

Differential sociodemographic determinants of marital dissolution between endogamous and cross-border couples in Taiwan: Evidence from a population-based birth cohort study

Background

Taiwan has experienced a large influx of cross-border marriage migrants since the mid-1990, and the majority have been females in their child-bearing ages. At its peak year of 2003, one out of every 3.5 registered marriages involved a Taiwanese man married a foreign spouse (Ministry of the Interior, 2013a). The foremost driving force behind cross-border marriages pertains to the challenges in the domestic marriage market faced by Taiwanese men who are older, of lower social class, and live in rural areas. It also provides a solution for those who hold strong paternal beliefs in a society where young women are now less willing to be obedient wives (Tien & Wang, 2006). Therefore, less developed countries in the region that have cultural or capital-linked connections with Taiwan have become the main sending sources such as China, Vietnam and Indonesia. The rising trend was further facilitated by the proliferation of marriage brokers (Hsia, 2005; Tseng, 2010). According to a national survey, most Chinese-born women in cross-border marriages met their Taiwanese spouses through informal networks (61.4%) or on their own (27.5%). By contrast, marriages to female migrants from other countries were often (about 40%) commercially arranged (Ministry of the Interior, 2004).

Such marriage migration has created several societal concerns, with one being that cross-border unions are less stable. Over recent years, the divorce rate stays around 28 ‰ among cross-border marriages with female foreign spouses, compared to 11‰ for Taiwanese endogamous couples (Ministry of the Interior, 2013b). Divorce as a life event causing a range of stressors is particularly prominent for cross-border marriages already at risk of multiple jeopardizes. Furthermore, since most marriage migrants have given births in 2 to 3 years after their arrival in Taiwan, higher marital dissolution rates would imply potential negative consequences on their young children.

To my knowledge, marital dissolution remains scarcely explored in the cross-border marriage literature in Taiwan. Using a longitudinal design, this study aims to describe the marital dissolution pattern of cross-border versus Taiwanese endogamous couples, and to scrutinize whether there are differential sociodemographic determinants of marital dissolution between the two groups built upon both resources theory and heterogamy hypothesis.

Methods

Data came from the Taiwan Birth Cohort Study (TBCS) which comprised a nationally representative sample of 21,248 live births in 2005. My analysis was based on 20,539 children whose parents were married in the initial survey at 6 months of age and completed at least one of the follow-up surveys at 18 months, 3 years and 5.5 years of age. Parent's marital status was the dependent variable with reporting a change to "divorce" in a given survey recoded as event occurrence. The duration of marriage (in months) was calculated by the difference between the date of marriage and the date of divorce, or the interview date for censored cases. Age at marriage, marriage cohort, educational level and urbanization of residential area were taken as non-time-dependent predictors while heterogamy factors included age and education. I used Cox Proportional Hazards models to examine predictors on the hazard rate of marital dissolution by cross-border marriage group. Cross-border marriage group was defined by mother's original nationality and categorized into: Taiwanese endogamy (86.5%), Chinese cross-border (4.6%) and Southeast Asian (SEA) cross-border (8.9%).

Overall, SEA mothers were youngest at marriage ($M=21.8$ years; $SD=3.8$ years) and child birth ($M=24.4$ years; $SD=4.2$ years), and came from most socioeconomically disadvantaged families in terms of education and family income level. With respect to heterogamy characteristics, the majority of Taiwanese endogamous couples were within 2 years of age difference and had the same educational level of more than high school. For cross-border marriage couples, husband more than 10 years older than wife was much common and so was husband having more education than wife or both having less than high school of education.

Results

By sample children reaching 5.5 years of age, there were slightly more Taiwanese endogamous couples remained married (87.7%) than Chinese cross-border (86.4%) and SEA cross-border couples (84.7%). Table 1 presents the results of the Cox Proportional Hazards models of marital dissolution by cross-border marriage group, with only sociodemographic predictors in Model 1 and incorporating heterogamy variables in Model 2. For Taiwanese endogamous couples, higher hazard rates were significantly associated with mother's younger age at marriage, lower maternal education, and living in more urbanized areas. Educational heterogamy did not predict higher risks of marital dissolution but spousal age difference (i.e. husband more than 10 years older than wife and wife older than husband). Interestingly, none of selected sociodemographic or heterogamy factors predicted the hazard of marital dissolution

among Chinese cross-border couples. For SEA cross-border couples, mother's younger age at marriage, lower maternal education, higher paternal education and living in more urbanized areas predicted higher risks of marital dissolution. However, no heterogamy factors were found significant.

Discussion

Among couples with young children in Taiwan, those involving Taiwanese men marrying foreign spouses have a higher risk of marital dissolution than their Taiwanese endogamous counterparts. There exist differential sociodemographic determinants of divorce. While maternal education is protective for both Taiwanese endogamous and SEA cross-border groups, paternal education increases the risk of divorce for the latter. In addition, heterogamy hypothesis is only supported for Taiwanese couples in terms of age difference. Although my research has a limitation in using samples who have at least one preschool-aged child, it paves the ground for further investigation of family environment effects on the well-being of the next generation since early life. This has been a significant population health issue given Taiwan's recent immigration trend.

References

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Table 1. Hazard ratios from Cox Proportional Hazards models of marital dissolution by cross-border marriage group

	Taiwanese endogamy		Chinese-born		SEA-born	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Mother's age at marriage						
(> 25 years)						
21~25 years	1.29***	1.33***	1.28	1.28	1.10***	1.22
≤ 20 years	2.07***	2.12***	1.10	1.02	1.62***	1.81**
Marriage cohort						
(After 2000)						
2000~2002	0.65***	0.66***	0.87	0.87	0.82	0.82
Before 2000	0.60***	0.61***	1.07	1.08	1.28	1.24
Maternal education						
(≤ 9 years)						
10~12 years	0.70***	0.68**	1.32	1.55	0.68***	0.42*
≥ 13 years	0.57***	0.53*	1.70*	2.22	1.74***	0.75
Paternal education						
(≤ 9 years)						
10~12 years	0.83**	0.88	0.77	0.70	1.06	1.77
≥ 13 years	0.64***	0.73	0.95	0.78	1.31	2.60 [†]
Residential area						
(Rural township)						
Township	1.27***	1.27***	0.78	0.76	1.60**	1.60**
City	1.53***	1.54***	0.97	0.96	1.33 [†]	1.33 [†]
Age difference						
(≤ 2 years of difference)						
F older than M by >10 years		1.42***		0.99		0.76
F older than M by 3~10 years		1.03		0.82		0.72
M older than F by >2 years		1.30***		1.00		1.21
Educational difference						
F more than M		1.10		0.46 [†]		1.55
M more than F		0.99		0.86		0.56
Chi-square	507.2***	529.8***	9.6	16.8	40.5***	44.8***

Notes: reference categories are shown in parentheses. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; [†]p<.10