

The Effects of Depression and Family System Perception on the Life Satisfaction of Immigrant Women: The Mediating Effects of Mental Violence

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Abstract

Background/ Objectives: This study was conducted to determine the structural relationships between depression, family system perception, mental violence, and life satisfaction among 249 immigrant women living in C Province of Korea. **Methods/ Statistical Analysis:** Frequency, reliability, and correlation analysis, structural equation modeling, and bootstrapping were applied for the data analysis. **Findings:** First, there was a positive correlation between family system perception and life satisfaction, but life satisfaction had negative correlations with both depression and mental violence. There was a negative correlation between depression and family system perception, but a positive correlation between depression and mental violence. Second, the depression of immigrant women had a positive impact on mental violence. Family system perception had a negative impact on mental violence but a positive impact on life satisfaction. Moreover, mental violence had a significant negative impact on life satisfaction. In contrast, family system perception had a significant positive impact on well-being. Third, mental violence was a mediating variable in the relationships between depression and life satisfaction and between family system perception and life satisfaction. **Application/ Improvement:** This study will be used to increase the life satisfaction of immigrant women.

Keywords: Depression, Family System Perception, Immigrant Woman, Life Satisfaction, Mental Violence

1. Introduction

With the rapid increase in international marriage since 1990, Korea has become a multicultural society. “Married immigrant women” and “multicultural family” are no longer unfamiliar terms, and the number of marriage immigrants is rapidly growing, expected to reach¹.

Life satisfaction among immigrant women is more complex than happiness or psychological satisfaction². It is defined as a subjective evaluation of a person’s satisfaction with life based on personal expectations³ and individual standards⁴. In particular, one study found that the desire to live in a host country increased as immigrant’s life satisfaction increased⁵, and another found life satisfaction among married immigrant women was a prerequisite

for their successful settlement and adjustment to Korean society⁶. Because Korean society has already become multicultural, life satisfaction among married immigrant women concerns not only the women themselves but also the society; the issue relates directly to these women’s overall integration into society and as such, warrants academic interest and research.

According to the World Health Organization⁷, immigrant women have a higher risk of mental and psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression than do immigrant men and non-immigrants; they are generally considered to be underprivileged. Depression is a mental and psychological factor that is deeply connected with life satisfaction. It is a result of negative self-perceptions accompanied by anxiety, sense of failure, gloom, lethargy,

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and feelings of worthlessness⁸. Married immigrant women experience depression in the course of adjusting to their new societies and families, in part because of their lack of awareness of violence and family relationships.

A family is a small social system of mutual relationships with strong affection and loyalty between family members. A family system is defined as the organic relationships in which individuals, families, and societies affect each other in an interdependent and complementary way⁹, that is, how a family understands itself and its relationships as a system¹⁰. The family system consists of family cohesion and family adaptability. Family cohesion refers to intimate mental bonds, and it is desirable to balance a sense of belonging and the degree of affection with personal autonomy¹¹. Family adaptability refers to the degree that a family can set up, maintain and change rules and to the ability of the family members to change these roles, rules, and power structure in order to face stress together¹².

With the increase in the number of married immigrant women, the divorce rate in Korea has increased recently, and at the center of this increase is the problem of family violence¹³. Family violence refers here to patriarchal terrorism that uses diverse methods of abuse to take systematic control over women¹⁴, and married immigrant women are frequently exposed to family violence through the spousal conflicts and heightened emotions that can come with difficulties in communication and the women's unstable residence status. One report, in examining the incidence of family violence by type, found mental violence in 46.2% of the participants, compared with the 30.7% rate of physical violence¹⁵. Mental violence is defined as the act of hurting other people with words and actions rather than physically, resulting in negative emotional impact for the victim¹⁶; acts of mental violence mainly consist of derogatory language, insults, aggressive words, threats, blackmail, ignoring, accusing, and yelling. One report determined that the effects of mental and psychological violence were greater than those from physical damage¹⁷ and that the impact is more serious because it does not leave visible wounds.

As was noted earlier, research on life satisfaction among married immigrant women should be approached in terms of Korea's social integration; the country has become multicultural, but few studies have examined the structural relationships between married immigrant women's life satisfaction, depression, mental violence, and family system perceptions, which are all closely connected with life satisfaction.

Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate these relationships among immigrant women. To achieve the research goal, the research questions were the following: First, what are the correlations between life satisfaction and depression, mental violence, and family system perception? Second, what are the structural relationships between life satisfaction and depression, mental violence, and family system perception? Third, does mental violence mediate the relationships between life satisfaction and depression and between life satisfaction and family system perception?

2. Method

2.1 Research Model

The research model shown in Figure 1 was developed based on previous research results that life satisfaction decreases with the occurrence of family violence¹⁵; that is, there is a close connection between depression and the quality of life¹⁸, and family violence against immigrant women has significant relationships with depression and stress¹⁹ as well as high correlations with depression^{20,21}.

2.2 Participants and Data Collection

For the survey areas of this study, three cities in northwestern C Province were selected by purposive sampling based on areas that have high populations of immigrant women residents. As a result, 115 women (46.2%) from City S, 84 women (33.7%) from City D, and 50 women (20.1%) from County T were surveyed. The data were collected using a questionnaire, and a total of 249 immigrant women were surveyed.

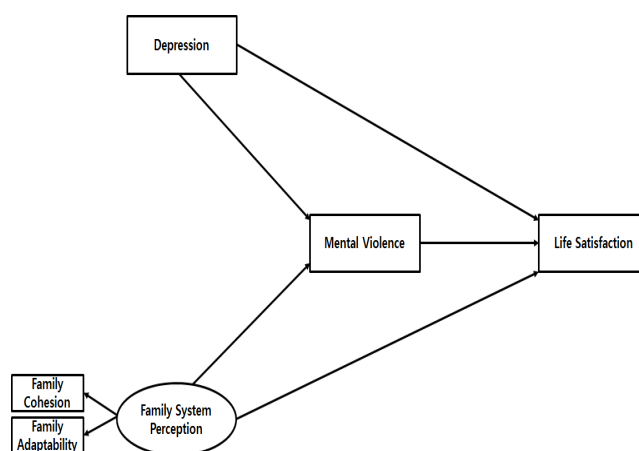


Figure 1. The research model.

In terms of general characteristics, most of the study participants, 42.3%, were natives of Vietnam, followed by the Philippines, China (Han Chinese and other races), other, and, finally, ethnic Koreans living in China. Most participants were aged 25 or younger (39.0%); for the remainder, 37.3% were aged 26-35, and 23.7% were aged 36 or older; thus most participants were between 20 and 35 years old. For education, 51.4% were high school graduates, and 18.9% were graduates of community college or higher, and for residence, 36.8% lived in a city, 34.7% in a township, and 28.5% in a village; there were many rural community residents.

A number of ways to gather the data from the women were used because they were not all proficient in Korean. The researchers visited multicultural family support centers in three different cities, explained the purpose of the study to each center's workers, and asked them to help the immigrant women who participated in the center programs complete the questionnaires, which were provided in 5 different languages. The researchers also visited 120 different families' homes to explain about the research and collect additional data.

2.3 Survey Tools

2.3.1 Depression

On the Symptom Checklist-90, depression is one of the subscales, and this study used the version that was translated by ²². It consists of 10 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and a higher score indicates a higher degree of depression. The Cronbach's α reliability value for the present study was 0.805.

2.3.2 Family System Perception

This study used a family system perception scale that was developed by ²³ and was translated by ²⁴. It consists of a total 20 items, also rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale is

divided into two subscales, cohesiveness and adaptability, and a higher score indicates high family system perception. The Cronbach's α values were 0.875 for family system perception, 0.786 for cohesiveness, 0.797 for adaptability.

2.3.3 Mental Violence

To measure the mental violence, the immigrant women experienced, this study used the 4 domestic violence questions from the Conflict Tactics Scale 2, which was developed²⁵ and utilized by ²⁶. This study measured the mental violence frequency experienced by the women in the past year on a 5-point scale; the Cronbach's α was 0.334. However, given the fact that there were only 4 questions, this value could be considered reliable²⁷.

2.3.4 Life Satisfaction

This study used the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by ²⁸, which was translated by ²⁹ and was further modified by³⁰; the present study used Kim's version. The scale consists of 5 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. The reliability for this scale was $\alpha=0.840$.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 for Windows and Amos 21.0. For the statistical analysis, the study used descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, and mean comparison analysis, and structural equation modeling.

3. Results

3.1 Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

The Pearson's correlation analysis results for the correlations between the variables are shown in Table 1. Life

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

	1.Depression	2.Cohessiveness	3.Adaptability	4.Mental violence	5.Life satisfaction	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
1.	1					2.5269	0.65863	0.014	0.558
2	-0.307**	1				3.5044	0.64846	-0.532	0.121
3	-0.183**	0.732**	1			3.1476	0.68276	-0.423	0.342
4	0.309**	-0.406**	-0.283**	1		1.6435	0.49417	0.663	0.673
5	-0.450**	0.473**	0.240**	-0.450**	1	3.6243	0.51815	0.002	-0.197

** $p<0.01$

satisfaction and family system perception had statistically significant positive correlations, whereas life satisfaction showed negative correlations with depression and mental violence. In addition, depression and family system perception had negative correlations, whereas depression and mental violence had positive correlations. The mean values for depression and mental violence did not exceed the median, but family system perception and life satisfaction did. Between the subscales, the perception of family relationships showed higher cohesion than adaptability. For skewness, all absolute values were below 3, and for kurtosis, all were below 7, thereby indicating that the requirements for a normal distribution were met³¹.

3.2 Validating the Modified Model

To verify the research model, the following were conducted: confirmative factor analysis (the measurement model), convergent validity evaluation, and research model analysis. The results of goodness of fit indices are shown in Table 2. The criterion for goodness of fit of research models is the χ^2 value, and in this study, this had no significant statistical differences. Both the Tucker Lewis index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) were above 0.9, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was smaller than 0.1³². The convergent validity of the measurement model was verified by confirming that the standardized factor loading was higher than 0.5, the z value was significant, and the average variance extracted and the concept reliability were 0.5 and 0.7, respectively³³; thus, the research model was validated. Specifically, $\chi^2=8.88(df=3)$, CMIN/df=2.96, NFI=0.978,

Table 2. Goodness of fit indices model

χ^2	df	CMIN/df	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
8.88*	3	2.96	0.978	0.949	0.985	0.089

*p<0.05

Table 3. Path of the modified model

Path between variables			B	β	S.E	t
Depression	→	Mental violence	0.151	0.202	0.045	3.392***
Family system perception	→	Mental violence	-0.34	-0.345	0.062	-5.456***
Mental violence	→	Life satisfaction	-0.257	-0.246	0.059	-4.357***
Depression	→	Life satisfaction	-0.225	-0.286	0.043	-5.288***
Family system perception	→	Life satisfaction	0.295	0.286	0.061	4.834***

***p<0.001

TLI=0.949, CFI=0.985, and RMSEA=0.089. Therefore, this model was used as the final one.

The results of verifying each path coefficient are shown in Figure 2 and Table 3. Based on the results of verifying each path, the immigrant women's depression had a positive effect on mental violence ($\beta=0.202$, $p<0.001$) and a negative effect on life satisfaction ($\beta=-0.286$, $p<0.001$). Family system perception had a significantly negative effect on mental violence ($\beta=-0.345$, $p<0.001$) but a significant positive effect on life satisfaction ($\beta=0.286$, $p<0.001$); mental violence showed a statistically significant negative effect on life satisfaction ($\beta=-0.246$, $p<0.001$).

3.3 Verifying the Mediating Effects

The results of the bootstrapping analysis to verify the mediating effects of mental violence in the relationships between life satisfaction, depression, and family system perception among the immigrant women are shown in Table 4. The mediating effect of mental violence in the effect of depression on life satisfaction was significant ($p<0.05$), and the indirect effect of mental violence in family system perception on life satisfaction was significant at $p<0.01$. That is, mental violence was confirmed

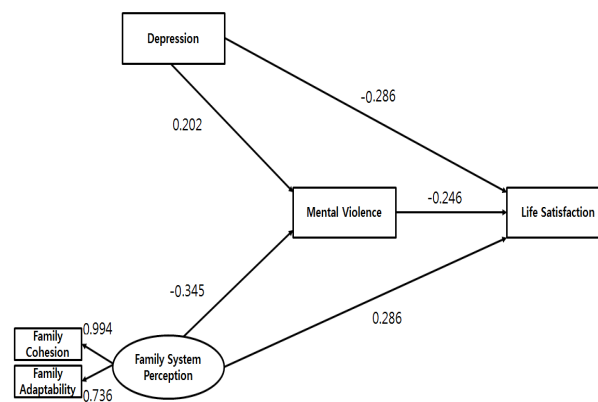


Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients.

Table 4. Mediating effects of emotional intelligence and self-esteem

Path				Unstandardized estimate	Standardized estimate	95%CI (Bias-corrected bootstrap)	
Depression	→	Mental violence	→	Life satisfaction	-0.039	-0.050	p=0.012
Family system perception	→	Mental violence	→	Life satisfaction	0.087	0.085	p=0.009

to be a mediating variable in the relationships between depression and life satisfaction and between perception of family system and life satisfaction. The women's depression and family system perceptions had direct effects on their life satisfaction but an indirect impact through mental violence.

4. Discussion

Targeting 249 immigrant women, this research was conducted to investigate the structural relationships between their life satisfaction, depression, family system perceptions, and mental violence.

First, life satisfaction and family system perceptions had statistically significant positive correlation, but life satisfaction had negative correlations with depression and mental violence. In addition, depression had a negative correlation with family system perceptions but positive correlations with mental violence, all of which were statistically significant. This is in line with the research results that family violence has high correlations with depression^{20,21} and that married immigrant women's family relationship stress and psychological well-being showed high negative correlations³⁴.

Second, depression had a significantly positive effect on mental violence and a negative effect on life satisfaction. Family system perception had a significantly negative effect on mental violence but a significantly positive effect on life satisfaction, and also, mental violence showed a significantly negative effect on life satisfaction.

Third, the indirect effects of mental violence in the relationships between depression and life satisfaction and between family system perception and the satisfaction were all statistically significant. That is, depression and family system perception had a direct effect on life satisfaction but also an indirect effect through mental violence.

Suggestions for further research derived from these results are as follows. This study confirmed that

depression, mental violence, and family system perception among marriage immigrant women are the main factors of their life satisfaction. Therefore, support is greatly needed to improve their life satisfaction through depression prevention programs for these women, psychological empowerment programs for their spouses, and healthy family enhancement programs for all family member, with the goal of developing healthy family values. As was noted in a recent study, for married immigrant women, the physically challenged, and others who have trouble getting out their homes to participate in social activities, life-long education can help to integrate them into their societies³⁵, and thus, opportunities for life-long education among married immigrant women and their families need to be reinforced.

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