Child Rearing Experiences of Foreign Wives Married to Korean Husbands

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Purpose This study was conducted to explore the child rearing experience and associated issues of foreign women married to Korean men.

Methods Eleven foreign women married to Korean men were selected by a purposive and snowball sampling method. Data were collected during the period from May to August, 2007 by a semi-structured interview guide. Transcribed interview data were analyzed using Giorgi's step of phenomenological analysis.

Results The findings revealed six major themes and relevant subthemes: (a) having motherhood, (b) struggling with obstacles, (c) getting lost, (d) finding ways, (e) harvesting; and (f) looking into the future.

Conclusions The participants were experiencing multiple acculturative stressors which negatively affected their capacity for rearing children. However, when they had appropriate support, they were able to achieve many successes. Moreover, they were self-directed and making their best efforts to realize their dreams. This study contributed to the limited knowledge on immigrant women’s child rearing experiences. It supported the need for comprehensive community programs that meet a variety of needs for this population and the need for public education.

Key Words child rearing, family, acculturation, cultural diversity, marriage

INTRODUCTION

Currently the number of foreign wives married to Korean husbands is estimated to be more than 250,000 in Korea. This number has increased markedly from the estimated 619 in 1990. In particular, since 2005, approximately 30,000 foreign women came to Korea every year to marry Korean men. These women are predicted to grow in number for the foreseeable future (Korea National Statistical Office, 2007).

As the number of this population rises, many associated issues also arise. More specifically, these women face intense difficulties in adapting to the cultural differences in communication, food, and housing patterns as well as adapting to the severe financial strain, marital conflict, family violence, cultural differences in educational values in child rearing, Koreans’ prejudice and discrimination against foreigners, and lack of supportive community networks (Han, 2006; Lee, 2005).

In order to solve these problems and prevent family dissolution, many suggestions have been offered such as providing opportunities to learn the Korean language, culture, and job skills, supplying stable workplaces, Korean friends, and counseling services.
and eliminating social prejudice against foreigners (Park & Yi, 2009; Seo, 2007). In fact, the Korean Ministry for Women and Family Affairs (2005) implemented a comprehensive community program providing Korean culture and language learning services for these women, and sent helpers for women who were in the postpartum period.

Meanwhile, Lim (2005) stressed that children are the most important factor to be considered for the healthy integration of these women into the Korean society, because children are the only blood ties, which give strong motivation for these women to adapt to the Korean society, and have a great impact on maintaining the family system and promoting the status of these women within the family. The women made efforts to consolidate their position in the family using their roles as a mother, and to satisfy their emotional needs through the relationship with their children by showing strong attachment to them.

However, Lee (2005) found that these women give birth to their children without sufficient preparations. They lack information about pregnancy, delivery, and child rearing because of the difficulties in information-gathering due to the language barrier. They are frustrated when their children bring homework or letters from the school. They complain that they have the hardest time when their children are sick and when their children need immunization shots because they cannot communicate with Korean health professionals. In reality, children of these women tend to have problems with normal language acquisition. They are estimated to have higher prevalence of emotional disorders, conduct disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, being left out, and identity confusion (Seo & Lee, 2007).

Considering the importance of children for the mental health of foreign wives and the complexity of the health problems in their children, community nursing programs for foreign wives should deal with not only the barriers associated with the Korean language and the cultural differences but also the health issues associated with their children. Although some community programs such as personal tutoring programs for the children of foreign mothers are being available, these are offered on an ad hoc basis without sufficient support (Kwak & Kim, 2009). More in-depth comprehensive information is needed in order to identify and provide appropriate nursing services in meeting the complex health needs of these mothers and their children in the community. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the child rearing experience and related issues of foreign wives married to Korean men to answer the question of “What is it like for foreign women married to Korean men to raise their children in Korea?”

METHODS

Research design and rationale
A phenomenological approach was used because the purpose of the study was to explore the subjective experience (a phenomenon) of the research participants without any presumptions. In particular, Giorgi’s method was chosen because it was developed from the Husserl’s perspectives of “[going] back to the things themselves”, while its purpose of obtaining “descriptions of a phenomenon” also corresponds to the purpose of this study (Giorgi, 1985, p.8; Husserl, 1977/1962).

Researcher’s qualification
The researcher took a qualitative research course and conducted a phenomenological study with colleagues using Colaizzi’s method while in a doctoral program. Later, a phenomenological research analyzed by Giorgi’s method was conducted for the doctoral dissertation and an article discussing the applicability of the phenomenological method to a certain group of research subjects by the researcher was published. During this process of learning, studying and practicing phenomenological methods, the researcher had the opportunity to learn the knowledge and analyzing skills of Husserlian phenomenology in depth.

Research participants and ethical considerations
Eleven foreign women married to Korean men residing in Kwangju City were selected by purposive and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria were having at least one child, ability to communicate in Korean
and/or English, willingness to participate in the study, and provision of signed informed consent.

Approval for the study was obtained from the Bioethics Committee at the Chonnam National University prior to initiating the research. Then, the researcher initially contacted and obtained permission from Mission for Foreign Workers, the oldest facility for foreigners in Kwangju City, which runs a counseling office for foreign women married to Korean men. After the purpose and the procedures of the study were explained and permission granted, potential participants were identified and encouraged to contact the researcher directly if they decided to participate. Participant-initiated contact was a way of ensuring autonomous participation and eliminating possible coercion with the Mission (who remained unaware of who the participants were).

The researcher met the participants only when they contacted the researcher with the intent to participate in the study. Eleven women called the researcher. During the first meeting between the researchers and each participant, details were provided concerning the purpose and procedures of the study including the length and the tape-recording of the interview as well as potential harms and benefits, issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were also assured that they could stop the interview at any time if they did not want to continue, or if they were uncomfortable and/or tired. Among the participants, two Japanese women expressed their concerns about recording, and the possibility that their interviews might be exposed to mass media. When the researcher explained again that their interviews would be used only for this study and only the researcher had access to the interview data, they were assured and gave permission for the research use of their interview data.

**Data collection**

Participants were interviewed from May to August 2007 in either the researcher’s office or their house, wherever they preferred and felt comfortable, using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews lasted for approximately 1.5 hours. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed by a research assistant. Transcribed data were reviewed and corrected by the researcher. Interview questions were broad, open-ended, and designed to avoid influencing the respondents’ answers in any way (Barker, et al., 1992). The first question on the interview was “Tell me your experience as a mother. You can tell me anything you want, anything that comes to mind.” Exploratory questions included, “Does it have any special meaning to you”, “What happened next”, “How did you feel at that time”, and “What did they do?” During the interview the researcher used therapeutic communication skills such as refocusing, clarification, reflection, empathy, and paraphrasing to assist the participants in being more focused and to feel more comfortable. At the end of the interview, all participants were questioned concerning demographic characteristics such as age, country of origin, level of education received and that of their husband’s, occupation of their husband, employment status, length of stay in Korea, housing, number and age of children.

**Data analysis**

Giorgi’s (1985) phenomenological method was chosen for the analysis. Table 1 summarizes the four steps of Giorgi’s method (Table 1).

**Rigor**

In order to make sure that the researcher was practicing phenomenological reduction correctly, a reflexive account of the actual research process was maintained as previously suggested (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Reflexive research is characterized by ongoing self-critique and self-appraisal, which shows the reasonable logic of the researcher’s interpretive practice and the process of recognizing potential prejudice and prejudgment. The reflexive journal also included the researcher’s fatigue, mood, and various difficulties in relation to the research in general. For example, the researcher kept a record of “Based on the literature review and my personal experiences with foreign wives residing in Korea, I consciously/unconssciously assumed that these women would be quite different from Korean mothers in a negative perspective. However, as interviews go on, I realize...”
that these women are not different at all in the aspects of passion and enthusiasm over their lives including their children’s education. They appear to be even more enthusiastic, wishful and devoted mothers compared to native Korean mothers. I feel like seeing our strong Korean mothers in 1960s and 70s while I interviewed these women.”

Another factor that could potentially affect the rigor of the study was the Korean language speaking ability of the participants. This was not a problem because most of the participants were fluent Korean speakers, having resided in Korea for over 7 years. Three participants who were fluent in both Korean and English had little difficulties communicating with the researcher, who had resided in the United States for 9 years and was able to speak relatively fluent English. The rigor of this study was also achieved by referring the procedure and results of the study to two experts of multicultural families with experiences in conducting qualitative studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Data Analysis Using Giorgi’s Method (Giorgi, 1985)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giorgi’s four-steps of data analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. One reads the entire description in order to get a general sense of the whole statement.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Once the sense of the whole has been grasped, the researcher goes back to the beginning and reads through the text once more with the specific aim of discriminating “meaning units” from within a psychological perspective and with a focus on the phenomenon being researched.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Once “meaning units” are delineated, the researcher then goes through all of the meaning units and expresses the psychological insight contained in them more directly. This is especially true of the “meaning units” most revelatory of the phenomenon under consideration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Finally, the researcher synthesizes all of the transformed meaning units into consistent statement regarding the participants’ experience. This is usually referred to as the structure of the experience and can be expressed at a number of levels.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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RESULTS

Individual characteristics of participants
Participants’ age ranged from 21 to 41. Two women were in their 20s, seven were in their 30s, and two were in their 40s. The women’s countries of origin were China, the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam. Current nationality of women from China, Philippines and Vietnam \((n = 8)\) was Korean. However, the three Japanese participants had maintained their Japanese citizenship because they considered it to be more beneficial for themselves and their children. Education level of participants ranged from junior high school to college graduate, while their spouses’ education ranged from elementary school drop-out to college graduate. Seven participants were full-time housewives, two participants from the Philippines were English language teachers, one Japanese woman was a Japanese language teacher, and one woman tended a street stall on a part-time basis. Ten of the participants’ spouses had low-wage temporary jobs and only one worked as a full-time employee. The length of stay of the participants in Korea ranged from 38 months to 15 years with a mean of 8 years and 4 months. Four of the women had three children each, five women each had two children, and two women had one child each. The age of the children varied from infancy to school age. Twelve children were at school age, nine were at preschool age, two were toddlers, and one was an infant (Table 2).

Structure of the experience
Two levels of the structure of the participants’ experiences (Giorgi, 1985, p. 19) were derived as the forms of themes and their associated subthemes. The following is the detailed description of the major themes and their respective subthemes. Participant’s responses are provided verbatim.

Having motherhood
These women had a strong sense of motherhood, and considered their children to be the most meaningful and a source of energy in their lives. They expressed
Table 2

*Individual Characteristics of the Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Current nationality</th>
<th>Formal education (yr)</th>
<th>Formal education of spouse (yr)</th>
<th>Employment of spouse</th>
<th>Length of residency in Korea</th>
<th>No. of children</th>
<th>Age(s) of children (yr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Part-time English teacher</td>
<td>10 yr</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>7 yr &amp; 4 mo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Elementary school dropout</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>4 yr &amp; 2 mo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>3 yr &amp; 2 mo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Part-time English teacher</td>
<td>8 yr</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>7 yr &amp; 6 mo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Part-time Japanese language teacher</td>
<td>9 yr &amp; 1 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8, 6, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Part-time street stall worker</td>
<td>15 yr</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10, 7, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>7 yr &amp; 11 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8, 6, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>9 yr &amp; 5 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9, 7, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Full-time housewife</td>
<td>10 yr</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8, 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the same wishes and love for their children as ordinary Korean mothers did. They also showed enthusiasm over their children's education.

Children as the meaning of life
Although the reasons for having a child were varied, children were treasured, and seen as the best thing they could have, someone who made them laugh and forget about ordeals they were suffering.

- “Even though I had conflicts with my husband, my marriage was a good decision because I had my children from my husband. My two boys are the treasure that God gave to me. If someone asks me what is the best thing for me in Korea, my two boys…” (Participant 5)
- “Here (in Korea) I was alone all by myself. That was the way I felt about myself. I felt like I existed alone in the middle of an ocean…At that time my life was so hard. But I came to life again thinking of my children.” (Participant 7)

Children as a subject of hope
Participants expressed wishes that their children had equally healthy lives and equal opportunities for education and careers as other Korean children had so that their children could realize their dreams and lead different lives from their parents.

- “I was born into a poor family. I don’t like my children to live the same way I had lived. My children go to college, have a good occupation, and have sufficient money. They live different lives from their parents’. That is what I hope for my children… In addition, I hope they meet good people.” (Participant 7)

Children as an object of commitment
The participants showed enthusiasm over their children’s education. They are more than willing to support their children’s education at all cost.

- “I wish I could support my kids just like Korean mothers do. I want to move to a good school district and I want my kids to learn the piano and taekwondo… I wanted to raise my children for myself. I did not want to leave them to someone else’s hands… I want to give everything to my kids, delicious food, good hospitals…” (Participant 8)

Struggling with obstacles
While rearing children, these mothers had to face and struggle against many limitations preventing them from fulfilling their role as a mother.

Financial strain
Financial strain prevented the participants from providing adequate support for their children’s education in a variety of ways.

- “I wish my kids learned the piano and taekwondo. But, I do not have money to support them. I am worried that my kids will lag behind Korean kids… I was hesitant to participate in school activities for parents even though I wished so much because I needed to donate some money.” (Participant 8)
- “I guess I am living the hardest life among foreign mothers… When I felt labor pain, I was going to go to a hospital. But my husband told me not to go because hospital fee was expensive at night. So I waited…” (Participant 5)

Lack of social support
The participants uniformly responded that they considered their husbands to be their most important source of support. However, spouses were also generally unhelpful and even harmful because of their uncooperative and violent attitudes, alcohol problems, and personality problems. In addition, some participants reported that they had few people to seek information from and/or to assist them in part because of language and cultural differences.

- “What my husband does at home is watching TV, eating meals, sleeping, getting up, washing, and going out. No talking… He is very very silent. I feel heavy. I get crazy. He comes back home late at night drunk…” (Participant 7)
- “In the Philippines, when you go out to somewhere, someone else in your village takes care of your child. But in Korea, there is no one. It is hard for me to take care of my child all by myself.” (Participant 7)
Lack of Korean language skills
Language barriers seemed to prevent these women from taking actions for their children.
- “[She was] about 5 months old, Y got pneumonia and the doctor said to admit her to the hospital. Oh my goodness!… I did not know Korean well. I did not understand what the doctor explained to me. I just smiled and said yes, yes…” (Participant 7)
- “I was so frustrated… frustrated, because I did not know Korean language. I was really scared when I was home without my husband. My baby was very warm at night. But I did not know how to speak Korean…” (Participant 4)
- “Sometimes I wanted to talk with the teachers of my kids. But telephone communication is much harder than face to face conversation. So, I am still reluctant to call someone.” (Participant 8)

Lack of information
Another barrier to healthy child rearing was the lack of information about child rearing/education including formal and private Korean educational systems, and uncooperative public education service providers including the teachers of their children.
- “I just became pregnant with no plans. It was very hard to have a baby with no information and no friends. So I cried for a week after giving birth to my baby. My baby also cried so much.” (Participant 9)
- “I had no idea about prenatal education and I watched TV all day at home doing nothing… My first son was so fretful and cried so much. But I did not have anyone to whom I could ask questions…” (Participant 10)

Social discrimination and prejudice
Both the mothers and their children experience various discriminations at schools, workplaces, inside hospitals and in the neighborhood.
- “When my baby was a first grader, she always cried. [I asked her], “Why?” [She answered] “They called me African, [they said] my mom was an Africa[n].” So I wanted to go to the school, but my children said, “Mom, please don’t come.”… Sometimes we have activities in school and I want to go and see what my children are doing, but I can’t… My children say, “Mom, don’t come, please”… I went to my children’s school only twice, but nobody talked to me, [not] even a mother…” (Participant 1)
- “My son’s teacher preconceives that I cannot speak Korean. She talks with other mothers excluding me… There was a chance arranged for children of foreign mothers to go to Seoul and see Korean palaces sponsored by YMCA. But the teacher sent his favorite Korean kid to Seoul instead of my son. I don’t have good feeling about her. I guess she looks down on and discriminates against my kid.” (Participant 5)

Psychological difficulties of own self
Most of the participants seemed to experience some levels of depression and anger in connection with many stressors, and this depression and unresolved anger have been unleashed on the children.
- “I seemed to lose my laughter. Sometimes I wished that there had been no children. I even imagined placing my baby into the refrigerator.” (Participant 9)
- “I am still afraid of making friends… I ate a whole chicken by myself at night… Two years ago I was very much dependent on alcohol, obese and thinking about divorce. My husband and I argued loudly many times and my kids hid themselves under the blanket because they were so scared.” (Participant 10)

Getting lost
Because of the many obstacles, these women have experienced some failures in their child rearing.

Abusing children
The participants reported that they were regretful because they tended to put their anger and stress on their children.
- “I raised my children in really bad ways. I hit them so many times because I was stressed out and had no friends. I even told my kids to jump off my apartment… Now I feel truly sorry for my kids.” (Participant 9)
• “When I get stressed out due to my husband, my stress goes to my first child... My husband did not work at that time, just staying home sleeping or watching TV. I was very frustrated. But I could not communicate with my husband because I did not know how to speak Korean. So I put my stress out on my children. I beat them many times.” (Participant 5)

**Helplessness**
Mostly because of the lack of Korean language skills, these women have experienced helplessness in terms of taking care of their children.

• “Once when I was home alone with my baby, she has fever of 40°C. I was so scared and cried. I cried because I was alone and scared. What could I do without my husband?” (Participant 3)

• “My heart feels sad. When my boy was seven years old, he asked me something. But I did not know how to answer in Korean. I do not know because I am not Korean. Ask your daddy...I also can’t understand a note from my son’s school. So I show it to my husband and say ‘Please read it for me.’” (Participant 7)

**A sense of inferiority**
These women tended to have a sense of inferiority about themselves and their children compared to Korean wives and Korean children.

• “Korean kids look stronger than my kids. They seem to have strong bones and teeth. They have much more beautiful teeth than Japanese. Their skin is also really soft and pretty...” (Participant 8)

• “As I am a Japanese mother, my children seem not to adjust well and do not have close friends... When there is a special program at my child’s school, I always miss to attend because I have no information... If I am a Korean mother, my kids may have different school lives. I feel sorry for my kids.” (Participant 5)

• “Korean mothers are very nice to their husbands. They change their make-up and clothes before their husband returns home. I am not that kind of woman... I want to learn their attitudes...” (Participant 8)

**Maladaptive behaviors of children**
Children revealed lying, addiction to computer games, stealing money, academic failure, attention deficit, language problems, and defiant behaviors.

• “My son’s home school tutor said that he had an attention problem and a bit poor Korean language skill. When I keep pointing out and scolding his distracted behaviors, he says, ‘Mom, you go to China, I will live with my dad here.’” (Participant 11)

• “When my son became [a] first grader, he always wandered outside playing computer games. It has been 10 years since we have struggled with each other. To me, he is just a defiant and rebellious kid. To him, I am an angry mother... I was shocked when I heard from someone that my son stole money from other children’s purse... He started Hapkido and quit within 2 weeks. He started piano and soon quit it again.” (Participant 10)

**Irrational decision-making**
Lack of information and hastiness of mind caused irrational decision-making.

• “Last year I bought a complete collection of fairy tales paying 600,000 KRW. I recognized that I should not follow what Korean moms do. But I felt like if I did not buy the books my kids would lag behind Korean kids.” (Participant 10)

**Finding ways**
While they were experiencing many limitations and/or consequent failures in their child rearing, these women also encountered various help and support which made it possible for them to cope, go forward, and achieve to a certain extent.

**Family support**
The participants appreciate their husband’s and his relatives’ support.

• “When I first met my husband in Vietnam, I was worried so much. ‘I cannot speak English. I cannot speak Korean. How can I live in Korea! If I get pregnant, how can I raise my children well?’ But now I am comfortable. My mother-in-law and husband assist me so much. My husband is so nice. He teaches me Korean language and tries his...” (Participant 8)
best to give everything that I want. My mother-in-law teaches me how to make Korean foods. I cannot make Korean foods without my mother-in-law’s help… Kimchi is hard to make and my mother-in-law just make it and bring it to me. She does not force me to make Kimchi.” (Participant 3)

- “My mother-in-law treated me like my mother did. She took care of my kids until she died. My sisters-in-law were also supportive and helped me a lot. My friends (foreign women) are suffering much stress due to their relatives and husbands, but I am fortunate to have such good relatives.” (Participant 11)

**Community network and support**
A community center for foreign mothers, its members, supportive health professionals, school teachers, and school mothers were helpful for the participants.
- “I liked to go to the meetings held at the Multicultural Families Center, because I could speak Chinese there, exchange information, and tell them anything about myself.” (Participant 10)
- “My daughter went to kindergarten when she was four. The teacher was so good and did not give favor to Korean kids whose parents gave many presents to her. She treated my daughter warmly and equally with other Korean kids. I guess my daughter became sociable because of the teacher at the kindergarten.” (Participant 11)
- “Some parents in my daughter’s school are very nice. They teach me some ways of good child rearing. Among them, a mother with four children was most helpful. She gave me [much] delicate advice such as when to give presents to the teacher and what to give…” (Participant 11)

**Programs for children**
The participants appreciated and wished for various programs arranged for their children in areas of music, computer, sports, Korean language, tutoring programs, and availability of public libraries.
- “An inexpensive tutoring program for children is helpful, because we can’t afford expenses for private academies where most Korean kids go.” (Participant 1)
- “I wish there were many curricular activities at school such as music and sports programs, so that my children can have chances to make Korean friends… I also wish there were more public libraries… I wish they could provide Korean language programs for kids aged between 4 and 5.” (Participant 9)

**Programs for mothers**
These mothers appreciated all the services provided for them such as Korean language programs, individual counseling programs, information-providing programs, and child-caring programs.
- “Since about 2 months ago, a teacher came to my home and helped me caring my baby… I do not pay. She plays with and teaches my baby. But I do not pay. Her heart is good [she is nice]. She teaches my baby Korean language… animal names, fruit names, and songs. She also teaches me Korean. She comes three times a week…she stays one hour. She loves my baby so much…” (Participant 3)
- “When I was having a really hard time I went to a fortune teller many times because I did not have anyone whom I can talk together with. When the fortune teller guessed right on my heart, I was so happy. When the fortune teller did not guess my mind right, I just told her what I thought and felt. As I felt ventilated when I talked with them, I just loved to go to fortune tellers at that time… Counseling Center for Women is very good because I can obtain information about childrearing, free computer programs, and free parent education programs. I also can receive counseling services when I am having a hard time.” (Participant 10)

**Harvesting**
In the middle of struggling, these women could achieve some success as rewards for their efforts and commitment.

**Bilingual and bicultural children**
The participants were proud of themselves and their children when they could accomplish something different from what Korean mothers and their children could do.
“When my Chinese relatives stopped by my house, my children were so excited to hear the stories about China. They say, ‘Mom, since you have such good relatives, we can live in China. If we can’t live [there], please let’s just visit.’ One day mothers of my kids’ friends called me saying, ‘My child asked me to go to China because they heard about China from your kids.’ I guess my children were really proud of my Chinese relatives.” (Participant 11)

“My children can speak both Korean and English because I sometimes spoke English since they were babies… my children want to go to the Philippines because they have a good memory there playing with their cousins…” (Participant 1)

Recognition of people around
Despite their sufferings, the participants were proud of themselves when someone recognizes their efforts and commitment.

“My daughter said that she was proud of her mom because she could speak Chinese fluently… four mothers in my daughter’s school asked me to teach Chinese for their children. The kids love to learn Chinese and tell their mothers what they learn. The mothers appreciate my teaching so much.” (Participant 11)

“My nephew-in-law said, ‘Aunt, I am not sure where I am now if you did not hold me when I was lost. Thank you so much for giving me your love.’ That was the happiest thing I have had since I came to Korea.” (Participant 2)

“My mother-in-law and relatives say that my husband has changed 180 degree. He stopped drinking since 3 years ago because of me.” (Participant 6)

Well brought-up children
Well-grown children are rewards of the women’s hardship.

“He is only 8 years old. But he often asks me, ‘Mom, aren’t you tired?’ He massages my shoulders saying ‘Mom, I love you, I love you.’” (Participant 7)

“When I started living here, it was not good because I could not speak Korean. But now it’s OK, I am very happy because my children grow well and we are happy together as a family.” (Participant 1)

“I seldom went to my children’s school not only because I did not have enough time but also I saw some kids much too dependent on their mothers. I was so proud of my daughter when she graduated from kindergarten because she took care of herself very well while other kids needed their moms’ assistance when they changed their clothes.” (Participant 11)

Self-development
The participants expressed joy of viewing their self-development.

“I love to watch Korean dramas on TV. It is fun and good to learn Korean language. When I came to Korea, it was very difficult to understand. But now I can hear almost everything! … My kids do not seem to think that my mother is a foreigner, maybe because I speak Korean language well and I make Korean foods well.” (Participant 8)

“At first, I could not eat Korean foods. But now I eat them well. Every day I just tried to eat Korean food little by little. If I don’t eat, I may get weak. So I ate Korean foods not to become weak and sick… Korean language is very hard to speak, write, and listen to. But my current Korean (language skill) is OK compared to three years ago.” (Participant 3)

Looking into the future
Despite many mistakes and failures, the participants make continuous and best efforts to raise their children well looking into the future.

Utilizing problem-solving abilities
Requesting answers from proper individuals, learning from Korean mothers, searching for words in a dictionary, seeking for information, and trying to communicate with family members were the means by which the participants used to solve problems with their children.

“I went to my kid’s school and met the teacher. As I told her that children in my daughter’s class
asked money from my daughter because I was a foreigner, she was really surprised. She told me that she thought my daughter had no problem because she did well at school. Since then, no more problems with money thing happened, maybe because the teacher asked the children not to do that.” (Participant 11)

- “When my son is sick, I search some Korean words that I need in a dictionary before I go to the doctor because I have to explain the symptoms of my child...I put Korean letter stickers to the doors of my house because I could not teach my kids Korean language. My kids had to look through the map of Korea when they enter the bathroom. I learned it from Korean mothers. All Korean mothers put letter stickers everywhere in their houses... It looked good to my eyes.” (Participant 8)

- “Although it did not change much, we tried very hard to change our way of talking and treating our children. I frequently talk to my husband, “Please don’t say like that to kids. I will change my attitudes. So you please change your attitudes.”... I [search on the] internet for education programs for mothers about childrearing.” (Participant 10)

Making continuous efforts toward integrating into Korean society

The participants recognized that they should be integrated into Korean society in order for their children to become true members of it.

- “Whenever I eat good tasting Korean foods, I ask the cook or the host, “How did you make this food?” Then, I wrote recipes and tried to make those foods at home... I have made Japanese apricot extract for many years (known to be good for gastrointestinal troubles by Korean traditional folk medicine). When my children have stomachache, I give the juice before medicating them, and they say “Mom, my stomach does not hurt anymore.” It is amazing... I buy many books for kids... with many pictures... because not only my kids but also myself can learn Korean language by reading these books... At first I tried to make Kimchi spending all night... although it was hard, I think it was one of the happiest times.” (Participant 8)


Utilizing strengths

The mothers were utilizing their strengths as foreigners to make their children live better lives.

- “I consider sending my kids to the Philippines because education cost in Korea is too expensive and I am not sure if I can afford education fees for my three kids in Korea. There are excellent schools in the Philippines requiring much less tuition compared to Korean schools... I send my kids to the Philippines during vacations. Last year my oldest son stayed there for three months. He came to speak English well because he made many friends there.” (Participant 6)

- “I am maintaining my Japanese citizenship because it is beneficial for my kids... I received more than 1 million Won when I gave a birth to my son in Yokohama. In addition, Japanese government provides much better social welfare services than Korean government does. Almost everything for kids is free in Japan.” (Participant 8)

Thinking positively

In the midst of troubles, the participants tried to think positively so that they could keep up with their lives.

- “It is good to live in Korea... The best thing is snow. We do not have snow in Vietnam. Vietnam is warm. When I saw snow for the first time, I opened all the doors at my house.” (Participant 3)

- “Although I am poor, my life is not so hard compared to others’ lives because I have supportive relatives and well brought-up children...” (Participant 11)

- “I learned a lot because my husband did not help me. My friends having a supportive husband cannot do as many things as I can... I learned
many things in Korea that I could not have learned if I had lived in Japan.” (Participant 8)

- “Even though I have conflicts with my husband, I have my children because I married my husband. My two boys are treasures that God gave to me. If someone asks me what is the best thing for me in Korea, my two boys…” (Participant 5)

- “It’s normal. It’s just normal. There is no mother who does not have pain in their heart in the whole world… Just let go. Do not think too negatively. If my children grow healthy… [it is all right]. That is a mother’s role… raising children. Ah! Really, truly I am a mother.” (Participant 7)

**Working**

The participants were working to support their children’s education, to prepare for the children’s future, and to support their families of origin.

- “These days I am working as a part-time Japanese language teacher three hours a week. I am also delivering newspapers at 5 o’clock in the morning so that I can afford monthly a payment of about 100,000 KRW for my kids’ books.” (Participant 8)

- “I want to make money. My son, good mom and dad, and good house… that is [my] dream.” (Participant 7)

- “I started making money working at my husband’s company…When I got pregnant, my husband said to me to stop working. But I just went to work. Working is more fun [than staying at home]. When I go to work, I meet people and learn the Korean language quickly…I send my money to Vietnam, to my parents. My mother lives in poverty and pain…” (Participant 3)

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to understand the child-rearing experiences of foreign women married to Korean men. The results showed that these women’s child rearing experiences were not separable and closely associated with other experiences that they had to face in the process of adapting to a new life in Korea. It supported some findings of previous studies and furthered the understanding of the relationships among various factors in a macro perspective.

In particular, the theme of “struggling with obstacles” shows the impacts of social isolation due to language and cultural differences and social discrimination and prejudice, emotional difficulties, and financial strain on child rearing. As a result, the research participants experienced “getting lost”, that consisted of the sense of helplessness and inferiority, irrational decision-making, and children’s maladaptive behavioral problems. But these issues can be overcome if there is a variety of adequate social support (“finding ways”) as well as self-directed efforts (“looking into the future”) and accumulative small successes (“harvesting”) in their lives. Most of all, the strong motherhood (“having motherhood”) of these women was a powerful source of energy that moved them forward.

The research participants were from four different countries and had diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Yet, their experiences were similar except for their current nationality. Japanese women did not change their nationality because they wanted their children to benefit from Japanese advanced social welfare system. Other than current nationality, this likely reflects that, even though their backgrounds are diverse, the women faced similar challenges in Korean society.

A number of studies (Choi, 2007; Han, 2006; Lee, 2005; Lim, 2005) have reported experiences among foreign women married to Korean men that commonly include disappointment at the reality being quite different from their expectations, troubles related to communications and cultural differences, and familial conflicts as major issues. In particular, communication problems tend to make other issues worse such as marital problems, difficulties in child rearing, and discrimination by native Koreans. Cultural differences also cause anxiety and low self-esteem, and work as barriers to interpersonal relationships and integration into communities. Others (Chung, 2008; Kim, Kong, & Lee, 2007) also found that foreign women tended to have difficulties in child rearing because of Korean language difficulty, financial strain, social prejudice, and husbands’ old age and lifestyle. In particular, Korean language difficulty
tended to make the women passive and more isolated. Chung pointed out that children’s educational needs were not met despite their mothers’ enthusiasm, due to the mothers’ lack of Korean language communication skill and lack of financial support. As a result, the children of these women tended to have more emotional and school adaptation problems. Meanwhile, Kwak (2008) found that foreign mothers were more pessimistic and depressive, and had negative attitudes toward children than Korean mothers. Chou (2010) also reported that immigrant mothers in Taiwan had high rates of psychological distress (70%) and depression (24%). These observations are very similar to the themes of “struggling with obstacles” and “getting lost” found in this study.

However, these women get help from diverse social support systems to some degree such as from other women from the same country and those in similar situations, non-governmental organizations, churches, shelters, Korean language schools, cooperative and supportive relatives, and their families of origin (Kim, Kim, & Shin, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2009). These factors correspond to the theme of “finding ways” in this study.

According to other researches of immigrant children, poverty and behavioral problems were closely related to immigration status, and poverty was associated with poor health practices (Anacleta, Santos, Luis, Nunes, & Brito, 2010; Baker, Dang, Ly, & Diaz, 2010). Ahn (2002) also reported that the strongest factor affecting parental stress among low income families was financial strain. These studies present the significance of financial stability for healthy development of children regardless of their immigration status, although in the case of foreign mothers, lack of language skills doubled the stress.

Regarding enthusiasm over children’s education, Song, Jee, Cho, & Lim (2008) reported that mothers from multicultural families had strong expectations that their children would become capable and competent individuals. This is also quite similar to the sub-theme of “children as a subject of hope” in this study.

The major difference between this study and other studies (Chung, 2008; Han, 2006; Kim, et al., 2007; Song, et al., 2008) is that the present study found participants to have active and positive ways of life while other studies assumed these women to be somewhat passive recipients of temporary social welfare and community programs. Even though they confronted and experienced many obstacles and failures, they ultimately were problem solvers using all the resources and strengths they could muster, pioneers making best efforts to adapt and grow, advocates for their children, and self-directed individuals taking responsibility for themselves.

Based on the above findings, the researcher offers some suggestions for nursing practice, education, and research. First, multifaceted services to meet the complex needs of the women and their children need to be developed. In particular, comprehensive community programs are needed to strengthen community networks and providing individual and family counseling and education, translation services, direct services for children based on their developmental stages, employment and opportunities to learn the Korean language and culture.

Second, the concepts of multiculturalism, acculturative stress, transcultural nursing and culturally competent nursing need to be included in nursing education as well as for the public not only to reduce social discrimination against and isolation of the women and their children but also to boost their integration into Korean society.

Finally, this study should be expanded to other populations. Experiences of husbands and children, developmental process and identity of children, factors affecting children’s adjustment and development, and perceptions, attitudes, and difficulties of teachers and peers regarding children from multicultural families need to be researched. In order to have more extensive knowledge over childrearing experiences of the foreign mothers, surveys need to be done using a large sample size and a questionnaire developed based on the findings of this study.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study was conducted to investigate the child rearing experience of foreign women
married to Korean men. Based on the results, the success of child education in multicultural families in Korea depends much on strong social supports and mature and inclusive atmosphere of the society that can facilitate the mothers’ psychological health and integrative adaptation to Korean society. In other words, although the first thing necessary for healthy education of children having foreign mothers is to support the mothers in their adaptation to the Korean language and culture as soon as possible, this adaptation does not simply mean helping learn a new language and adapting to a new culture. Ultimately, it is important to make a mature society where these mothers become true members living together in healthy and diverse Korean social networks, while they make best efforts to manage their own lives. During this dynamic process, nurses can play major roles as resources, advocates, supporters, and assistants as well as policy makers affecting laws, systems and programs for this population.

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REFERENCES


