

# Horticultural Therapy Program for Multicultural Groups

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## Abstract

*In 2006, 41% of newly-married Korean men living in agriculture or fishery area were married to foreign wives. These foreign wives suffer social, cultural, and psychological maladjustment. They need support in understanding Korean culture & language, economic independence, and mental health. This horticultural therapy program (HT program) was practiced to help the foreign wives gain emotional stability, to help them adapt to rural society, and to help them improve the relationship with their families. The participants of this HT program were 10 foreign wives, 5 Chinese, 2 Vietnamese, 1 Japanese, 1 Thai, and 1 Filipina. Total sessions were 12, and each session lasted for two hours. This program started April and ended July in 2007. After this program, self-esteem of participants increased from 29.6 to 33.5, and stress decreased from 77.3 to 64.7. Participants also expressed sense of satisfaction and accomplishment after the program.*

## Introduction

“Multi-culture” is a major issue in Korea today. According to 2007 Statistics Office data, about 130,000 women marriage immigrants came to Korea for the past seven years. In 2006 alone, 3,525 farmers and fishermen living in rural area, 41.0% of 8,596, were married to foreign women. Most of the marriage immigrants came to Korea without sufficient knowledge and information about Korea through religious groups or marriage brokers. Consequently, they suffer from social isolation and economic problems caused by lack of communication and different world views (Kim, 2007). However, these marriage immigrants do not receive much support from the Korean government in reality. Therefore, the society and the government need to pay more multifaceted and comprehensive attention to and make efforts for multicultural families.

This study approached multicultural families with the perspective of horticultural therapy in order to help stabilize multicultural families and support marriage immigrants adjust to Korean culture through a horticulture therapy program. The HT program used for this study, in particular, focused on improving immigrant women’s mental health and the relationship of the international couples. It also provided the female immigrants with an opportunity to speak about their feelings, empathize with them, and helped them to relieve negative emotions.

## Materials and methods

### Subjects and period

Twenty female immigrants agreed with Seochon Agricultural Technology Center to

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participate in the HT program. Due to the difficulties in the rural area, only 10 participated regularly while the other 10 participated irregularly. Six female immigrants who did not participate in the programs were compared as a control group. The HT program ran from April to July 2007 every week. The program consisted of 10 sessions with 2 hour each.

**Session activities and objectives**

The HT program aimed at emotional stability of immigrant women, improvement in the relationship of international couples, and stability and revitalization of rural communities. Session activities were designed in phases in order to help participants find interest in the programs and recover self-confidence. The first objective of the activities was to help immigrant women feel a sense of pride through acquiring new knowledge while learning positive Korean expressions. Second, it aimed to provide social support and alleviate loneliness and feelings of marginalization by supporting participants to share feelings and form bonds. Third, the horticultural activities were designed to release and reduce negative feelings, and serve as a topic for communication between the international couples.

**Tab. 1: Sessions and activities of Horticultural Therapy Program for Multicultural Group**

Session	Time	Activity Title	Activity Details
	4/12	----- Prior Survey -----	
1	4/19	Sweet Party	Cake decoration with flowers
2	4/26	Heartbeat	Plant breeding
3	5/03	Full of Love	Flower basket with love
4	5/10	Small World	Plate garden
5	5/17	Colorful Transformation	Scarf dye
6	5/31	As the Sun and the Wind Goes	Petals pick and dry
7	6/07	Different World	Planting seedlings
8	6/14	With Flowers and Love	Pressed flower photo frame
9	6/21	I Can Do It Now	Crashing
10	6/28	Happy Memory	Wall Photos
	7/05	----- Follow-up Survey -----	

**Evaluation Methods**

The study employed Rosenberg’s Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and Abell’s Stress Scale (Abell, N., 1997) before and after the HT program to the test and control group in order to check the effect. High scale of the self-esteem indicates high level of confidence, and low scale of stress indicates low level of stress. After the program, the test group was asked to express their feeling. Their reactions were also used for evaluation.

## Results

### Changes in Self-esteem and Stress

The result of the survey on self-esteem and stress conducted on the test group and the control group in order to identify the effect of HT program is as the following. (Tab. 2) After the program, the self-esteem of the test group increased from an average 29.6 to 33.5 while the stress dropped from 77.3 to 49.5. Meanwhile, the control group showed almost no change in the self-esteem recording 27.8 and 27.3 before and after the program. Their stress fell from 77.3 to 64.7, but the reduction rate was significantly lower than that of the test group.

**Tab. 2: Changes in Self-esteem and Stress**

Item	Section	Before	After
Self-esteem	Control group	27.8 (6 people)	27.3 (6 people)
	Experiment group	29.6 (10 people)	33.5 (8 people)
Stress	Control group	77.3 (6 people)	64.7 (6 people)
	Experiment group	67.1 (10 people)	49.5 (8 people)

### Reactions to the Program

After the program, participants expressed many positive reactions such as feelings of happiness, thankfulness and understanding, and emotional stability, etc. (No data attached).

### Changes at Each Session

A horticultural therapist examined positive effects of the program to the participants at each session. As they progressed to the next session, participants became more interested in the program and showed therapeutic effects (No data attached).

## Discussion

The study showed that horticulture programs can be a great method to help female marriage immigrants in Korea to settle down in the society. This could be confirmed by the fact that immigrant women in multicultural families who experience difficulties due to differences in language and viewpoints could feel joy and comfort from participating in the HT program. In addition, as the participants' reactions such as "I felt that someone was helping me" and "I now understand and accept Korea" show, HT programs gave them an opportunity to trust Korea.

## Conclusions

After employing the HT program to female marriage immigrants, the self-esteem of the test group increased from an average 29.6 to 33.5 while the stress dropped from 77.3 to 49.5. Meanwhile, the control group showed almost no change in the self-esteem recording 27.8 and 27.3 before and after the program. Their stress fell from 77.3 to 64.7, but the reduction rate was significantly lower than that of the test group. After the program, participants expressed many positive reactions such as feelings of

happiness, thankfulness and understanding, and emotional stability, etc.

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