

# A study on Motivation of Marriage and Views of Marriage of Korean College Students

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**Abstract.** Low birth rates due to low marriages and late marriages are serious social problems with population aging in Korea. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between view of marriage and marriage motivation of college students. This study used a descriptive study to test the correlation of view of marriage and motivation for marriage. One hundred fifty one College students were conveniently participated of one university in Cheonan province of South Korea. The average view of marriage was  $3.18 \pm .45$ , and item with the highest scores were 'Marriage can have money' ( $3.90 \pm 0.97$ ). The lowest scores were 'If they fail to marry, they can remarry' ( $1.66 \pm .63$ ). The highest priority motivation for marriage was 'Love', with 85 subjects (56.3%), 'psychological stability' (25.8%), 'Economic stability' (11.9%), and 'New family formation and birth' (6.0%). The view of marriage of the subject who said that the motivation for marriage was 'economic well-being' was significantly higher than the subject who answered 'psychological stability' ( $F = 2.912, p = .037$ ). The idea of marriage, which may have an economic basis, is bringing down the problem of low fertility in our society by delaying the marriage period or preventing marriage. It is a time when it is necessary to make a systematic educational preparations by designating the ideas and perceptions about marriage.

**Keywords:** College, Student, Marriage, Motivation, Education

## I. INTRODUCTION

The number of marrying couples in South Korea has been on a consistent decline since 2011; it dropped from 302,828 in 2015 to 281,635 in 2016 [1]. Along with the declining marriage rate, the birth rate has been rapidly dropping, going from 721,185 births in 1994 to 406,243 in 2016. South Korea has recorded the lowest birth rate among OECD countries [1].

The low birth rate caused by the declining marriage rate and increase in late marriages is a serious social problem that is coupled with a rapidly aging population [2]. That is, a low birth rate takes a toll on the productive population, which in turn slashes the potential growth rate, thereby causing a national crisis [3]. In response to this problem, the Korean government devised the first, second, and third fundamental plans for the country's low-fertility, aging society and implemented various support policies [4]. Notwithstanding such an effort, Korea's birth rate is still on a continuous decline, calling for additional studies from multiple perspectives in order to promote policy changes to meet the needs of the real world and increase the birth rate [4].

Marriage is one of the oldest social systems and has persisted throughout human history. It plays a crucial role in maintaining societies and nations, such as by reproducing

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members of society and conserving generations [2]. In the past, marriage meant accepting a lifelong companion from a good family background, having and raising children to promote emotional stability, and defending the institution of marriage [5]. However, the concept of marriage has changed gradually since industrialization, and now, it is more of an option than a requirement [6]. In fact, according to a report by Statistics Korea [1], the percentage of adolescents and young adults aged 13–24 stating that they do not care whether they get married or not is on the rise, from 44.4% in 2014 to 51.4% in 2016, and in contrast, the percentage of those opposing divorce is rapidly falling, going from 33.5% in 2014 to 27.0% in 2016 [1].

Previous studies report that multiple factors contribute to the changing views on marriage. Kim [7] stated that today's young generation does not consider marriage as mandatory but sees it as something to be determined based on their individual situations and preferences. Moon et al. [8] reported that the fundamental cause of marriage-related problems pertains to the distorted meaning and rationale for "family" amid the transforming society and values, as well as to the lack of an adequate approach to the fundamentals [8]. Moreover, the said study stated that views on marriage have changed due to the reality in which families fail to prepare individuals through marriage socialization, as families have lost their social function of passing on the values of a community in a society marked with fierce competition for survival [8].

Undergraduates who are in need of children or wish to have many children in the future are more willing to marry [9]. In other words, views on marriage are an important factor affecting the will to give birth and the low-fertility phenomenon [7]. Hence, information about undergraduates' views on or motivations for marriage would be conducive to understanding the values of individuals of marriageable age and would also serve as useful fundamental data for developing measures to promote the birth rate. In this context, this study aims to identify college undergraduates' motivations for and views on marriage.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Design and sample

College students were conveniently recruited of one university in Cheonan province of South Korea. Participants were included if they were (1) able to read and answer the questionnaire, and (2) not diagnosed with physical and mental health problems that could affect self-report.



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The sample size estimate was calculated with G\*Power 3.13 [10] to satisfy an effect size of 0.3, an alpha level of 0.05, and a power of 0.80, where three predictors will be incorporated within the multiple regression analysis. An estimated 138 subjects were necessary to meet these conditions; thus, our sample size ( $N = 151$ ) saturated the requirement of the power analysis.

## 2.2 Measurements

### 2.2.1 General characteristics

Information about participants' age, sex, religion, parents' marital status, family's major source of income, birth order, cohabiting family, and perceived economic status was collected. Participants were instructed to specify their age in full and mark male/female for sex, yes/no for religion, married/divorced/separated/widowed for parents' marital status, father/mother/both/self for family's major source of income, only child/first/second/third for birth order, live alone/live with family/live with a friend or relative for cohabiting family, and high/middle/low for perceived economic status.

### 2.2.2 Motivations for marriage

For motivation for marriage, participants were instructed to answer the question "What is your most important motivation for marriage?" by choosing one of the following options: love, financial stability, psychological stability, and forming a new family and having children.

### 2.2.3 Views on marriage

Views on marriage were measured with an instrument developed by Chung et al. [11] and modified and adapted by Lee [12]. The scale comprises four categories: mental richness, desirable institution and mental stability, problems, and financial stability. Each item is rated on a five-point

Likert scale: 1 for "not at all," 2 for "generally not true," 3 for "neutral," 4 for "generally true," and 5 for "very true." The scale is comprised of 23 items, and a higher score indicates a more traditional view on marriage. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in Lee's [12] study was .822.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using the SPSS window program 22.0 version (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA)

The view of marriage of the subject was descriptive. The general characteristics of the subjects were numbers and percentages, and the differences in view of marriage according to general characteristics were analyzed by mean and standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA and Scheffe. The difference of view of marriage according to motivation for marriage of subject was analyzed with mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and Scheffe.

## III. MATH

### 3.1. View of marriage of subjects

The average view of marriage was  $3.18 \pm .45$ , and item with the highest scores were 'Marriage can have money' ( $3.90 \pm 0.97$ ), 'Marriage matures a person' ( $3.70 \pm .91$ ), and 'Marriage and love are separate' ( $3.61 \pm 1.16$ ). The lowest scores were 'If they fail to marry, they can remarry' ( $1.66 \pm .63$ ), 'Marriage is a complementary relationship ( $1.87 \pm .76$ ), and 'If marriage is unfortunate, you should divorce' ( $1.83 \pm .90$ ).

Table 1. View of marriage of subjects (N=151)

Contents	Range of score	Mean $\pm$ SD
1. Marriage is a desirable system	1~5	3.42 $\pm$ .95
2. Marriage must be done.	1~5	2.07 $\pm$ 1.07
3. Marriage gives a psychological sense of security.	1~5	3.40 $\pm$ .86
4. Marriage does not have to be done at a certain age	1~5	2.41 $\pm$ 1.10
5. Marriage relieves loneliness.	1~5	3.51 $\pm$ .91
6. Marriage is good.	1~5	3.31 $\pm$ .84
7. Marriage can have money.	1~5	3.90 $\pm$ .97
8. Marriage is the completion of love	1~5	2.88 $\pm$ 1.07
9. Marriage enriches life.	1~5	3.15 $\pm$ .92
10. Marriage brings economic stability	1~5	2.63 $\pm$ .92
11. Marriage matures a person.	1~5	3.70 $\pm$ .91
12. Marriage should be done only once	1~5	2.24 $\pm$ 1.13
13. Marriage may require parents to agree	1~5	2.87 $\pm$ 1.19
14. Marriage and love are separate.	1~5	3.61 $\pm$ 1.16
15. Marriage is good for people with similar conditions.	1~5	3.60 $\pm$ .98
16. Marriage is maintained through sexual life.	1~5	3.38 $\pm$ .92
17. Marriage is a complementary relationship.	1~5	1.87 $\pm$ .76
18. If marriage is unfortunate, you should divorce.	1~5	1.83 $\pm$ .90



19. Marriage is a way of preserving the species.	1~5	2.82±1.10
20. Age difference at marriage is not a big problem.	1~5	2.77±1.08
21. Marriage should not be between sexes.	1~5	2.32±1.27
22. Love and marriage must coincide	1~5	2.49±1.08
23. If they fail to marry, they can remarry	1~5	1.66±.63
Total	1~5	3.18±.45

### **3.2 Differences in the view of marriage according to general characteristics of the subjects**

The general characteristics of the participants were as follows<Table 2>. 12 subjects (7.9%) were males and 139 subjects (92.1%) were females. 102 subjects (67.5%) had no religion, and marriage status of parents was mostly married (88.1%). The main sources of income for the family were 69 subjects (51.0%) and 79 subjects (41.7%) father, followed by 11 subjects (7.3%) without brothers and 65 subjects (43.0%)

And the second case was 65 subjects (43.0%). 87 subjects (57.6%) were living with their families, 44 subjects (29.1%) were living alone, and 20 subjects (13.2%) were living with friends or relatives. 120 subjects (79.5%) perceived the economy as 'medium'.

Table 2 shows the difference in marital status according to general characteristics of the subjects. There was a statistically significant difference in the degree of marriage between religion and non – religion ( $t=2.209$ ,  $p=.029$ ).

**Table 2.Differences in the view of marriage according to general characteristics of the subjects (N=151)**

Characteristics		n(%)	Perception of marriage	
			Mean±SD	t/F (p)
Age	≤20 yrs	79(52.3)	3.11±.45	2.966
	21 yrs, 22 yrs	61(40.4)	3.24±.40	(.055)
	23 yrs, 24 yrs	11(7.3)	3.40±.64	
Sex	Male	12(7.9)	3.37±.48	1.487
	Female	139(92.1)	3.17±.45	(.139)
Religion	Yes	49(32.5)	3.30±.42	2.209
	No	102(67.5)	3.13±.46	(.029)
Parents' marital status	Married	133(88.1)	3.16±.44	2.088
	Divorced	13(8.6)	3.21±.53	(.104)
	Separated	4(2.6)	3.41±.35	
	Bereaved	1(0.7)	3.61±.55	
Major sources of income	Father	79(52.3)	3.17±.45	1.290
	Mother	2(1.3)	3.04±.49	(.277)
	Working couple	69(45.7)	3.19±.45	
	Subject	1(0.7)	3.66	
Birth order	Single	11(7.3)	3.25±.45	.657
	First	65(43.0)	3.23±.45	(.580)
	Second	65(43.0)	3.13±.45	
	Third	9(6.0)	3.12±.52	
Family living together	Live alone	44(29.1)	3.32±.47	2.879
	With family	87(57.6)	3.13±.42	(.059)
	With friends or relatives	20(13.2)	3.10±.52	
Subjective economic level	Higher	20(13.2)	3.18±.54	754



Middle	120(79.5)	$3.21 \pm .45$	(.472)
Lower	11(7.3)	$3.38 \pm .34$	

### **3.3. Difference of the view of marriage according to motivation for marriage**

The highest priority marriage motive was 'Love', with 85 subjects (56.3%), 'psychological stability' (25.8%), 'Economic stability' (11.9%), and 'New family formation and birth' (6.0%).

As a result of analyzing the difference of the degree of view

**Table 3.Difference of the view of marriage according to motivation for marriage (N=151)**

Characteristics	Motivation for Marriage (First choice priority)	Love	Motivation for Marriage	Perception of marriage	
			n (%)	Mean $\pm$ SD	F (p)
			85(56.3)	$3.23 \pm .43$	2.912 (.037) a>b
	Economic stability		18(11.9)	$3.47 \pm .46^a$	
	Psychological stability		39(25.8)	$3.09 \pm .45^b$	
	New family formation and child birth		9(6.0)	$3.20 \pm .59$	

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

In our study, the most common motivation for marriage was love, showing that undergraduates view love as an essential requirement of such a relationship and the key motivation for marriage. This result is contextually in line with a previous finding that motivations for marriage are influenced by social changes and that young adults are increasingly perceiving individuals' subjective aspects—that is, love, affection, attractiveness, and character—as important factors [13]. Lee [14] reported that having a desire to form a socially accepted, intimate relationship is a key factor in the motivation for marriage, and that other key factors include social pressure, love, emotional stability, parents' recognition, financial stability, influence of married colleagues, and desire for child birth. These findings suggest that factors other than love are also at play in motivations for marriage. Based on these findings, multilateral measures should be developed to help college students to understand marriage as an aspect of forming a relationship that promotes personal, family, and social stability and perceive marriage as a positive social institution.

On the other hand, forming a new family and having children was the least common motivation for marriage. This is contextually in line with a previous finding that younger generations consider themselves to be the most important and thus have negative perceptions of having children, such as being deprived of their personal time, not being able to buy things they want and invest in themselves due to childrearing costs, having to invest their effort in their children as opposed to themselves, and that they only want to invest their full effort in self-improvement [15]. Marriage has been, and still is, considered a product of love. However, Korea's Confucian culture, in which marriage and childbirth were considered mandatory duties, has been transformed over time, and today,

of marriage according to the motivation of marriage, the view of marriage of the subject who said that the marriage motive was 'economic well-being' was significantly higher than the subject who answered 'psychological stability' ( $F = 2.912$ ,  $p = .037$ )<Table 3>.

younger generations perceive childbirth as a choice as opposed to a duty. Therefore, a deep understanding of the reasons behind such a view of childbirth should precede the development of various measures to promote marriage, particularly an understanding of what children mean to them and what factors they consider when deciding to have children.

Oh [16] stated that a desire for a high quality of life and changes in perceptions about marriage among women brought on by rapid urbanization and industrialization make them perceive marriage as an option rather than a duty and serve as causes of the low birth rate. Therefore, prior to devising measures to solve the problem of low fertility, perceptions of childbirth among married couples of childbearing age should be surveyed, and it is also important to instill a sense that childbirth and marriage are not merely matters for individuals and families but also critical factors in the existence and wellbeing of the society and nation. Furthermore, it is imperative that the government acknowledges that marriage is not a matter of individual perception but is a problem that reflects social conditions and atmospheres, so it must implement measures to resolve issues pertaining to employment, residences, and the financial burden of childrearing when devising strategies to boost the marriage rate.

The mean score of views on marriage among the college undergraduates was  $3.18 \pm .45$ , which was similar to that reported in Kim's study [7] ( $3.11 \pm .47$ ) and that in Lee and Hong's study [13] ( $3.30 \pm .33$ ), showing that college students exhibit quite a conservative view on marriage. Perceptions about marriage are not formed at the time of marriage, but rather slowly develop over time from early adulthood [16], necessitating education programs for college student to cultivate a positive view of marriage.



Moreover, efforts to transform the negative perceptions of marriage among undergraduates are needed, such as ads and education that could be used to instill a sense that marriage and childbirth are sources of happiness in family and society [17].

Among the items on views on marriage, the item “You can get married only if you have money” received the highest rating. Further, undergraduates choosing financial stability as a motivation for marriage had the most conservative views on marriage. This is in line with the previous finding by Joo, Chung, and Shim [18] that socioeconomic status and occupation have direct and indirect influences on college students’ choices of spouse and decisions to marry. Moreover, this result reflects that although many undergraduates chose love as their greatest motivation for marriage, they also considered the practical changes that result from marriage. Despite grave socioeconomic changes in South Korea, most college students still consider marriage as an important developmental task with which childbirth should be considered, and they must take into consideration the great burden of rearing a child once they choose to have children. Therefore, various governmental policies that lessen the burden of childrearing would ultimately serve as a crucial factor in promoting the formation of a positive view of marriage. In fact, Do [17] reported that the majority of students claimed the “burden of childrearing costs” to be the cause of low fertility.

Meanwhile, college undergraduates with religious beliefs had a significantly more conservative view of marriage than those without them. This is in contrast with Kim’s findings [19], where views on marriage did not significantly differ in relation to religion, while it is in line with Lee and Hong’s [13] findings that views on marriage significantly differed in relation to religion. Kim and Chung [20] reported that such religion-based education has a positive impact on preparing for marriage. This may be attributable to the fact that perceptions of marriage as well as the level of education to prepare individuals for marriage differ across religions. Some religious organizations provide opportunities for single individuals to acquire various marriage-related knowledge and learn about family relations and parental roles.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is important to implement efforts to monitor individuals’ perceptions of marriage and to foster positive perceptions from the college stage on, when affection-based social relations between men and women are most actively formed. Further, these efforts would be effective when implemented stepwise in multiple platforms, such as families and communities, in addition to schools, and changing social perceptions to cultivate a desirable marriage culture would be more important than simply encouraging marriages to solve the problem of the low birth rate.

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