



## Research Article

# Effects of a Psychological Adaptation Improvement Program for International Marriage Migrant Women in South Korea



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## SUMMARY

**Purpose:** This study was conducted to develop and evaluate the Psychological Adaptation Improvement Program (PAIP) for international marriage migrant women in South Korea.

**Methods:** A total of 43 international marriage migrant women who were enrolled in six rural multi-cultural family support centers in South Korea were included in this study. They were randomly assigned to the intervention group ( $n = 21$ ) or to the control group ( $n = 22$ ). The intervention group received 10 sessions of PAIP, 1 or 2 sessions per week for 8 weeks. The dependent variables were self-esteem, depression and social problem solving ability. The data were analyzed by Fisher's exact test,  $t$  test, and repeated measures analysis of variance using SAS program.

**Results:** PAIP was effective in increasing self-esteem and reducing depression, and partially showed significant positive effects on participants' social problem solving ability, suggesting increased levels of positive problem orientation and decreased avoidance style in the social problem solving ability subscales.

**Conclusion:** PAIP might be used as an effective intervention to improve psychological adaptation among international marriage migrant women in the rural community of South Korea.

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## Introduction

Recently, a predominant phenomenon related to international migration in South Korea is that foreign women who immigrated to South Korea for marriage with Korean men (international marriage migrant women) have increased. The international marriage rate in 2000 was 3.5% of all marriages in South Korea and it increased up to 9.0% in 2011; of this 9.0%, the marriage between Korean man and foreign woman was 74.8% (Korea National Statistical Office, 2012). This is viewed as an inevitable phenomenon in Korean society due to variety of situations in and outside the country, such as low birth rate, increased single Korean women, avoiding marriage with rural men, globalization, and influence of the Korean wave in Asia (Yang et al., 2012).

On the other hand, international migration is individually a very stressful life event. It is known that many immigrants experience acculturative stress, negatively influencing one's psychological

well-being and causing mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse and post traumatic stress disorder (Bhugra, 2004; Hoschl et al., 2008; Hovey & Magana, 2002). In terms of the international marriage migrant women in South Korea, previous studies reported that they experience difficulties in adjusting to the Korean society due to cultural differences, language problem, discriminative and unfriendly attitude for foreign woman, and lack of support systems (Jeong & Lee, 2010; Lee & Kim, 2010; Nam & Ahn, 2011). Earlier research results from Kwon and Park (2007), as well as Kim (2010) showed high acculturative stress level and low life satisfaction among international marriage migrant women. In the study by Kim (2011) where international marriage migrant women were surveyed, the results indicated that 45.5% of participants had mild depression, which was higher than 2.9–5.6% observed in the study by Cho et al. (2009), involving Korean adults. Besides, several studies reported that international marriage migrant women in rural areas experienced more severe domestic work-related stress and acculturative stress, worse quality of life, lower self-esteem, and worse mental health problem such as depression, compared with those in urban areas (Kim & Park, 2008; Kwon, 2011; Nam & Ahn, 2011).

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The Korean government has implemented policies to help the adaptation of international marriage migrant women to the Korean society. However, most of these policies focused on services for sociocultural adaptation such as Hangeul (Korean Alphabet) teaching, and supporting employment, while Korean culture education and psychological problems, such as mental health problems, tend to be lightly treated (Kim & Lee, 2010; Lee & Kim, 2010). For example, depression in the Korean society is apt to be left ignored for a long time due to the perception that depression can be handled by one's own will (Oh & Park, 2007). These results indicate that mental healthcare experts need to actively develop an intervention strategy to deal with psychological problems among rural international marriage migrant women, focusing on their psychological adaptation.

Domestic and foreign researches on international migrants were mostly descriptive studies focused on their sociocultural or psychological adaptation (Bradley & Van Willigen, 2010; Gomez, Kelsey, Glaser, Lee, & Sidney, 2004; Hoschl et al., 2008; Kim, 2011; Kim & Chyun, 2012; Kwon, 2011; Lee & Kim, 2010; Lim, Oh, & Han, 2009). In particular, domestic studies on this population have focused on their sociocultural adaptation (Kim & Chyun, 2012). Recently, studies addressing their psychological adaptation have increased, but most of those were also descriptive studies (Kim, 2011; Kim & Chyun, 2012; Kwon, 2011; Lee & Kim; Lim et al., 2009). Despite the emphasis on developing intervention programs for their psychological adaptation in the literature (Kim; Kwon, 2011; Lee & Kim; Lim et al.), there is little research on this topic.

Individual psychological adaptation level is a very important indicator to show one's psychological well-being and the overall adaptation level. It was commonly measured with the level of self-esteem, depression and life satisfaction (Bradley & Van Willigen, 2010; Lee & Kim, 2010; Shin, Han, & Kim, 2007). Based upon the literature, our study measured the level of psychological adaptation with self-esteem, depression, and social problem solving ability levels.

Self-esteem is an individual factor that improves mental health problems, such as depression among immigrants (Bae & Park, 2010; Bhugra, 2003). Depression was one of the most talked-about mental health problems as the negative indicator of psychological adaptation (Lee & Kim, 2010). In addition, the problem solving ability that is regarded as an indicator on social capability might be a key component of psychological adaptation. Researchers who tried to approach mental health problems with the problem solving ability, remarked that psychological adaptation is associated with the degree of problem solving ability within the social relationship (D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1982). Previous studies showed that social problem solving ability was significantly associated with better mental health, higher quality of life (Chinaveh, 2010), and better family functioning (Siu & Shek, 2010). Conversely, low social problem solving ability was shown to be associated with depression (Prachakul, Grant, & Keltner, 2007). Thus, addressing the social problem solving ability can constitute a way to improve psychological adaptation among international marriage migrant women.

As a result, this study was conducted to develop and evaluate the intervention program for improving psychological adaptation among rural international marriage migrant women in South Korea. We therefore developed the Psychological Adaptation Improvement Program (PAIP) which consisted of a brief psychosocial intervention and focused on increasing self-esteem, reducing depression and improving social problem solving ability.

The overall purpose of this study is to identify the short-term effects of PAIP on self-esteem, depression and problem solving ability among rural international marriage migrant women in South Korea.

## Methods

### Study design

A quasi-experimental study with nonequivalent control group with a nonsynchronized design was used. Independent variable was 10 sessions of PAIP. The dependent variables were the indicators of psychological adaptation, including self-esteem, depression and social problem solving ability.

### Setting and sample

The participants consisted of 43 international marriage migrant women, who were enrolled in six multi-cultural family support centers of 6 cities (Andong, Yeongju, Uiseong, Gyeongju, Cheongsong, and Mungyeong) in rural areas in South Korea. Each center had a total enrollment of 300–400 and provided no psychosocial intervention service for the clients.

Participants met the following inclusion criteria: they were (a) with foreign nationality who married a Korean man, (b) able to communicate with the researchers in Korean, (c) able to understand and respond to the questionnaires used, (d) not diagnosed with mental illness, and (e) willing to sign informed consent forms to participate in this study.

The sample size was calculated using a G\*Power program (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). In order to have an effect size of 0.25, a power of .95, and have repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) be applicable, 18 subjects were needed for each group.

### Ethical consideration

Ethical approval of this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Catholic University in South Korea (approval no. CUMC11U037). All study participants were provided with information regarding the contents of PAIP. They were also informed that their responses would be kept confidential and the results of the study would be used only for the purposes of the study. The participants then signed the informed consent forms.

### Measurements

#### Self-esteem

Self-esteem levels of the study participants were assessed using the Self-Esteem Scale (SES) developed by Rosenberg (1965) and translated into Korean by Jeon (1974). It consists of 10 items (5 positive items and 5 negative items) and uses a 4-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The scores for the negative items were calculated inversely. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem levels. In a study by Jeon, the reliability of the SES was established with a Cronbach's alpha of .85. In our study, the reliability of this instrument was established with a Cronbach's alpha of .76.

#### Depression

Depression levels of the study participants were assessed with the Center for Epidemiologic Studies–Depression Scale (CES-D), developed by Radloff (1977) and translated into Korean by Choi, Yang, and Chon (2001). CES-D has been used to measure the level of depression in many different ethnic groups and among the people who were under chronic stress and/or difficult situations (Radloff & Locke, 1983; Shin et al., 2007). It consists of 20 items (4 positive items and 16 negative items), and uses a 4-point scale from 0 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 3 (*most of or all the time*). Each of the 20 items states an experience related to depressive mood and symptom that the subjects might have had in the past week. The

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