

Marriage Divide and Children's Living Arrangement: The Case of South Korea

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Sociologists in the United States describe the increasing differentials by socioeconomic status in the probability of entering and remaining in the marriage as “marriage divide.” For women as well as men, people of higher incomes and education are more likely to marry and less likely to exit the marriage than those with lower status. In South Korea, which witnessed a dramatic increase in the divorce rate in the past decade, such marriage divide by socioeconomic status is conspicuous. Most directly, many divorced couples report that poor financial situation was the major reason for their divorce.

This study examines the living arrangements of children from the parents who are not married to each other. The focus is on differences by mother's socioeconomic status. The literature in the US has long discussed how the family structure of children affects their welfare including their school performance, health, and socioeconomic attainment in adulthood. In Korea, little systematic research has been done on the living arrangements of children of divorced or separated parents. That is partly because of data shortage. Surveys in Korea are shy of asking about the “troubled” life history and do not probe the whereabouts of children from previous marriages. That is especially the case if the mother is remarried. To complement such data shortage, this study uses somewhat indirect approach; we will compare women's birth history data with the current household structure to determine who are not living with the mother. Where data are available (for some subgroups), we will also examine the living arrangements of the children not living with the mother.

Data are from three national surveys dealing with family issues: Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Family conducted in 2007 (first wave), Fertility and Family Survey conducted in 2006, and Divorce Registration Data for several years. Summary statistics of the mother's marital status and number of children from the first two surveys are reported in Table 1. Mother's age is restricted to 20 to 49 as the study focuses on children aged 18 or younger. Both surveys include rich data on women's life circumstances, including birth history, educational history, employment history, marital history as well as current household income and expenditure. Divorce registration data include information on the number of children under age 18 at the time of divorce, and will be used for baseline estimates.

Table 1. Number of Children Ever Born by Marital Status: Ever-married Women Aged 20-49 from Two Nationally Representative Surveys

Number of children	Mother's current marital status							Total
	first marriage intact	remarried	separated	divorced	widowed	cohabiting (ever mar)	cohabiting (never mar)	
0	290	8	1	15	0	2	20	336
1	1081	17	14	67	22	3	1	1205
2	3314	51	21	103	47	4	3	3543
3	722	13	2	21	20	1	0	779
4	65	1	2	2	2	0	0	72
5	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	9

Total	5480	90	40	208	91	11	24	5944
Number of children	10175	162	70	344	184	19	7	10961
	(92.8)	(7.2)						

Fertility and Family Survey: 2006

Number of children	Mother's current marital status					Total
	first marriage intact	remarried	separated	divorced	widowed	
0	516	16	2	12	3	549
1	1279	46	22	80	18	1445
2	3951	85	76	134	51	4297
3	741	28	21	20	7	817
4	77	2	0	4	0	83
5	12	2	0	0	0	14
6	1	0	0	0	0	1
7	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6578	179	121	250	79	7207
Number of children	11785	<u>318</u>	<u>237</u>	<u>424</u>	<u>141</u>	12905
	(91.3)	(8.7)				
