Children of Multicultural Families and School Dropout in South Korea*

Extended Abstract for the submission to

the American Association of Population Annual Conference

Please do not cite without explicit permission from the author

Hyun Sik Kim
Sociology
Kyung Hee University
South Korea

* A draft of this article was presented at the 67th Colloquium of the Multicultural Families Study of Hanyang University. Thanks to Doosub Kim, Hansung Kim, Bongoh Kye, Sanghak Kim, and Sunjae Hwang who provided helpful comments at the colloquium. This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2014S1A3A2043476).
Abstract

There are nation-wide concerns in South Korea regarding whether rapidly growing number of children of multicultural families is successfully integrating into the society. To bridge the gap between urgent needs of empirical evidence and the lack thereof, this article attempts to assess whether multicultural children are more likely to drop out of school before high school graduation than Korean children. To evaluate our study hypotheses, the 1% samples of the 2010 Census data and the National Survey of Multicultural Families 2012 have been combined to be applied to discrete-time hazards models. Analytical results indicate 1) that multicultural children were, on average, more likely to drop out than Korean children, 2) that, however, the differential is contributable to soaring hazards of foreign-born multicultural children such that Korea-born multicultural children did not show distinguishable difference with Korean children, 3) that children of foreign-born father were in greater hazards than children with Korea-born father but those of foreign-born mother were as likely to drop out as children with Korea-born mother, and 4) that the decisive factor was, once again, not whether mother or father were foreign-born but whether children themselves were foreign-born.
Children of Multicultural Families and School Dropout in South Korea

South Korea (hereafter Korea) is witnessing rapidly growing the number of children of multicultural families, as defined throughout this article to be children who have at least one of mother and father that were born out of Korea. Official statistics show that, for instance, there were about 44,000 multicultural children aged 18 or below in 2007 but the number were more than quadrupled to more than 204,000 in 2014 (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2014). Ministry of Education on the other hand reported that about 26,000 children of multicultural families enrolled elementary, middle, and high schools in 2009 and the number more than doubled to 55,000 in 2013, which accounted for 0.35% and 0.86% of total students, respectively (Ministry of Education 2013). Given the high levels of cross-border marriages together with lowest-low fertilities of native Koreans for the last decade (Lee 2012), it is reasonable to expect that multicultural children will take up a bigger share of population in the coming years.

Growing volume of multicultural children in absolute and relative terms sparked a nation-wide concerns regarding whether these children are on the right track of integrating into Korean society or are going through a series of hardships making them difficult to assimilate into the main stream. Reflecting these national concerns, government documents and academic research projects are swelling that tries to unveil how multicultural children is faring in Korea (Seol 2009). For instance, the National Survey of Multicultural Families 2012 (NSMF 2012), which is the second cross-sectional national survey of multicultural families mandated by a law, included a special questionnaire section targeting adolescents and young adults over their school lives and work experiences (Jeon et al. 2013).
According to the emerging body of literature, there is conflicting evidence about whether multicultural children significantly lag behind Korean children in educational attainment (Jeon et al. 2013; Park 2012), which are one of critical importance in life chances in Korea (Sandefur and Park 2007). For instance, Jeon and colleagues (2013) reported that enrollment rate of multicultural children in 2012 was 97.9%, 96.1%, and 85.1% for elementary, middle, and high school, respectively, which is quite similar to 98.6%, 96.1%, and 92.6% of Korean children (Ministry of Education 2013). By contrast, Park (2012) argued that enrollment rate of multicultural children residing in Gyeonggi province was just 70.0%, 51.0%, and 34.8% in 2012 for elementary, middle and high school, respectively. In addition, we are aware of no study that deals with individual-level characteristics that affect school dropout of children of multicultural families vis-à-vis Korean children.

THEORETICAL HYPOTHESES

In this context, this article attempts to unveil differential hazards of school dropout before high school graduation between multicultural and Korean children who lived in Korea. More specifically, we formulate four closely related hypotheses. 1) There would be differential hazards of dropout between multicultural and Korean children on average. 2) If we disaggregated multicultural children into Korea-born and foreign-born children, Korea-born as well as foreign-born multicultural children would exhibit enhanced risk of dropout compared to Korean children. 3) If we examined effects of having foreign-born mother or foreign-born father as separate variables, we would observe noticeable differences in dropout hazards depending on mother’s
and father’s place of birth (Korea or not). In addition, mother’s place of birth would be more important than father’s place of birth. 4) If we divided children into Korean-born or foreign-born status in addition to mother’s or father’s place of birth, once again, we would see higher dropout hazards among children who had at least a parent who were foreign-born than Korean children regardless of their own place of birth. We also note that throughout this article we separate Korean children into two groups by parents’ marital status, namely into children of divorce and children in intact families. By doing so, we can assay disadvantages of being multicultural children to those of Korean children of divorce who were quite disadvantaged in several aspects of life (e.g., Chung 2010).

DATA AND METHOD

To investigate these questions, we combined the 1% sample of the 2010 Census and NSMF 2012 and selected those children aged 7 through 18 who were supposed to attend elementary, middle, or high school. We decided to combine NSMF 2012 because the number of multicultural children in the 2010 Census was quite small and we observed only 8 multicultural children who dropped out. Using the information on whether children was attending which level of school and, if not, when they stopped attending school, we made the dropout variable and school level variable. The latter consisted of three levels: elementary, middle, and high school. Then, we applied our data to discrete-time hazard models to empirically test our hypotheses (Singer and Willet 2003).
RESULTS

In this extended abstract, we present stylized analytical results using survival curves which are most basic descriptive statistics in survival analysis. All these results are not adjusted for any other confounding variables such as mother’s and father’s educational levels, number of family members, and children’s gender.

Figure 1. Survival curves by children’s multicultural status

A. Korean vs. multicultural children  
B. Korean vs. multicultural children by place of birth
Panel A of Figure 1 describes three survival curves in which the solid line represents the survival curve of Korean children with intact families, the dashed line denotes that of Korean children of divorce, and the dotted line shows that of multicultural children. It clearly shows that differential dropout rates between multicultural and Korean children emerged at the end of middle school and got widened by the end of high school. Notice that survival rate or school continuation rate in our context of multicultural children was far less than that of Korean children of divorce.

By contrast, Panel B illustrate whether there was difference if we further divided multicultural children into Korea- and foreign-born status. Solid and dashed line represents the same as Panel A, dotted line conveys the survival curve of Korea-born multicultural children, and dashed-dotted-dashed line stands for that of foreign-born multicultural children. Two remarkable observations are noteworthy from this figure. 1) There was no difference between Korean children in intact families and Korea-born multicultural children. Notice that survival rate of Korea-born multicultural children was higher than Korean children of divorce. 2) However, survival rate for foreign-born multicultural children was so low that by the end of high school, survival rate approached 0.8. It can be safely stated that the average difference between multicultural and Korean children was entirely due to the high dropout rate of foreign-born multicultural children.
Figure 2 explores differential dropout rates by mother’s place of birth. Panel A demonstrates that children having foreign-born mother (dotted line) was more likely to drop out of school by the end of high school than Korean children in intact families (solid line) but as likely as Korean children of divorce (dashed line). Panel B, however, shows that Korea-born children with foreign-born mother enjoyed similar levels of dropout rates with Korean children while foreign-born children with foreign-born mother were put in highly enhanced risks. These observations continues to support the previous finding that what really mattered to drop out was not mothers’ place of birth but children’s own place of birth.
Finally we present Figure 3 to search for differential dropout rates by father’s place of birth. Panel A of Figure 3 is quite different from Panel A of Figure 2 in that children having foreign-born father was even more likely to drop out by high school than Korean children regardless of father’s marital status. Panel B repeatedly shows that Korea-born children having foreign-born father were not disadvantaged significantly in educational attainment compared to Korean children but foreign-born children with foreign-born father were.
REFERENCES


Jeon, Ki-Taek, Hae-Sook Chung, Yi-Seon Kim, Young-Ran Kim, Jae-Seon Joo, Hae-young Kim, Chang-Kyoon Son, Jae-Boon Lee, Kiseon Chung, Jungmee Hwang, Min-Jung Kang, Bo-Young Sun, Yun-jeong Choi, Yoo-Sun Chu Geon-Pyo Park, and Cheyong Tong. 2013. A Study on the National Survey of Multicultural Families 2012. Seoul, South Korea: Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. In Korean


Sandefur, Gary D. and Hyunjoon Park. 2007. “Educational Expansion and Changes in Occupational Returns to Education in Korea.” Research in Social Stratification and