

Dyadic Decision-Making Process of Middle-Aged Couples in Korea: The Case of Retirement Migration

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The decision-making process of couples can be influenced by the decision context and the life stage of each partner. Midlife couples, in particular, are in a transitional phase where their decisions may have a significant impact on their later life. This study explores Korean middle-aged adults' decision-making on retirement relocation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight individuals (four dyads) in their 50s and early 60s. A total of 12 individual and joint interviews were conducted to understand their lived experiences. Results showed that dyadic processes, characterized by withholding, cooperative, and collaborative patterns, contributed to distinct decision-making and follow-up experiences. Further, the dyadic consensus in shifting marital power and spousal interactions influenced couples' adaptation to marital relationships after relocation. This research extends knowledge on the late midlife decision-making between spouses on major life transitions. Findings provide insights into the potential resources and constraints of dyadic decision-making, which may influence couples' long-term experiences.

Keywords: married couples, dyadic decision-making, late midlife relocation, spousal interaction

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Introduction

Couples often encounter decisions that they need to make as a family, ranging from trivial tasks to significant ones like dividing household chores to purchasing a house. These decisions can be made collaboratively or by one individual. Although unilateral decisions can be made on the mundane, major life events require joint decisions. It is essential to understand the decision-making process, which entails motivations, influencing factors, decisions, and post-decision processes. Decision-making as a couple is even more complex than individual decision-making, as it involves spousal influence and the need for consensus between spouses (Joo et al. 2023).

Couples' decision-making varies by context over time based on the life course perspective (Godwin and Scanzoni 1989; Park and Lee 2005; Richmond et al. 1997). For instance, younger couples may need to make joint decisions on parenting, while older couples prioritize health and retirement. Meanwhile, midlife couples, who often receive less research attention (Infurna et al. 2020), are in a pivotal period linking earlier and later life (Lachman et al. 2015). Middle-aged couples face opportunities to plan and prepare for their future by utilizing their past experiences and resources. One important aspect to consider is retirement, which may lead to residential changes. The expectation of retirement may prompt residential change (Stockdale and MacLeod 2013; Sampaio and King 2019).

The downward shifting of the retirement age and retirement at different life stages highlights the need to explore the middle-aged population (Stockdale 2014). The desire for new lifestyles and better quality of life are widely stated motivations for relocation in mid and later life (Benson and O'Reilly 2016; Stockdale 2014). Such desires are shown in the metropolitan-to-nonmetropolitan moves. Warm weather, being close to nature, and a slower pace of life are preferred characteristics linked to a rural idyll. The desire may trigger the thought of relocation, but initiating the thought does not always lead to acting. Thus, the process of deciding on relocation needs to be examined to understand the facilitating and constraining factors.

Unlike one-time decisions, relocation is a consequential decision that the aftereffect prolongs. It is worth discovering what happens after relocation. Relocation in the retirement transition brings changes to one's environment, lifestyle, and relationships. Among these changes, marital relationships are one of the influential ones that couples may need to readjust. Specifically, being away from work usually reduces social network size, and the spousal relationship remains significant. Given the increased time spent together,

marital interactions may need to be reoriented. The unique experiences in relocation adaptation may differ by the dyadic decision process, considering past experiences and future anticipation. Thus, this study explores how couples make relocation decisions, focusing on married couples who relocated from the Seoul metropolitan area to Jeju, an island located in the southwest of the Korean Peninsula. Further, experiences on adaptation within couples after the relocation are described.

Decision-making among couples

For decades, scholars have attempted to unravel the complexity of dyadic decision-making (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Godwin and Scanzoni 1989; Queen et al. 2015), yet there is still more to discover. The most widely studied concept related to decision-making is marital power. Traditionally, husbands' power is stronger than that of their spouses and increases with more resources such as education, income, and occupational status (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Rodman 1972; Xu and Lai 2002). Such a trend has been shifting due to wives' higher participation in the labor force and changing gender role attitudes (Godwin and Scanzoni 1989; Darling et al. 2012).

Marital power results in spousal influence, defined as "decision responsibility attributed to the husband or wife by the spouse" (Qualls 1987, p. 266). Spousal influence is determined by multiple factors, such as inequity of resources, love/caring, and modernity in gender role preference (Adams 2004; Godwin and Scanzoni 1989). For instance, spouses with more financial resources tend to have more marital power and thus have stronger spousal influences. The spousal influence may or may not be received by the other spouse. Given that the interactions are two-way in direction, the reactions of both spouses need to be considered. Spouses may resist, resent, or cooperate with their prevailing spouse.

Previous experiences can also influence dyadic decision-making (Smith and Moen 2004). Nonetheless, there are contrary findings on how past decision-making experiences in earlier life affect dyadic processes. On the one hand, spousal influence on decision-making has been perceived as constant over the life course (Huber and Spitze 1983). On the other hand, the degree or the direction of spousal influence has been shown to vary by the context (i.e., companionship, childbearing) (Godwin and Scanzoni 1989). Moreover, the decisions may range from mundane to highly consequential ones which often involve more interactions between spouses.

Midlife and decision-making on relocation

Carl Jung portrays midlife as the afternoon of life, bridging the morning and evening (Lachman 2015; Infurna et al. 2020). Influenced by early life and to be influential in later life, midlife needs to receive more research attention. The existing evidence emphasizes younger couples facing the decision of childbearing or older couples deciding on their medical treatments. Middle-aged couples face opportunities and challenges as they are in life transitions. While their careers may be stable and rewarding, it can be challenging to handle multiple family roles and balance losses with the aging process (Infurna et al. 2020).

How individuals perceive the future time left may influence marital relationships. Future time perspective, “the timing and ordering of personalized future events” (Wallace and Rabin 1960, p. 229), pertains to individual differences. Even with a similar future time perspective, spouses may react differently. For instance, middle-aged adults may view themselves as approaching the later stages of life and display more forgiveness in their marital interactions. Conversely, some individuals may perceive time as limited and, therefore, become more self-centered, expecting more from their spouses.

A life course perspective is often applied to the dyadic decision-making literature (Queen et al. 2015; Smith and Moen 1998), emphasizing major life transitions. However, research on important life events such as retirement often focuses on older adults, with little regard for the pre-retirement group. Even though retirement occurs in later life, the process starts earlier (Stockdale and MacLeod 2013). Thus, studying midlife planning and acting on later life transitions benefits future older adults and prepares the younger group for their later life. Relatively young, healthy, and financially secure couples move from the urban north to rural areas (Litwak and Longino 1987; Smetcoren et al. 2017).

Retirement relocation is considered a process rather than an event, as Wiseman (1980, p. 146) defines it as a “continuous or periodic reevaluation of residential satisfaction.” As such, there is a need to understand life after settling down. Work life and daily life are changed, and more importantly, the marital relationship might need to be readjusted as middle-aged adults transit into later adulthood. The spousal relationship is core to social relationships and becomes more critical as individuals age. Interpersonal and environmental changes may bring changes to middle-aged adults’ marital relationships.

One of the most apparent changes after the relocation is the time spouses spend together. Leisure or free time increases substantially after retirement and relocation compared to a busy urban working life. Added to the decreasing scale of social relationships, the amount of time spent with one's spouse is likely to increase. Also, existing literature suggests that husbands and wives spend more time on housework after retirement in both gendered domains (Szinovacz 2000). Depending on the spouses' gender role ideology, changes in housework time can cause conflicts within couples (Smith and Moen 1998). The consensus within couples (i.e., modern or traditional) may play an important role when adjusting to these changes.

Decision-making as a process

Figure 1 presents a model of the decision-making process among couples adapted from the framework suggested by Queen, Berg, and Lowrance (2015). The truncated pyramid depicts how husband and wife make decisions as a couple throughout the decision-making process. There are four phases involved in the decision-making process, including decision identification, information search, decision-making, and post-decision process. Once a decision that needs to be made is identified, decision-makers engage in an information search to gather relevant information that will guide their decisions. After making the decision, the post-decision process follows, which refers to the satisfaction or regrets that may arise regarding the decision made.

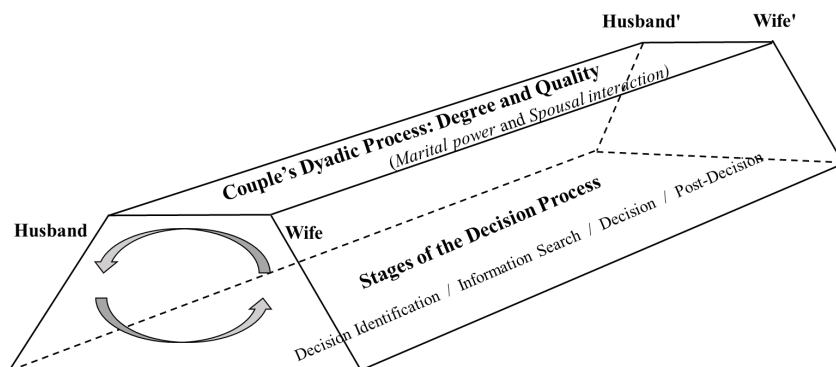


FIG. 1.—ADAPTED FROM QUEEN, BERG, AND LOWRANCE (2015)'S FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN COUPLES

Among couples, all stages of the decision process are influenced by the couple's dyadic process. The truncated top of the pyramid shows the composites of the dyadic process. Specifically, the degree and quality of spousal influences on decision-making are the key components that are being addressed. The *degree* of dyadic processes refers to the level of collaboration or joint decision-making made by a couple. Collaborative decisions can be described by the equal share of say, which is closely linked to marital power (Choi et al. 2019; Rodman 1972; Szinovacz and Davey 2005).

Marital power can be unbalanced (husband prevailing or wife prevailing) or balanced (equal). Meanwhile, the *quality* of dyadic processes refers to positive and negative interactions, such as affiliative interactions or criticism. Berg and colleagues (2013) identified couples' interactions based on the level of affiliation: high affiliation (i.e., cooperate, oblige), and low affiliation (i.e., control, withdraw). Importantly, it is the distinct combinations of the degree and the quality that contribute to dyadic processes overall.

Deciding to relocate is a complex process that often involves discussions between spouses. Couples may seek advice from those who have already retired and relocated or search for information online. The decision to relocate involves either moving to a new place or staying within their current community. The subsequent steps after the decision to relocate may depend on how well the experiences align with their expectations. As described earlier, the degree and quality of dyadic processes may be the key components of not only how the decision is made but also post-relocation experiences.

Additionally, the dyadic processes can be affected by individual resources, decision context, and other social influences (Queen et al. 2015). Individual resources involve both individual and couple levels. Health status (e.g., physical, cognitive), experience/knowledge, and interpersonal resources are included. Either spouse having a friend or family member living in the anticipated relocation area can be a beneficial resource for the couple. Decision contexts, such as financial or medical decisions, show different spousal influences. The domains of the decision may relate to the gender role. For example, the role of breadwinner or caregiver specifies tasks between spouses.

Dyadic decision-making in the Korean context

The tradition of the patriarchal family remains influential in Korean middle-aged couples (Moon 2017). Such a trend is more prevalent among older

groups. However, with rapid modernization and urbanization, some families are moving away from this traditional practice. As a result, a combination of traditional and modern values can be seen in many families (Sung and Byun 2013). This led to a shift in economic power and the pursuit of equality in the marital relationship. Research indicates that couples with similar income levels and both spouses being employed are more likely to share decision-making power in their marriage (Choi et al. 2019).

In Korean literature, it is affirmed that marital relationships improve with equality in spousal influence, which aligns with research in Western countries (Jang et al. 2009; Yoo 2022). A qualitative study on middle-aged couples found that the congruency between spouses benefited marital relationships (Choi and Yu 2018). Major life events that occur with life transitions may alter marital relationships. A recent study on the retirement preparation of middle-aged couples found that psychological well-being was influenced by family relationship quality (Park, Kim, and Han 2023). Another study explored the patterns of problem-solving strategies among middle-aged couples and indicated that patterns other than active solving reported a lower level of marital satisfaction (Joo et al. 2023).

The level of conjugal communication was strongly related to middle-aged rural migrants' life satisfaction (Kim and Lee 2016). The Korean literature examines various aspects of married couples; however, there is limited research on the experiences of middle-aged couples, particularly in the area of dyadic decision-making as a process.

Methods

In order to generate narratives of the lived experiences of Korean middle-aged couples, in-depth interviews were conducted in Jeju in November 2022. These interviews were conducted to obtain a better understanding of the perspectives, decisions, and experiences of the couples, both individually and collectively. Unlike survey questions, which are limited to capturing the details of dyadic processes, interviews are especially beneficial to understanding the dynamics of couples as they perceive their shared experiences (Bjornholt and Farstad 2014). This study conducted individual and joint interviews considering the advantages of each mode (Blake et al. 2021; Eisikovits and Koren 2010). Joint interviews have the advantage of access to interactions between interviewees (Eisikovits and Koren 2010), and illustrate couples' shared perspectives (Polak and Green 2018).

The study population was restricted to late midlife married couples who moved from the Seoul metropolitan area to Jeju Island. A total of eight participants (four dyads) aged 54 to 63 were purposively selected to be included in the present study. One couple was in their 50s, and the rest were in their early 60s. Participants were interviewed in their homes for three sessions, two individual sessions, and one joint session. In total, 12 sessions were conducted, and each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. This study did not include sensitive topics that could make participants hesitant to express their views, which allowed for less restriction on conducting joint interviews.

All the participants were interviewed in Korean. Participants were administered a demographics survey which included questions about their age, previous working status, and duration of the relocation. Participants were encouraged to describe their relocation process in a semi-structured interview format. Specifically, participants were asked about their experiences regarding their motivation for relocation, how the decisions are made between spouses, and the experiences after the relocation. The responses were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcribed text was brought together and read in detail. The author aggregated and analyzed the responses, noting contradictions and developing narrative themes (Braun and Clarke 2012). In all cases, participants were informed about the project and that it would be used confidentially and for scientific purposes. Consent forms were collected from all participants. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Dongguk University in Seoul.

Results

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the study participants. The age of participants ranged from 54 to 63. In two dyads, husbands were older than their wives. All the husbands and half of the wives were employed before their relocation. Two wives reported that they were housewives before moving to Jeju. The duration of time living in Jeju ranged from five to 18 years. Also, all participants were generally in good health.

Similar answers emerged when the couples were asked about what motivated them to relocate. Most couples, typically with the husbands taking the lead, wanted to pursue a different lifestyle and envision an ideal retirement. The wives followed their husbands' decisions without significant disagreement, although there was an exception in Dyad 4, where the wife

TABLE 1
INDIVIDUAL AND COUPLE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

		Dyad 1	Dyad 2	Dyad 3	Dyad 4
Age	Husband	60	61	57	60
	Wife	58	63	54	60
Previous working status	Husband	Working	Working	Working	Working
	Wife	Housewife	Housewife	Working	Working

suggested the move. Such initiating thoughts began in their 40s and 50s. This can be described as decision identification.

Dyad 1, Husband: [In his 40s] I wanted to live a life that I can do what I wish to... which combines work and things I love.

Dyad 2, Husband: I was in my mid-50s and needed to plan for retirement, and the childhood experience of rural life got me thinking about retiring in a rural community.

Dyad 3, Husband: Age 50 is halfway through life, and I felt the need to prepare for the second half... I wanted to leave urban living behind.

The decision identification leads to an information search. Regardless of which spouses suggested the residential move, husbands were the ones who turned their thoughts into actions. All participants commonly stated that the husbands came to Jeju first to settle down, and then the wives joined their husbands later. Couples retrieved information either by themselves or from friends and relatives.

Dyad 4, Husband: I came to Jeju six months before my wife and traveled around to rest and get an idea of how things were going and what I could do for a living.

Dyad 3, Husband: My sister lives here, and she provided land and the house... I asked for her expertise.

In the next phase, the decision was made by the couples. Husbands

relocated and settled down, and then their wives followed. Some wives agreed to relocate because they believed that Jeju would be a good place to live, as their husbands anticipated. Others moved because they did not have alternatives.

Dyad 4, Wife: My parents lived in Jeju, and I liked here every time I came here. I could imagine myself living here.

Dyad 3, Wife: I did not have any alternative choices, so I just followed my husband.

Post-decision processes of the participants suggest that all of them were satisfied with their decision to move to Jeju. There are things they miss about urban life, but the decision to relocate overall was assessed as satisfying. In addition, influencing factors include individual resources, decision context, and other social influences. As described earlier, three out of four couples were relocated through chain migration, where family or friends had already moved to Jeju. Also, participants were generally healthy with some degree of rural experience.

In addition to perceptions and experiences described in the individual interviews, the joint interview revealed marital power and spousal interactions which were helpful to identify patterns of dyadic processes. Dyad 1 and Dyad 2 were identified as husband-dominant couples (“mostly my husband makes the decisions”; “It takes some time to have my opinions heard”). The difference between these two can be found in spousal interactions. Dyad 1 showed a lower level of affiliation and the wife tended to avoid conversations due to the conflict (“I try to help him and make suggestions, but then it becomes a conflict. Now I just wait until he figures it out himself”), whereas Dyad 2 showed a higher level of affiliation, in which both spouses were actively engaged in the interview as a couple and being assistive.

Dyad 1, Wife: You followed your freedom here, but my life became so much less free...

Dyad 1, Husband: Well...you can think of it that way, but you can find new things to do here which can bring positive changes...The premise that you just followed me can make your time here challenging.

Dyad 1, Wife: Um...I'm not saying that I just followed you, I agreed to move here because I thought it would be good....

Dyad 1, Husband: You have to find your own [freedom] fiercely, other ways you cannot find it in the future...

Dyad 2, Husband: I try not to nag my wife as we spend more time together...

Dyad 2, Wife: There are people who are on others' backs all the time.

Dyad 2, Husband: Being bothering, and making people hard to bear, then the time together would not be good...

Dyad 2, Wife: We try to be considerate.

Dyad 2, Husband: It's very hard to live in a rural area if couples are not being considerate.

Dyad 3 and Dyad 4 showed more equal marital power compared to other couples ("We make decisions as a family"). Dyad 3, the youngest couple, said that they used to be husband-dominant, where the husband makes most of the decisions, but this has changed since the relocation. Dyad 3 and Dyad 4 are characterized by high affiliation in their interactions, where wives are open to sharing their disagreements and husbands are willing to listen and resolve the issue.

Dyad 3, Husband: I try to follow my wife's idea when she has something that she wants to do.

Dyad 3, Wife: Honey, you are stubborn. You think you do as I told...

Dyad 3, Husband: No, no. I really try to not push my thinking as possible as I can

Dyad 3, Wife: I wish you were like that from the beginning.

Dyad 3, Husband: It's because I came here and became generous. I like our life here and have nothing more to ask.

Dyad 4, Wife: I try to follow my husband's lead when we make larger decisions like buying land... and my husband goes along with my decisions on minor things. There are quarrels but we make it work in the end. I don't know what he thinks. (Laugh.)

Dyad 4, Husband: I think so too. I insist on larger decisions and she makes the minor ones. There are not many decisions to make.

Dyad 4, Wife: There were conflicts, and we might have argued over them at the time, but everything is good after all (laugh)...

TABLE 2
DYADIC PATTERNS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

	Dyad 1 “Withholding”	Dyad 2 “Cooperative”	Dyad 3 “Collaborative”	Dyad 4 “Collaborative”
Marital power	Husband-dominant	Husband-dominant	Equal	Equal
Spousal interactions	Low affiliation	High affiliation	High affiliation	High affiliation

The first dyad showed disagreements and reported that both husband and wife were less open to sharing their emotions and thoughts to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Thus, they were identified as the “withholding” couple. The second dyad showed husband-dominant marital power, but with high affiliation, both spouses’ opinions are shared. This dyad was identified as a “cooperative” couple due to the wife’s characteristics, who followed the husband’s lead. The third and fourth dyads showed a similar level of power in the marital relationship and high affiliation, and were grouped into the “collaborative” couple category.

With the decision context, gender roles were found to be influential. For example, more significant decisions, such as relocation sites, are decided by the husbands and trivial ones by the wives. Three out of four dyads reported that the wife followed their husband, and one dyad followed the wife. The wife (Dyad 4) suggested moving to Jeju, but the husband was the one who did the planning for the retirement transition and building the house. Other social influences, including children or other social relationships, did not play an essential role. Middle-aged wives visited their hometowns more frequently than their husbands to visit their adult children.

Relocation is a consequential decision that needs adjustment regarding marital and other social relationships. This study focused on the spousal relationship in whether the relationship has been changed after the relocation. The amount of time spent together was the prominent change couples reported. The withholding couple experienced more conflicts with the longer joint time, whereas other couples enjoyed their time together.

Dyad 1, Husband: For 20 years, I have worked day and night, so we did not spend that much time together, but now we are together 24 hours, so there are some good sides, but obviously, there are some conflicts. We try to find

the middle ground when there are conflicts, but it is difficult. You might think time can solve some problems [disputes], but as people age, there are permanent characteristics, and you cannot get over the things you could when you were younger.

Dyad 2, Wife: I used to spend most of my time alone before the move, and I like how we are now together most of the time. We are like friends; sometimes go to the coffee shop together.

Dyad 3, Husband: When I was younger, my wife's nagging bothered me, but life here may have made me broad-minded, or maybe there is no other stress. Discovering new things about my wife is interesting, and even her complaints are adorable.

Dyad 4, Wife: I waited for this time to come...spending time and having leisure activities together. Such a lifestyle came earlier than I expected, with its downside, like limited income. Other than that, I did not have to adjust [my marital relationship]. I am just enjoying our time together.

Time perspective influenced the marital relationship as well. The perception of having limited time left led to the desire to be a better spouse or to treat oneself better. Traditional gender roles contributed to some of the participants' views on later life.

Dyad 2, Husband: I try not to nag my wife, so I can have her keep feeding me in the future. Who would want to feed a nagging old man? It is miserable for a man to cook for himself... I try to prepare myself to be alone... it is hard to expect the end of life. It could be either her or me... men need to be prepared more than women.

Dyad 3, Wife: When I was younger, I... many people just focus on their husband, almost being clingy, but in my 50s and facing 60s...I let go of that hard feeling, and I am now more comfortable. Ideally, in my 70s and 80s, we will be like friends.

Dyad 1, Wife: Sometimes I feel it unfair to keep doing house chores that I have been doing my whole life. I think to myself, do I have to do housework until I die? Do I have to make breakfast even if I know I will die in two days? ...I am aging...things need to be changed...

Discussion

This research study explored the relocation experiences of middle-aged Korean couples from the planning stage to post-move adaptation. The decision-making was studied not only as a process but as a dyadic decision, focusing on married couples who have moved from the metropolitan area to a remote rural area. The authors aimed to understand the husbands' and wives' experiences in the decision-making process, and the dynamics between spouses during and after the decision.

To explore how couples make decisions, it is crucial to explore the dyadic processes that lead to unique encounters during the decision-making process. Dyadic processes are defined by their degree and quality (Queen et al. 2015), and the current study focused on understanding these two concepts through marital power and spousal interactions, respectively. The researchers identified three patterns based on the combination of these factors: "withholding," "cooperative," and "collaborative." The "withholding" and "cooperative" couples were characterized by the dominating husband, but the wife was more submissive in the cooperative couple. On the other hand, the "cooperative" and "collaborative" couples demonstrated high affiliation in their spousal interactions. The findings illustrate the importance of considering the experiences of both spouses in joint decisions as individual characteristics are limited in capturing the dynamics within a couple (Berg et al. 2013; Heaphy and Einarsdottir 2012).

The "withholding" couple adhered to traditional gender roles, yet the wife started to desire more equality in their marital power dynamic. This disagreement occasionally led to disputes, resulting in limited communication as a way of avoiding conflicts. The expectations of spouses' gender roles can change as they enter different life stages, which may have an impact on the relationship dynamics between couples (Sung and Byun 2013). As disagreements arise and escalate, they can pose new challenges that couples need to resolve. Moreover, antecedent factors affect dyadic processes (Godwin and Scanzoni 1989). The resentment harbored by the wife over the excessive housework may have accumulated during the earlier years of their marriage. The simultaneous occurrence of retirement and relocation may have triggered an uneasy feeling in the wife. It is also plausible that the realization of aging and its implications in later life revealed the concealed resentment.

The "cooperative" couple persisted in traditional gender roles similar to the withholding couple, but they differed in the level of agreement between

spouses. Again, it is worth noting that the consensus on the gender role within the couple can be influential. Couples can be either modern or traditional in terms of gender role attitudes, but the level of agreement matters (Godwin and Scanzoni 1989). The couple made dyadic decisions predominantly led by the husband, but the wife's opinions were also shared. The wife was persuaded throughout the decision process and was satisfied with the decision. During the process, the wife was actively engaged in various activities such as quilting or baking. Notably, the caring attitudes of the husband supported the cooperative relationships between spouses.

The "collaborative" couples were characterized by equal marital power and high affiliation in spousal interactions. These couples had the highest degree and quality of dyadic processes. Regardless of who suggested the relocation, both spouses were actively engaged in the decision. Also, both spouses in the collaborative couples showed satisfaction in the post-relocation process. Interestingly, all spouses were employed before the relocation, which may entail equal marital power based on social and economic resources (Blood and Wolfe 1960). It is understandable that financially independent wives have negotiable powers in marital relationships. Along with high affiliation, the relocation was decided and processed dyadically instead of individually.

The dyadic processes described above led to different experiences in couples' decision-making processes. Most couples showed that husbands initiated the thought of relocation with anticipation of a desirable later life. The wives and the husband who did not initially suggest the move had similar attitudes about Jeju, agreeing that it is an ideal place for retirement. There was an exception where the wife suggested relocating to Jeju. However, all couples reported that the husbands were primarily responsible for gathering information about the move. This was due to traditional gender roles, where husbands were responsible for making major decisions and putting them into action.

Decisions were made depending on the type of dyadic processes. As a result, contrasting experiences were found in post-decision processes as well. Cooperative and collaborative couples agreed on satisfying relocation decisions, while the withholding couple showed less consensus. There are inconveniences such as transportation and arts and culture, but the advantages of relocation outweighed the constraints.

Additionally, the findings suggest that most wives have experienced changes in their gender role perspective and expect to share responsibilities that were once their domains. The pleasant experiences of relocation

adaptation by collaborative couples suggest that husbands' acceptance of their wives' gender role change is crucial. The cooperative couples once again underline the importance of consensus and assertive communication within the couple. Advancing in age and the uncertainty of the future motivated husbands to be more cooperative, doing housework and showing care. In contrast, the same future perspective triggered one of the wives to claim marital equality. The previous experiences of doing housework and taking care of the family became a burden as the wife thought of her physical ability and the rest of the time left. The perception of the remaining time of life can be approached differently.

There are limitations to this study. The sample size is small and, therefore, is not representative of middle-aged Korean couples. However, each couple was interviewed multiple times, including in individual and joint interviews, to allow a deeper understanding of their experiences. Additionally, the participants were mostly healthy and financially stable, which could make it difficult to understand the experiences of those who struggle with health and financial challenges. It is possible that the participants only represent those who have successfully adapted to their new community, and leave out those who may have left due to maladaptation. This aligns with the time following the relocation of the participants, which is around five to 18 years. It is a broad range of time but shorter periods are not included. Furthermore, some of the experiences may be due to the combination of relocation and retirement, which suggests the need for further studies. Future studies on a larger dyadic sample will be beneficial to confirm the experiences of middle-aged couples.

Regardless of the limitations, the present study provides valuable insights into the experiences of middle-aged couples. The focus on the ongoing decision-making process of relocation is often more complex than an immediate decision. Although there are annual reports on basic statistics of the relocation population, there are few studies available on personal narratives. Notably, the experiences of married couples and the dynamics of the dyadic decision-making process should be discussed more. Our study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on midlife decisions and the dynamics of spousal interactions.

Decision-making is often studied fragmentarily, such as the influencing factors on decisions or how the final decisions are made. However, the decision-making process includes the initiation, decision, the consequences of decisions, and adaptations following the decisions. These are essential components to have a comprehensive understanding of major decisions. As

midlife is demonstrated as a pivotal period linking the earlier and later years, we expect our findings to benefit mid- and later-life couples. Our findings provide information for couples to optimize the process of dyadic decisions in a way that the decision provides satisfaction as the impact of the decisions may be prolonged. Potential facilitating and constraining factors at each decision phase are discussed. It is encouraged to conduct future studies to enhance our understanding of decision-making in various life events, life stages, and cultural contexts.

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