the relationship between status of foreign wives and fertility has not yet been sufficiently explored. Most studies of fertility have focused on the characteristics of individuals and couples. However, because foreign wives have characteristics from two regions (country of origin and Korea), behavior such as childbirth may be affected by the unique characteristics of two regions.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the perception of direction of mobility on fertility among foreign wives in Korea. Childbirth from marriage immigration also has a very important meaning as well as the immigration process and adaptation. Although individual and couple characteristics are important aspects impacting fertility, we consider changes in the relative economic status through marriage referred to as direction of mobility in this paper, as highly influential factors to explain the fertility behavior of foreign wives. Because the effects of objective indices such as 'household income' depends on the region, an individual's subjective economic level may have a greater impact on childbirth decision. Relative economic status between the two countries is the subject of awareness; therefore, it has a great strengths for understanding of an individual's childbirth decisions.

According to the relative income hypothesis proposed by Easterlin (1973), the fertility of individuals depends on their relative income rather than their absolute economic level. In particular, level of fertility varies depending on an individual's position in their reference group; therefore, we expect that when individuals have lower incomes relative to their reference group, their fertility would be significantly lower

**Table 1. Number of Children by Socioeconomic Status and Direction of Mobility**

	Number of Children		
	Mean	N	F
Country of Origin			
China (Korean)	1.29	11,196	
China (Han)	1.37	6,138	
Vietnam	1.86	12,842	744.8***
Philippines	1.94	3,287	
Cambodia	1.96	1,396	
Total	1.60	34,859	
Direction of Mobility			
Downward Mobility	1.42	10,334	
Horizontal Mobility	1.64	16,143	275.4***
Upward Mobility	1.75	7,786	
Total	1.60	34,163	

Note: \*: p < 0.1; \*\*: p < 0.05; \*\*\*: p < 0.01.

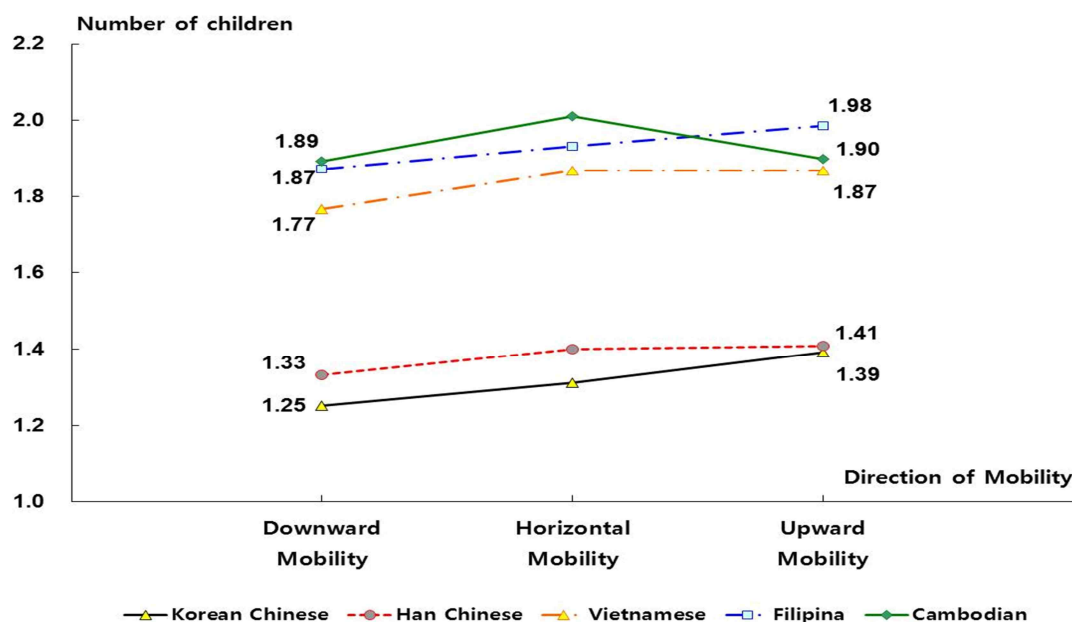
(Leibenstein, 1975). Foreign wives who perceive themselves as having upward mobility (in the hierarchy through marriage) tend to have a greater number of children. Perception for upward mobility is likely to reduce the effect of the minority status hypothesis that might otherwise lead to lower fertility.

In this study, Direction of mobility is measured by differences in personal economic status between Korea and the country of origin. For example, if the foreign wives' perception of her economic level in Korea is higher than that of her country of origin, it means "Upward mobility", while the opposite is "Downward mobility." It is assumed that Foreign wives who experienced upward mobility through marriage are more likely to have a higher level of fertility. The number of children is calculated by the sum of the current number of children, current pregnancy, and the planned number of children. This means that potential completed fertility has a similar meaning as Total Fertility Rate.

Micro-data from *the 2009 Korean National Multi-culture Family Survey* (MOHW et al., 2010) is analyzed. The study sample is composed of 34,859 foreign (Korean-Chinese, Han-Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipina and Cambodian) wives under the age of 49 married to a Korean men.

To verify the effect of direction of mobility on fertility, an analysis of variance was performed. Table 1 presents the results of the ANOVA on the effects of country of the origin and the direction of mobility on the number of children. Level of fertility varies

**Figure 1. The Number of Children by Direction of Mobility and Country of Origin**



Source: The Korean National Multi-culture Family Survey (2009).

depending on country of origin of the foreign wife. Filipinas have the highest number of children, while Korean-Chinese have the lowest.

The number of children is highly associated with the direction of mobility. Foreign wives who perceive their marriage as upward mobility tend to have more children. The average number of children of foreign wives who recognize their marriage as upward mobility is 1.75, 1.64 for Horizontal Mobility and 1.42 for downward mobility.

In Figure 1, the number of children varies depending on the country of origin and direction of mobility. In general, foreign wives who recognize their marriage as upward mobility through marriage are likely to be associated with having more children.

Multivariate regression analyses were conducted to determine the existence of an independent effect of the country of origin and direction of mobility with major socioeconomic and demographic variables being controlled. Model 2 in Table 2 shows that those who perceive their marriage as upward mobility tend to have more children than their counterparts. Other things being equal, Han Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipina, and Cambodian wives tend to have more children. The husband’s level of education, home ownership status, and duration of marriage have positive impacts on fertility while wives’ job experience, husband’s marital experience, and size of the residing city have negative impacts on fertility.

**Table 2. Regression Analysis of Factors Related to Number of Children**

	Perception for Upward Mobility [Model 1]		Number of Children [Model 2]	
	<b>b</b>	beta	b	beta
Han Chinese wife	-0.05	-0.01	0.06***	0.03
Vietnamese wife	0.92***	0.20	0.40***	0.19
Filipina wife	1.66***	0.20	0.40***	0.11
Cambodian wife	0.91***	0.07	0.49***	0.09
Wife's Education	-0.13***	-0.17	0.01***	0.03
Husband's Education	0.03***	0.03	0.03***	0.09
100-199 (ten thousands won)	0.41***	0.09	0.04***	0.02
200+ (ten thousands won)	0.86***	0.18	-0.01	-0.00
Home Ownership	0.69***	0.15	0.07***	0.03
Experience of Working	-0.33***	-0.07	-0.31***	-0.16
Husband's Marital Experience	-0.07**	-0.01	-0.07***	-0.30
Duration of Marriage	-0.01***	-0.08	0.00***	0.07
Large City	-0.12***	-0.03	-0.22***	-0.11
Medium/Small City	-0.06**	-0.01	-0.15***	-0.08
Perception for Upward Mobility			0.01***	0.02
(Constant)	-0.09***		1.19***	
Number of cases	26,387		26,387	
$R^2$	0.18		0.23	
$F$ ratio	413.4***		515.3***	

Note: \*:  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ .

In short, the preliminary results of the analysis are found to be consistent with the hypothesis of the direction of mobility. The recognition for direction of mobility exerts an independent effect on fertility, apart from socioeconomic and demographic variables. We found that fertility may be affected by characteristics between the two countries most represented by relative economic level.

The level of impact of direction of mobility on fertility varies depending on country of origin and objective economic level. In addition, subjective and relative factors can affect the number of children. Because the relative economic level of foreign wives can be changed by the characteristics of the two regions—between the country of origin and Korea—, when examining characteristics associated with women's birth, various aspects such as direction of mobility reflecting the character of the region should also be considered.