Asian Family Matters

Cross-border Marriage and Spousal Violence in Hong Kong

Changing Family in Asia Cluster
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This brief is intended to provide an overview of research produced by the Changing Family in Asia Cluster at the Asia Research Institute.

This research brief focuses on migrant marriage and spousal violence in Hong Kong. Adam Cheung, a postdoctoral fellow who joined the Asia Research Institute in November 2012, investigated the relationship between social isolation and spousal violence among female marriage migrants and local women.

His research interests include family relations, division of household labour and family structure in Chinese societies. The following section summarises his research article that was published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* (June 2012).

**Cross-border Marriage and Spousal Violence**

Over the past few decades, cross-border marriages have become more common in Asia and other parts of the world. Cross-border marriages between men from Hong Kong and women from mainland China has increased sharply since the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China. Research from other countries suggests that women in cross-border marriages are more vulnerable to spousal violence than women in the general population, due to their relative socio-economic disadvantage and social isolation. In the case of Hong Kong, migrant women’s vulnerability is exacerbated by their husbands’ relatively low socio-economic status in the wider society. Compared with men who married local women, men who married Mainland Chinese women had a lower monthly income and education.

This study is one of the first to assess the occurrence of spousal violence within this population of marriage migrants in Hong Kong, taking into account both the experiences of migrant women and the role of their local husbands. It examines the impact of couple’s network participation, social support, and social control on the violence victimisation of female marriage migrants and local women by a spouse in Hong Kong. Data were from a household survey of 492 cross-border and 379 local married couples in Hong Kong in 2007. Three types of spousal violence were examined in this research: Husband-to-wife psychological aggression, physical assault and sexual coercion. The data suggest that female marriage migrants were more vulnerable to violence by a spouse, compared with local women. The one-year prevalence rates of husband-to-wife psychological aggression, physical assault and sexual coercion were 38.6%, 12.6%, and 13.8% among marriage migrants. The same figures for local women were lower (31.7%, 8.2% and 8.2% respectively).

Editors of this issue: Adam Cheung, Suzanne Naafs and Saharah Abubakar
The main findings indicate that compared with local couples, couples in cross-border marriages have a lower household income, receive less social support from friends and family, participate less in social-network activities, and perceive less social control. Results from multiple logistic regression models suggest that female marriage migrants’ vulnerability to spousal psychological aggression and sexual coercion was related, in part, to their own and their husbands’ connections with the family, community and social networks. Female marriage migrants’ greater vulnerability to spousal physical assault was mainly a result of their younger age and their husband’s employment status. The findings of this paper show the importance of extending the focus of female marriage migrants in existing studies on cross-border marriages to include the characteristics of husbands in these marriages as well.

In addition, data suggest that wife’s participation in social-network activities is not necessarily a protective factor for women. Contrary to what we might expect, data showed that wife’s network participation is positively related to their victimisation in spousal violence. In many non-Western cultures, the participation of women in networks outside their marital family is considered to be a transgression of gender norms. Past studies showed that some husbands of marriage migrants feared that after their wives gained independence, they might file for divorce. Therefore, some men prohibited their wives from visiting friends or leaving home. The findings draw attention to the potential efficacy of violence intervention and prevention policies that focus on strengthening the role of social support and social control in combating spousal violence.

**Further Information**

For further reading of the article on which this research brief is based, please visit the website of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*:

Past Events and Papers Presented
During the past months our cluster members attended several international conferences to give paper and poster presentations.

1. **International Sociological Association Committee on Family Research (CFR/RC06), Academia Sinica, Taipei, 28-30 March 2013**
   - Adam Ka-Lok Cheung: “Hiring Domestic Help and Family Well-being among Chinese Couples in Hong Kong: A Propensity Score Matching Analysis”
   - Wei-Jun Jean Yeung and Hu Shu: “Changes and Continuities of Family Values in Modern China” (Poster session)

2. **Conference New Agendas on Youth and Young Adulthood, Glasgow, United Kingdom, 8-10 April 2013**

3. **Population Association of America Annual Meeting, New Orleans, USA, 11-13 April 2013.**
   - Dhiman Das: “Women's Bargaining Power within Family and Child Malnutrition in India”
   - Qianhan Lin: “The Impacts of an Early Biographical Experience on Later Subjective Well-Being: The Case of China's Cultural Revolution Cohort” (poster session)

4. **Dynamic Korea in a Transforming Asia: Opportunities and Challenges for South Korean Development, Asia Research Centre, Copenhagen Business School, 18-19 April 2013**
   - Lee Hyunok: “Ties that Bind: International Migration between South Korea and Vietnam”

Blog Post: Youth and Low-paid Internships

“Internships used to be a stepping stone towards paid jobs, but the number of professional interns is growing.”

In a blog post on the website of the Children and Youth Studies programme at the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University in The Netherlands, our cluster member Suzanne Naafs reflects on the opportunities and dilemmas surrounding youth and low-paid internships. For further reading, please click here: [http://blog.eur.nl/iss/cys/2013/05/16/youth-and-unpaid-internships-opportunity-or-trap/](http://blog.eur.nl/iss/cys/2013/05/16/youth-and-unpaid-internships-opportunity-or-trap/)

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