



Exploring the Narratives on Domestic Violence Experienced by Married Immigrant Women in Korea

Youngsoon Kim¹, Haiying Huang^{2,*}, Gihwa Kim³, Youngsub Oh², and Chunyang Li²

¹Department of Social Studies Education, College of Education, Inha University, Incheon 22212, Korea

²Department of Multicultural Education, Graduate School, Inha University, Incheon 22212, Korea

³Graduate School of Education, Inha University, Incheon 22212, Korea

This study is to explore domestic violence experienced by married immigrant women in Korea through narrative inquiry method. Especially, the purpose of this study is to find the living world which they experienced during the period of family disintegration. Three research participants were from China and Philippines. Participants chose to go to Korea for a better life and with an expectation of Korea as an active subject, but commonly experienced economic difficulties in married life. They attempted to overcome economic difficulties through subjective efforts, but they experienced multiple violence in marriage life and finally divorced. Focusing on the reason why divorced immigrant women cannot but disintegrate their family, this study explores their narratives.

Keywords: Married Immigrant Women, Divorce Experience, Domestic Violence, Narrative Inquiry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Korea is no exception to the tendency of “feminization of migration,” which has been spreading globally since the 1980s. Due to gender inequality in rural areas and the government’s support for population aging and low birthrates, married immigrant women have increased in Korea. According to a survey by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family¹ on married immigrants and naturalized persons, their number in 2015 is 304, 516, and the percentage of women is 81.5%. Their 16% account for the residence period in Korea of less than 5 years, 36.1% for the period from 5 to 10 years, 27.3% for the period from 10 to 15 years, and 20.6% for more than 15 years. In comparison with the number in 2012, the percentage of residents for five years or less has decreased, while residents for 10 years or more has increased significantly. However, the number of their divorces is about 10,000 each year. Even remarried families are often divorced. According to the statistics of divorce counseling in multicultural families, released by Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations, divorce counseling for remarried families has increased from 28.5% in 2015 to 34.2% in 2016.²

Previous studies can be divided into the following two themes: married immigrant women’s experiences of conflict and violence, and their experience of divorce and post-divorce life. Hwang³ emphasized that economic violence can be the core of the victim experience. Chang and Park⁴ said that those women have been

exposed to two or more violences like linguistic, emotional, economic, and sexual violence. Kim et al. (2010) said that the main causes of divorce of married immigrant women are personality differences, economic incompetence, spouse’s affair, and abuse and violence. As the main causes like spouse’s mental disorders, language communication, lack of dialogue skills, economic incompetence, drinking and beatings, are overlapping working for their divorce, the in-depth understanding of their divorce is needed.⁶ According to previous studies, most divorced married immigrant women are suffering as a socially disadvantaged class in Korea. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the divorce process and their thoughts in order to establish policies and support the married immigrant women to cope with their difficulties.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the actual situations of divorce among several problems caused by the increase and prolongation of multicultural families in Korea. Particularly, we would like to help the understanding of their real life, focusing on experiences of domestic violence, and provide basic data for the protection of their human rights.

2. MARRIED IMMIGRANT WOMEN’S FAMILY DISINTEGRATION PHENOMENON

The Statistics Korea (2017) shows that marriage with natives is on a decreasing trend in 2016 in comparison with that in 2000, but marriage with foreigners is increasing in 2016 than in 2000. In addition, the number of divorces with Koreans has decreased, while the divorce with foreigners has increased significantly

*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

compared with that in 2000. The number of divorces with foreigners reached the peak of 8,349 in 2009, and has declined until 2016. However, the number of divorce of married immigrant women is still increasing.

The purpose of this study is to examine the divorce experience of married immigrant women due to violence as a wide range of concept, including neglect as well as physical violence. In other words, the experiences of married immigrant women's conflict, violence and divorce and their self-supporting experiences will lead to a deeper understanding of their living conditions.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study is to record vivid life of married immigrant women who experienced domestic violence and divorce by using narrative inquiry method. Narrative inquiry is one of qualitative research methods, which aims at acquiring the greater understanding and meaning by describing and explaining phenomena experienced by people in a specific context.⁴ The interest in women's speaking act itself, including what women say and how they say, can position women as the subject who interpret and signify their lives.¹⁰ It is the collaborative transformation for the narratives that people are living out to pursue, as narrative inquiry seeks to establish the basis for social change. Without such a foundation rooted in the narrative experience of ordinary people, any effort for social change would be condemned as a mere execution of ineffective or externally imposed authority.¹¹ In this way, the narrative inquiry method can socially and culturally share the meaningful experiences of individuals through the story. Through the analysis of the experience, various factors can be found, and the change of the perception of experience can be also seen.

3.1. Research Participants

This study was conducted to hear the stories of divorced immigrant women who experienced violence among various reasons of divorce. As two persons among researchers were also married immigrant women, they introduced the outline of this research to married immigrant women's community, and contacted potential research participants who can share their own experiences. Thus, based on the confidence of married immigrant women, interviews can be conducted for a long time, from 2 to 3 hours, despite of the first meeting between the researchers and research participants. In addition, we exchanged daily information with Social Network Service (SNS) in advance, and after the interview, additional questions could be answered by telephone or SNS. Therefore, this study was able to secure the factuality of data collection.

Three research participants were living in Korea for more than 10 years and were in their mid-40s. Participants A and C were from China and participant B was from the Philippines. Participant A gave birth to her ex-husband, one male and one female, and her older daughter is now a high school student. She married his ex-husband in 1996 due to her relatives' introduction of him and married for 20 years, but recently divorced. Participant B was from the Philippines and met her husband in the Unification Church's matching program in 2000. In her 13-year marriage, she gave birth to her ex-husband, two sons and one daughter. The older child is a high school student and the youngest daughter is still in the second grade of elementary school. After her

divorce, she had to live an economic life, so her older son takes care of her two younger siblings when she is absent. Participant C met her current husband in 1999 through a broker, and came to Korea to raise a high school student son. He remained married for about eight years after marriage.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Based on ethical regulations of Institutional Review Board in Inha University, researchers explained research outline, confidentiality, participation, disadvantage, the right to stop the participation, and compensation for research participants. And researchers provided the consent form of research participation. After getting those consent of participants, their interviews were recorded. The semi-structured questionnaires were prepared for the study, and an open-ended interview was conducted.

Analysis of the interview materials collected in this manner, as proposed by Yom (2011), was more contextual than focused on words and main control. Context and situation, happening and persons, were tried to be narratively understood in a big framework of life. We tried to find patterns and themes of a story that can clearly show the violence and divorce, experienced by three married immigrant women. The framework of data analysis is based on the three-dimensional space concept of narrative inquiry method.

4. RESULTS

Focusing on three dimensions of narrative inquiry such as time, meaningful social interaction, and space, this study explored narratives which appeared during the period of family disintegration.

4.1. Domestic Violence

4.1.1. Patriarchal Values

Research participants said that they felt a lot of marital conflict due to the patriarchal culture of Korea. Because of the economic difficulties of the family, they started to find employment. As well, the patriarchal nature of Korean husbands, they are in a difficult position to take care of everything, including childcare, housework, and economic work.

"He was patriarchal. He is completely patriarchal. He complained that I did not provide breakfast. The reason why I cannot wake up in the early morning is that I have to work late at night." (Research participants C).

Korean husbands think that divorce is caused by the wife's role disloyalty. Their expectation of wife role is high. However, when the husband's expectation of wife role is not satisfied, conflict

Table 1. Domestic violence and coping experience by married immigrant women in Korea.

Themes	Core concepts
Domestic violence	Patriarchal values Cultural difference Multiple violence: Economic, physical violence and control
Coping with domestic violence	Stigma as a broken home Blind spots of private or public support Passive response to avoid violence Negative development of children Psychological and emotional depression

and divorce can be caused.¹³ In other words, the basis of domestic violence of married immigrant women was stereotype about patriarchal sex role, which has been deeply rooted in Korean society.

4.1.2. Multiple Violence

The category of domestic violence is not limited to physical violence, and there is an intangible violence without evidence. That is to say, neglect like husband's irresponsibility and indifference is also a form of domestic violence. The research participants earned their living expenses by themselves for several years and even 10 years without receiving economic help from their husbands.

"Violence. It's economical. He has not given living expenses for years. Even the rent of 5 thousand dollars cannot be paid. He do not do any housework, and I have to earn living cost. And I just take care of all the kids." (Research participants A).

Participants attempted to work to solve the difficulties of family after marriage. All of them were trying to break the difficulties of the family by doing their own economic activities. The greatest difficulty to research participants was not the economic difficulties but the husbands' violence, ranting, and indifferent neglect.

"His friend always likes to drink alcohol in my home. When his friend came to my home in a day, I told about my husband's family. I complained that my husband did not respect my opinion, although I am the eldest daughter-in-law in his family. At that time, he poured alcohol to me in front of his friend." (Research participants C).

Throughout married immigrant women's family life, their husband's patriarchal gender role attitudes under male preferential conditions and circumstances led to rantings or ignorance to their wives. These were the everyday violence which the research participants experienced.

Participant B gave birth to three children. However, irresponsible husband always left home everyday, and she had to take care of herself without help from her husband in childbirth and postpartum care.

4.2. Coping with Domestic Violence

4.2.1. Stigma as a Broken Home

Although it was a difficult marriage due to multiple violence, research participants were afraid of stigma as their broken home, so it was hard for them to divorce. Divorce was the last choice in Korea society as well as in the consciousness of married immigrant women.

"I just lived for 10 years, divorce itself is the one I hate. I can not help but endure. If I divorce, my children lose their dad." (Research participants A).

Participant B lived her difficult life by taking care of the family's livelihood by raising three children alone, but as a result, she received her husband's cold divorce notice. When she refused to divorce, her husband left home and did not even contact her for three years. After a long wait, she got in touch with him and decided to divorce.

"My husband wanted to divorce me in 2010. But I do not know the divorce itself and my country Philippines does not have a divorce. I hate the divorce itself. He brought me the divorce papers to sign them." (Research Participant B).

Participant C's also husband asked her to divorce first. She tried to survive for his son, enduring husband's economic incompetence, ignorance, and violence. However, the husband demanded divorce by selling the house and taking her son to the countryside.

4.2.2. A Blind Spot of Private or Public Support

Participant B's husband involved in the violence lawsuit and went to prison after the 3 years of marriage. After leaving the prison, her husband is not satisfied with his job. He was swindled. Her husband's drinking and violence became more and more dangerous and even threatened her life. But there was no public support to help her from her husband's violence.

"Because he drank and lost his temper, he just trampled and beat me who fell down. My child reported it to police. The police came and just did the investigation. The police imposed fines. I have to pay fines back. He was not punished, but after he became sober, he came back home." (Research participants A)

The violence of participant B's husband became a reason for her late return, while she was a lecturer. Because of the difficult circumstances of the family, the participant B began to earn living expenses by teaching Chinese for adults in the evening as well as for a kindergarten in the day. However, her efforts made her husband's pride hurt and led to violence.

In this way, participants asked the police as a public support to help from the husband's violence, but the results were useless, and inevitably they again became helpless in front of the husband's violence. They also told their parents about violence, but they could not get help anymore.

"My brother just told my husband to get well with me. But he did not want to intervene with my family affairs." (Research Participant B).

"My father just said to me that divorce was not answer. He pressed me that there was nothing good after divorce. I did not dare to think about divorce." (Research participants C).

4.2.3. Passive Response to Avoid Violence

In the blind spot of private or public help, their passive coping with the long-term violence was inevitable. Married immigrant women had dual vulnerability of immigration and gender. In addition, in the absence of active government involvement in domestic violence in Korean society, they struggled to maintain marriage. Participant A was hopelessly exposed to the violence of her husband, who was increasingly intensified by drinking alcohol.

"I cannot sleep in my house for two or three years without wear. Well, if he just come home, I can not sleep at home and just get dressed. I just pretend to sleep and I can not face his eyes." (Research participants A).

Participant C had nothing to do in front of her husband's violence. Her husband's violence was also carried out in the presence of young children, and the shadow of violence remains a deep scar on children.

4.2.4. Negative Development of Children

The shadow of domestic violence has been deeply felt not only by the participants but also by their children. Although they were already divorced, the research participants had to deal with their children's aftereffect from domestic violence.

“My elder child has to have a job. But, due to a psychological problem, she continued only at home. She received counseling support. My second child has also psychological anxiety. So the little boy went to the bathroom just to cry every day.” (Research participant A).

Participant C wanted to see his son after divorce, so he went to see his son in the countryside. But her husband did not help her meet their son. After divorce, the longing for her son and her husband’s unilateral domineering came to her with another pain.

“I did not see my kid after the divorce. I went to the countryside. I walked in and my son came to my chest. My heart was torn. The wound is the one which I cannot speak. Daddy does not show me. My heart was so crying and crying.” (Research participants C).

Participant C did not stop loving her son in many difficulties. She invested most of her monthly salary in her son, bought clothes for every season, gave her school supplies and pocket money.

4.2.5. Psychological and Emotional Depression

Participant A, who is passionate about her work, went to work and was recognized for her ability in various counseling activities at the Multicultural Family Support Center. However, her husband’s violence during her long marriage hurt her heart. She had a depression.

“I had a lot of difficulties but I endured. Whenever I see him, I trembled and shed tears. He said that he will kill me. I was depressed until the last year. I don’t have any motivation and I just want to die.” (Research participants A).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the experiences that married immigrant women experienced in domestic violence and divorce process, the aim of this research is to make known their experiences by using the narrative inquiry method. Research results are as follows:

In their narratives of family disintegration, we were able to learn that domestic violence forms their core experience. They have experienced multiple domestic violence due to the husband’s patriarchal values, cultural differences, irresponsibility. They were afraid of stigma as broken home and had to passively respond to the violence in the blind spot of private or public support. In their marriage that lasted more than 8 years, they had been exposed to domestic violence for a long time. This appeared in their mental emotional depressive symptoms and negative development of their children. They decided divorce to escape domestic violence or were said divorce by their husbands’ irresponsible demands.

While studying the divorce experiences of married immigrant women, we first focused on the economic differences before and after marriage. But rather, participants in this study actively overcame economic difficulties by improving their own

economic power. They had a strong personality and had made a multifaceted effort to maintain their home with a strong motherhood in the middle of economic difficulties and domestic violence. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the relevant legal system, introduce a system to intervene with severe domestic violence, provide facilities for those women’s personal protection after violence, and revitalize campaign and family consultation for the prevention of violence.

The story of each divorced married immigrant woman was special and diverse. Therefore, it is also necessary to deeply explore the specificity and context of individual’s living culture. During the adaptation period since divorce, family members, friends, and other social support networks play an important role in dealing with life crises (Jeong, 2014). Policy support is more important than anything in order for Korea society to recognize the divorced married immigrant women’s fierce efforts to live as mothers and become physically and emotionally healthier.

Acknowledgments: This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea. (NRF-2017S1A5B4055802).

References and Notes

1. Ministry of Gender Equality (2016), Retrieved from www.mogef.go.kr.
2. Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations, Multicultural family counseling’s statistics (2016), Retrieved from www.lawhome.or.kr.
3. J. M. Hwang, *Korean Association of Women’s Studies* 31, 1 (2015).
4. O. J. Chang and J. Y. Park, *Korean Home Management Association* 28, 221 (2010).
5. S. K. Kim, Y. K. Kim, A. J. Cho, H. R. Kim, H. K. Lee, D. H. Seol, K. S. Jeon, and I. S. Sim, *Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs* (2009).
6. Y. S. Kim, J. M. Hwang, and J. Y. Lee, Policy Paradigm for Transition to Multiethnic and Multicultural Society in Korea (I): Reality of Adaptation in Korea and Policy Agenda, Research Report, Korean Women’s Development Institute (2007).
7. Y. J. Oh, S. Y. Choi, H. A. Won, and S. A. Cho, Exploring the divorce of multicultural family, Spring Conference Korea Home Management Association (2016).
8. Statistics Korea, Retrieved from www.kostat.go.kr.
9. K. R. Shin, M. O. Cho, and J. H. Yang, *Qualitative Research Method*, Ewha Women’s University Press (2004).
10. S. N. Kim, *Korea Cultural Anthrppology* 35, 31 (2002).
11. Clandinin, Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research 82 (2007).
12. J. S. Yum, Narrative Inquiry in Educational Research: The Concept, Procedure, and Dilemmas, *Anthropology of Education* 6, 119 (2003).
13. Y. H. Shin, The Marital Problems of the Korean Husband and Korean-Chinese Wife Couples, *Family and Family Therapy* 10, 1 (2002).
14. O. J. Chang, A study on marital-life adaptation of international married Korean men, Chung-Ang University, Phd Dissertation (2007).
15. J. H. Moon, Age of Recognition, April Book, Seoul (2004).
16. J. H. Yang, Representation of Migrating Women: News Depiction of Inter-Racially Married Asian Women to Korean Men, *Media, Gender, and Culture* (2007), Vol. 7, pp. 47–77.
17. S. H. Jung, A study on the change of life after divorce about international marriage immigrant women, Changwon University, Master’s Thesis (2014).
18. H. S. Yoon, *Local History and Culture* 8, 299 (2005).
19. Nicole Constable, *Identities, Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10, 163 (2003).

Received: 23 January 2018. Revised/Accepted: 22 March 2018.