Socioeconomic Status and the Transition to First Marriage in South Korea

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Background & Motivations

Major societal changes leading to increasing economic insecurities and deteriorating job prospects have implications not only for the work situations and career opportunities for young adults (Kalfeberg, 2009) but also for their family behaviors such as marriage or fertility.

Later marriage as a striking family trend in East Asia (Raymo et al., 2015)

Mean (median) Age at First Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>27.8</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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Socioeconomic status, gender and marriage

- Becker (1991): role specialization and trading between partners
- Oppenheimer (1988, 1997): both men and women tend to consider similar characteristics (e.g., economic prospects) for selecting a spouse
- Explained changing economic foundation of marriage
- Gender-role context (Blossfeld, 1995; Torr, 2011)
- Labor market conditions – growth of non-regular employment (Kim, 2017; Pietrowski et al., 2015)

What’s Missing in the Literature?

- Limited attention to the implications of precarious labor market, which might play out differently for men and women regarding family formation.
- Societal and cultural context in Korea where some aspects of gender roles remain traditional.

Objective & Research Questions

- This study examines the relationship between SES (earnings, occupations, employment status and education) and first marriage in Korea.
- Investigating the case of Korea furnishes an opportunity not only to test existing theories of marriage but to expand theoretical discussion on how the relationship between SES and marriage differs by gender in a context where egalitarian relations are still incomplete.

Research Questions

1. If there exists a more consistent gender gap in employment than in education, would the effects of education on marriage differ from those of employment on marriage for women?
2. Given that the importance of economic prospects has increased as the market has become insecure, would single women and men with higher earnings be more likely to marry than those with lower earnings?

Korean Context of Marriage

Percent of Ever-Married Men and Women by Age Group, 1985 – 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Korea Men</th>
<th>Korea Women</th>
<th>U.S. Men</th>
<th>U.S. Women</th>
</tr>
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Source: Korean Statistical Information Service.

Reasons to Remain Single: Men

- Financial concerns make up about 41% of men’s reasons to remain single.
- Economic burden
- Can’t afford housing cost
- Hard to meet someone
- Don’t have enough earnings

Reasons to Remain Single: Women

- Missed an appropriate marriage timing
- Work-family conflict
- Prefer my career over marriage
- Not interested in getting married

Data & Methods

- Data: Korean Labor & Income Panel Study (KLIPS) 1998 – 2014
- Analytic sample: never-married men and women aged 19 – 49
- Method: discrete-time event history analysis
- Model I = control var. + Education
- Model II = Model I + Employment status
- Model III = Model I + Occupation
- Model IV = Model I + Earnings

Results (continued)

Expected Probability of Marriage by Occupation for Men and Women

- Strong influence of occupation on marriage for men.
- No significant influence on women’s marriage, except for student.

Expected Probability of Marriage by Earnings for Men and Women

- Strong influence of earnings on marriage for men.
- No significant influence on marriage for women.

Results

Coefficients from Discrete-Time Hazard Models of Marriage on SES: Men

- Every SES measure is significantly associated with men’s transition to first marriage.
- Reference groups: regular jobs for employment; regular white-collar for occupation; 2nd quartile for education.

Discussion & Conclusions

- A strong positive association between SES and marriage for men.
- Earnings appear to be the most important aspect of SES associated with men’s marriage.
- Having a non-regular job or blue-collar job has a negative influence on marriage for men.
- SES is not closely associated with marriage among women.
- Women with junior-college education are less likely to marry than women with a high-school diploma.
- Women’s SES is treated more like insurance for times of need, complementary to men’s main earnings, rather than a long-term economic prospect.
- The economic foundations of marriage have not yet changed to gender symmetry in the family from gendered specialization.

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