

Domestic Violence among Vietnamese Wives in South Korea: A Comparison of Women with and without In-Law Abuse

Suyeon Park¹, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate key differences between battered wives with and without a history of abuse from in-laws. Specifically, unique circumstances differentiating women who are and who are not abused by in-laws are examined. Using research procedures guided by grounded theory methodology, from the study focused on 22 Vietnamese women who married Korean men, three differences are identified. Women with a history of abuse from in-laws shared common residences with their in-laws, had Korean families with more traditional expectations about family roles, and identified conflict with their mothers-in-law and talking back to them as the main reasons for abuse by their husbands.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, In-law Conflict, Vietnamese Women, Korea

Introduction

Unlike the intimate partner violence in the West, defined as violence against an individual by another person in a marital or romantic relationship, abusive behavior against married women in Asia is often perpetrated by their in-laws (Fernandez, 1997). Several recent studies have demonstrated that in-law conflict is one of the risk factors for battered wives and is significantly associated with domestic violence in Asian families (Chan, Brownridge, Tiwari, Fong, & Leung, 2008; Chan et al., 2009; Choi, Chan, & Brownridge, 2010; Clark, Silverman, Shahroui, Everson-Rose, & Groce, 2010; Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1999; Raj et al., 2011). In-laws may either instigate marital conflicts or act as direct sources of conflict between men and women; both of these roles increase the risk of domestic violence by the intimate partner. In-laws also may directly perpetrate physical and emotional abuse against women (Raj, Livramento, Santana, Gupta, & Silverman, 2006). Although in-law conflict or abuse by in-laws has been documented in diverse settings, there has been limited investigation into unique circumstances differentiating women abused by in-laws. To address this gap, this study examines key differences between similarly situated women who migrated from Vietnam to Korea to marry, but who differ in their experience of abuse by in-laws.

Vietnamese women are the second largest group of foreign wives in Korea. International marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women increased from 95 in 2000 to 10,131 in 2006, accounting for a 73 percent increase in this period (Le, Truong, & Khuat, 2014). Vietnamese wives represent 29.4% of all foreign wives in Korea between 2006 and 2014 (Statistics Korea, 2015). They also represent almost 50% of total cross-border marriages of rural Korean men. A majority (51.6 percent) of Vietnamese wives resided with their parents-in-law, which was the highest ratio among all foreign wives (H. Kim, 2012; Lee, 2013; Seol et al., 2005). Thus, understanding the context in which in-law abuse occurs among Vietnamese wives and their unique experiences would contribute to the literatures on in-law abuse or conflicts and to the prevention of the problem. For a sample of women who experienced abuse by intimate partners, this study compares those with and without abuse by in laws on their husbands' and family circumstances, expectations of women in their Korean families, and the main reasons for abuse by husbands.

¹ Department of Criminal Justice, SUNY Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh, NY 12901, USA.

1. Literature Review

Tension or conflict with their mothers-in-law is one of the major concerns of foreign wives in Korea (Choi 2016; Chung & Yoo, 2013; Han 2006). There have been several studies examining the relationship problem or family adjustment experiences between immigrant wives and their Korean mothers-in-law (An & Chung, 2014; Hong, Lee, & Hwang, 2014; Kang & Auh, 2014; Kong, 2009; M. Kim & Kim, 2015; Yoon & Lee, 2010).

The previous studies of the adjustment and conflict associated with the relationship between migrant wives and their Korean mothers-in-law often used the mothers-in-law as research participants (Hong et al., 2014; Kang & Auh, 2014; M. Kim & Kim, 2015). For example, based on an in-depth interview with a Korean mother-in-law, Kong (2009) suggested that the difficulty of communication, cultural differences, and the difference in mutual expectations resulted in the conflict between her and her Vietnamese daughter-in-law. Yoon and Lee (2010) tried to understand the experience of six rural Korean mothers with foreign daughters-in-law (4 Vietnamese and 2 Cambodian). According to the mothers, international brides were the only viable option for their sons who found it difficult to marry Korean women. The mothers worried about the reputation of their foreign daughters-in-law among their neighbors because they lived in rural areas with strong communal ties. They also worried that their sons' wives might run away from home. An and Chung (2014) focused their research on the adaptation experience of 13 Korean mothers-in-law whose sons had married Vietnamese women. They categorized three stages for the adaptation process: taking foreign daughters-in-law, experiencing distress, and trying one's best to live together.

Different from these studies that were based on mothers-in-law's perception and standpoints, Kang and Auh (2014) studied foreign wives and their mothers-in-law to examine the contextual factors causing in-law conflict in multicultural families. Based on in-depth interviews of six Korean mother and foreign daughter-in-law dyads (4 Filipina, 1 Uzbekistan, and 1 Vietnamese), they suggested that in-law conflicts were embedded in different motives for marriage, financial strains, communication barriers, cultural insensitivity and conflict in value systems, and disagreement about role expectations. Hong et al. (2014) aimed to understand how foreign wives perceived their relationships with their Korean mothers-in-law. In this study, eight wives (3 Vietnamese, 3 Korean Chinese, 1 Japanese, and 1 Filipina) described their husbands' mothers as prison guard figures due to their control and micro-management. Women also felt that they were treated as invisible women in their family and not as one of the family members. In another study on in-law relationships experienced by foreign wives, M. Kim and Kim (2015) indicated that 15 women from China, Vietnam or the Philippines experienced conflict with their mothers-in-law due to cultural differences, excessive love of the mothers-in-law towards their own sons, and exercised unilateral power by the mothers-in-law.

Although such studies have contributed to the understanding of conflict with in-laws among immigrant wives, their focus was mainly on women's mental health issues. For example, one study (Thao, 2016) found a positive relationship between family life stress and depression among Vietnamese migrant wives. Thao (2016) suggested that interference or control by the in-laws and the Korean family's devaluation of foreign wives acted as stressors in family life. Another study (G. Kim, Kim, Moon, Park, & Cho, 2013) of 233 foreign wives in Korea indicated that the type of household affected foreign daughters-in-law's depression. Compared with immigrant wives living with only their husbands, immigrant wives living in extended family settings had higher levels of depression. However, this research does not identify the context of the relationship problem with women's in-laws. Moreover, neither study directly examined domestic violence by the extended family members or their roles in domestic violence situations.

Recent study (Park & Morash, 2017) explored the vulnerabilities of Vietnamese women who experienced multiple forms of family violence in the context of marriage migration. Park and Morash (2017) found that the conflicting expectations about the marriage and role of women in the family between Vietnamese women and Korean families resulted in abuse and control by their Korean husbands or in-laws as a means to enforce total control of the women. Although this study contributed to the literature by providing detailed accounts of abuse experienced by Vietnamese women, it did not carry out in-depth investigation of the variations in women's experiences (e.g., women with and without abuse by in-laws) or the Korean families' circumstances. What is unexplored is how the circumstances of women with in-law abuse differ from those of women without in-law abuse. Therefore, the present study aims to understand Vietnamese wives' experiences of domestic violence by comparing abused women with abusive in-laws with women without abusive in laws. As stated above, Vietnamese wives are much more likely to live with their in-laws compared to other foreign wives groups. Thus there is a need to better understand their unique circumstances and experiences.

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

To understand the unique circumstances and experiences of battered wives with a history of in-law abuse, a grounded theory method was applied to guide the research process. Throughout the data collection interview responses were analyzed inductively with constant comparison to identify themes and patterns and point to additional sample selection that would verify themes and patterns (Charmaz, 2006). Data were collected through in-depth interviews of a sample of 22 Vietnamese women who had experienced abuse by their Korean husbands or in-laws and through telephone interviews with eight key informants who included social service providers and an interpreter who worked for a marriage broker.

2.2 Participants

The primary participants for this study included Vietnamese women over age 18 who married Korean men and had a history of abuse from their Korean husbands or in-laws. Participants were purposively selected from women referred from social service agencies, shelters, and other study participants to allow for a comparison of women with and without in-law abuse. The two groups with similar immigration history, age, and education were continuously compared for similarities and differences in their experiences.

Most women ($n=20$) migrated to marry Korean men. Two women who entered Korea as industrial trainees and married Korean men they met in Korea were in the group with in-law abuse. All women in the study were substantially younger than their husbands. In the group with in-law abuse, husbands were on average 16 years ($SD=6.3$) older than their wives ($M=26.8$). For the non in-law abuse group ($M=26.9$), the age gap between wives and husbands was greater (i.e., 20 years ($SD=4.7$)). For both groups, most women (7 of 12 of women with in-law abuse, and 8 of 10 of women with non in-law abuse) did not complete high school. While six women in each groups had no information about the financial situation of their Korean families, those with this knowledge reported fairly low family incomes for the Korean context (Seol et al., 2005; Statistics Korea, 2008). Professionals interviewed for the research confirmed that the most abused Vietnamese wives did not live in Korean families that would be considered to be financially well off. For the group without in-law abuse, the monthly family income was greater (US \$1,950, and US \$1,631 of women with in-law abuse). One husband was previously married in the group with in-law abuse, and seven husbands and one wife were previously married in the group without in-law abuse. When they lived with their husbands, four women including two who were industrial trainees in each group were employed. Six participants resided in rural areas during their marriage and four of them were in the group with in-law abuse. Eleven of the 22 women had lived with their parents-in-law at some time.

A second source of data for this study was telephone interviews with eight key informants. They were selected based on their professional work experience with battered Vietnamese women. The informant sample included three social service providers and one Vietnamese marriage broker translator who were able to provide information relevant to Vietnamese women in rural areas, and four social service providers knowledgeable about Vietnamese wives in urban areas.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The research focuses on a sensitive subject area and a sample of women vulnerable to abuse. The research protocol was approved by the IRB before data collection and applied to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants. The research purpose and process were explained to the participants, who were provided with consent forms in both Korean and Vietnamese. The in-depth interviews with the Vietnamese wives were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants from June to August 2008. Each interview lasted from one to two hours. The author provided participants with the questions that were routinely asked of all women. As the interviews proceeded, follow-up questions and additional questions were added to pursue emerging findings. All interviews were conducted either in Korean or Vietnamese. Interpreters assisted in the interviews with women who preferred to use Vietnamese. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio-taped ($n=20$) or responses were noted in writing ($n=2$). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and then all interviews were translated into English. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality. Interviews with key informants began after most Vietnamese women had been interviewed. They were asked about their experiences providing services, support, and information to Vietnamese women, and their perceptions of the women and their situation in Korean and Vietnamese families. They were also asked about in-law conflicts and abuse.

The interview transcripts were coded thematically to identify emerging themes and patterns using NVIVO software. Three themes that characterized the different circumstances of women with and without in-law abuse were identified: living arrangements, expectations of women's roles, and main reasons for abuse. In-depth interviews with Vietnamese women were triangulated with telephone interviews with eight informants to improve the credibility of findings.

3. Findings

Twelve of the 22 women experienced abuse from in-laws. All but one also experienced abuse by their husbands. All experienced emotional abuse by their in-laws including verbal abuse, isolation, and economic control. Five reported physical abuse by in-laws. Ten of the 22 women experienced abuse by their husbands, but not from in-laws. They provided the comparison group for women with a history of abuse from in-laws.

The data analysis processes identified key differences between battered wives with and without a history of in-law abuse. First, most women with in-law abuse resided in traditional households that lived as multigenerational extended families. Co-residence often resulted in conflict between women and their in-laws. Second, women in the extended family settings had Korean family members who had especially traditional expectations about wives' roles in their families. They were expected to meet the needs and desires of their in-laws as well as husbands and were required to be dutiful, submissive, and obedient daughters-in-law. Finally, women with in-law abuse were different from others in the main reasons for abuse. Conflict with their mothers-in-law mainly led to tension in their marriages and physical abuse by their husbands. Each of these themes is presented in more detail below along with supporting evidence from the qualitative data.

3.1 Living Arrangements

Women who experienced abuse from in-laws were different from their counterparts in their living arrangements. Of the 12 women who reported physical, emotional, and economic abuse by in-laws, 11 had lived with their in-laws at some time, and eight of them still lived with their in-laws at the time of the interview. One woman did not reside in an extended family setting, but lived near her mother-in-law. This is in contrast to the other 10 women who were not abused by in-laws. They lived in nuclear family units.

3.1.1 Extended Families

Eleven women's descriptions of living in extended family settings demonstrated their families' specific circumstances as motives for the co-residence. In six cases, their husbands were responsible for supporting or taking care of their elderly parents. For example, Lý and her husband, the first-born son, supported and served his parents who were 80 years old and could no longer work in a farming village. Filial obligation and responsibility were primary motivations for living together with the old parents.

In five cases, the parents preferred to live with their sons who were financially incompetent or mentally ill, delaying setting up their sons' independent households. Specifically, Bình and Hồng stated that their husbands with mental illness did not contribute much financially to the household. Quỳnh indicated that most of the money that her husband earned had to be spent for paying his debts. These women's statements similarly convey in-laws' perception and concern over their sons. For example, Giang said her mother-in-law "told me that she couldn't let us move out because my husband wouldn't be economically independent to maintain separate households and couldn't spend money wisely."

In addition to motives for the co-residence, women indicated that co-residence or residential proximity often resulted in conflict with their in-laws, which was a significant source of problems in their marital relationships. Women stated that they experienced tensions with their mothers-in-law due to differences in life style, culture, expectations, and unequal household authority. Women felt that they were under extreme stress from in-laws' interference in the housework or marital relationship and their inconsistent behaviors. For example, Thảo explained, "She meddled in all matters asking me to do this and do that. This put me under too much stress." Seven women wanted to move out of their in-law's houses after severe conflict with their mothers-in-law. Three of them were able to establish separate residences.

3.1.2 Nuclear Families

The group not abused by in-laws lived in nuclear families. Most women (n=7) resided with their husbands and children. There were three couples without children, but one wife was pregnant. Women indicated that their families centered on married couples and their children and lived independently from their extended family members with minimal contact with them.

All but one husband provided no financial support to parents, and the one who did contributed to his parents' household because his children from an ex-wife lived with them. As previously noted, husbands of the seven women in this group were formerly married to Korean wives and had gone through a divorce. They were viewed as having their own autonomy to set up independent households and live apart from their parents. Their parents were very concerned about the maintenance of their sons' marriages because their marriages took place after prior relationships had ended. Mai who lived with her husband and two daughters from his ex-wife explained the experience with her in-laws:

“My mother-in-law lived 30 minutes away by car from our house and we met from time to time. She was a nice woman. My mother-in-law and brothers-in-law worried that I would leave him because they knew that my husband was a difficult person and had a drinking problem. Maybe that was why they were nice to me and hoped that I could live a happy life with my husband.” She said her in-laws were not meddling or interfering.

In a few cases, women described that they did not interact with their in-laws. For example, Phuong stated that “I heard that his parents passed away and he had two older sisters and one older brother. When I came to Korea, I found that my husband was not getting along with his sisters and they were not in touch so much.”

The groups differed in the household arrangements. The group abused by in-laws lived in the extended families. Co-residence seems to be used as a mechanism for Korean families to support or take care of their aged parents and to manage households with limited financial resources or other family issues. It also appears to provide a context for in-law conflict by forced expectations of subservient daughters-in-law with frequent contact with in-laws. In contrast, the group without a history of abuse from in-laws lived in nuclear families. They lived separately from their parents after marriage and had minimal contact with their in-laws. In most families, they did not rely on each other for financial support or caregiving.

3.2 Expectations of Women's Roles

Previous research has found differences in expectations for marriages and women's roles in family between Vietnamese women and their Korean family members. Vietnamese women wanted to leave the household and find a job so they could send money to their natal family in Vietnam. Korean families prohibited them from working and wanted them to continue the family lineage and focus on household duties (Kong, 2010; Kang & Auh, 2014; Park & Morash, 2017).

Vietnamese women in this study described that they were expected to fill traditional gender roles including household reproduction and providing care for other household members. However, compared to women in the nuclear family settings, the situations of women who lived with their parents-in-law were compounded by a hierarchical and patriarchal family structure emphasizing the roles of subservient daughters-in-law. They were obligated to take the responsibility to respect and care for their in-laws.

3.2.1 Subservient Daughter-in-law in Extended Families

The traditional Korean family is based on Confucian patriarchy which emphasizes the hierarchical family structure. In the dynamic of Confucian family, the elders rule over the young. The young are required to respect, obey, and serve the elders. Women have traditionally occupied lower status and have less power than men. Women are expected to join the husband's home as a newcomer and serve the husband's parents (Jung, 2014; M. Kim, 1996). Specifically, women have to “be long-time scorned apprentices to their mothers-in-law and sacrificing domestic servants in order to earn their membership into the husband's family” (N. Kim 2006, p.523). This mother-in-law tradition provides a space for “domination and exploitation of the mother-in-law over the daughter-in-law” (M. Kim, 1996, p.187).

While most women (n=9) lived with their mothers-in-law who were widowed, two lived with both parents-in-law. Women in extended family settings described their mothers-in-law as holding the main power and exerting control over the household while they occupied the lowest status in their families. The mothers-in-law managed economic resources and made decisions on family matters, leaving most of the wives in the extended families economically dependent. Oanh said, "My mother-in-law took care of the money. She paid when we went shopping. I have never been given any living expenses or allowances separately and never had money." Other women's comments similarly suggested that they had to live with very little material resources and were forced to ask for money.

Most women complained that their husbands always accepted their mothers' opinions and did what they suggested. Some of them mentioned that their immigration status or Korean citizenship would depend on the decision of their mothers-in-law. Cúc said, "I don't know yet whether my husband would sponsor me to acquire citizenship. He has to ask his mother to decide. My mother-in-law will decide." In a few cases, women reported that they were denied access to good quality food and had to eat after others. Quỳnh indicated, "When I was living with my husband's family, I never ate with them. His parents ate first and my husband ate after. Then it was my turn. I was not supposed to eat meat and other side dishes as she bought them for herself. I only had rice and Kimchi and never had good dishes like meat. My husband became dumb in these situations. When he told me to come and have some, I couldn't as I was scared that my mother-in-law would come and beat me. I never had fish or meat even when I was pregnant with my first baby." This comment confirmed her inferior status in her family.

Women worked exclusively as caretakers and housekeepers. Most women (n=9) reported that they gave birth to their first baby within 1-2 years after the marriage. The task of caring for aged parents-in-law along with childcare and household chores fell mainly to daughters-in-law in extended families. Lý explained, "After I married my husband I helped him cultivate rice plants, red pepper, and sesame. I normally wake up at 5 am and prepare breakfast for my husband and his parents. He always takes me to work. When I get back from work I have to prepare lunch for them. Farming requires much labor and I also have to do housework. He doesn't take care of the baby while I have to do household chores, even after working outside all day long." She said that unmanageable domestic burden created severe strains. As another example, Binh was obligated to stay at home to perform the care for her disabled mother-in-law who was paralyzed. Although she did all the domestic work, including cooking, cleaning, and laundry, her mother-in-law complained to her daughters about her laziness.

Women were expected to be submissive and obedient to their in-laws. Violence often erupted when they were perceived to challenge the authority of their in-laws. For example, Oanh was beaten by her father-in-law because he thought she was impolite to him. As illustrated by Binh's case, described above, women suggested that their mothers-in-law were often dissatisfied with their management of the housework and constantly criticized them for not preparing meals on time, cooking meals properly, and handling leftover appropriately. Oanh commented, "She kept criticizing whenever she didn't like even the smallest thing. For example, I normally used my left hand when cutting but she told me to hold the knife with my right hand. Although I listened to her, I could not change quickly. She accused me again because she thought I was slow."

Women were expected to dutifully accept whatever their mothers-in-law acted unjustly or blamed them for something. Hạng's statement reflected the Korean families' general expectation of women's reaction in these situations. "My husband said that I was never supposed to talk while his mother was talking and that I wasn't supposed to talk back."

3.2.2 Dutiful Wife in Nuclear Families

Women in nuclear families described their husbands' decision making power and control of the family finances. The roles of women and their position in their family often were constructed in response to their Korean family's specific concerns and associated needs. The sons' lack of financial responsibility to parents and their maintenance of separate households left the foreign wives primarily responsible for performing duties as wives and mothers in nuclear family settings. They were not obligated to serve their in-law.

More than half of women (n=6) became pregnant and gave birth soon after their marriages, but one was expected to focus on caring for her step-child instead of giving birth to her baby. For husbands who had to rear children from their ex-wives, childcare was the specific and immediate need. Four women in this group had to provide care for their step-children.

Thanh stated that her husband pressed her to wake up at dawn to prepare a meal for her step-daughters even when she was in the last stage of pregnancy. Since Thanh was married at the age of 19, she was just three or four years older than her step-daughters.

In a few cases, women revealed that their husbands demanded sexual activity that women did not like and more frequently than women wanted. For example, Mỹ said, “He forced me to have sex when I didn’t want to. He always wanted it so often.” Hiền’s case presented a typical example of the combination of multiple needs and desires. Her husband wanted her to help his marriage broker business as an interpreter, take good care for his five year-old son from his ex-wife, and fulfill his sexual desires. She said, “He didn’t want to have a baby with me. He only wanted me to serve his sexual needs. I took flu and cold medicine when I didn’t know I was pregnant. Then, he suggested that I should abort because cold medicine might result in congenital deformity of the baby. He wanted me to not tell his daughter about my pregnancy and abortion. I could see my baby by ultrasonic scanning when I was pregnant again. The doctor said, “This is too late to abort. Abortion is very dangerous at this moment.” I didn’t want to abort. On the way from doctor’s office, he said to me, “Why don’t you abort? I don’t want to have a baby. I like it this way. It will be happy for me to live with you, my son, and my daughter. My heart bled for my unborn babies and I cried bitterly. I had to abort my second baby by an illegal operation.” Supporting the Vietnamese women’s accounts, a social service provider in an urban area explained the marriages and roles of the women pursued by Korean husbands: “International marriage appeared to become an alternative for Korean men who were willing to remarry. They want to find a wife who can cook, do the laundry, and provide care for him. Instead of taking care of his kids as a single parent, women would be more involved in the role of care giver for their step children.”

The women in nuclear families were involved in reproduction, domestic work, and child care. They were relatively less exposed to a family environment which supports norms regarding submissive and obedient daughters-in-law than their counterparts in extended families. Women in the extended family households had to serve the needs of their in-laws as dutiful daughters-in-law. They occupied the lowest rank in their family and were required to be submissive and obedient to their in-laws. The Korean families with in-law abuse had more traditional gender role expectations than others. However, the Vietnamese wives did not passively behave as expected by their Korean families expected. Another social service provider said, “Women’s decision to migration through marriage requires tremendous change and energy for them. Women already broke the mold through the experiences of border-crossing. They might not want to follow strict traditional ideas about their role in the family any more. Their desires went beyond the patriarchal system.” As this comment suggested, women exercised their agency to try to improve their status in the family. This often led the conflict between them and their Korean families.

3.3 Main Reasons for Abuse

Women with and without a history of abuse from in-laws differed in the main reasons for marital conflict and abuse by their spouses. Women with an in-law abuse history stated that conflict with their in-laws, especially mothers-in-law, and talking back to them were the main reasons for tension in their marital relationships and abuse by their spouses. In contrast, for women without in-law abuse, the main reasons for abuse were based on interpersonal conflict between husband and wife.

3.3.1 Women with In-law Abuse

Of the 12 women who reported in-law abuse, 10 women suggested that conflict with their in-laws was a significant source of problems in their marital relationships. Women had conflict with their in-laws, especially mothers-in-law, over housework, care of children, and financial matters. Their husbands used force to control their wives when they had disagreements with their in-laws, talked back to their in-laws, or when they blamed their husbands for standing by their in-laws. Thảo explained, “There were many clashes of opinions as we had different thoughts and, when I told my husband, he always instructed me to listen to his mother. For example, when cooking for my baby, she maintained that I could cut large meat while I told her that the meat should be cut into small pieces for convenient eating. We always quarreled because of these matters. When my baby had a fever and was sick, I tried to alleviate the fever with a damp towel as we couldn’t go to the hospital. Then, she maintained that I should stop doing that but instead should cover him with bedclothes. When I kept giving her my opinion, my husband shouted and swore at me.” Quỳnh referred to a similar experience, stating: “When I had a fight with his mother, he listened only to her and hit me in the tummy. I was pregnant at that time. My stomach ached so much. He beat me mostly based on the reason that I had problems with his mother.

She always made up pretexts to scold me and I often inquired, asking what have I done so wrong? My husband, hearing this, beat me saying that I was not supposed to talk back to his mother.” Both statements captured women’s experience with patriarchal husbands and demanding mother-in-laws. Some women who left abusive relationships at the time of the interview stated that they would live with their husbands again if only they could set up independent households. This indicated the extent of the in-law conflict they experienced.

3.3.2 Women without In-law Abuse

Women in this group described that interpersonal conflicts between their husbands and them arose when they did not reach their husbands’ expectations or submit to their husbands’ demands. Women often had conflict with their husbands over financial matters and their working outside the home. The husbands beat their wives if they did not listen to things their husbands asked for them to do or if they complained about their husbands. For example, Vân experienced abuse when she complained about her husband’s limited contribution to the household and his heavy drinking: “The major causes of our conflicts derived from serious financial strains. My husband works day to day with no stable income. He comes home drunk 2 or 3 times a week. He cannot go out to work the next day due to his drinking. Then, he does not make living expenses for the day. When I complained about how we would manage our life if he drank and missed work, and when I told him that 1 million Won (U.S. \$1,000) a month couldn’t cover our living expenses, including the baby’s powdered milk, he got angry and hot-tempered, and beat me.”

Women also described violence resulting from their desire to send money to their family in Vietnam. Thanh said, “We had fights because of my remittances to Vietnam. At first, he promised that I would send the money I earned, but later he was opposed to remittances, telling me that a couple shares everything and there is no such thing as mine or yours, so my money was his.” The basis for some men’s anger and abuse were due to their accusations that their wives were having affairs. Four women reported accusations of having affairs with no grounds for suspicion as the main source of conflict within their families. Due to husbands’ suspicious about affairs, the women were not allowed to contact others or work outside the home.

Four women attributed marital conflicts and abuse by their husbands to lack of acquiescence to unwanted sexual activity. Women’s descriptions of unwanted sexual activity often involved husbands’ sexual ownerships. Husbands used violence when women did not submit to their sexual demands. Phương said, “My husband forced me to have sex with him too much when I didn’t want to. It was almost every day that we had sex. Later, it was so hard and I expressed that I didn’t like it. Then he bullied me saying that I was not supposed to avoid sex as we were married and it was a natural thing to do. He also asked me if I had another man. He would beat me if I said I didn’t want to when he asked me to have sex.” Women’s inability to speak and understand the Korean language enraged their husbands and prompted abuse. As Ngọc put it, “He would beat me because he was stressed and I did not understand Korean and we could not communicate.” Limited language ability also left some women confused about why their husbands were angry and abusive to them.

Women with in-law abuse were different from their counterparts in the main reasons for abuse by their husbands. They reported that conflict with their mothers-in-law mainly led to tension in their marriages and physical abuse by their husbands. This pattern that involved conflict with in-laws was found for only women who lived with their in-laws and had to meet the needs for their in-laws as well as their husbands. For women without in-law abuse, interpersonal conflict between husband and wife were the main reasons for abuse by their husbands.

4. Discussion

This study identified key differences between battered wives with and without a history of abuse from in-laws. Consistent with previous studies (Clerk et al., 2010; Raj et al., 2011), most women who had a history of abuse from in-law resided in extended family settings. Although co-residence with the extended family might not be a prerequisite for in-law abuse, extended family living conditions formed the context to facilitate in-law conflict and abuse under increased contact with in-laws in this study.

A long tradition of feminist theory identifies patriarchal gender arrangements in which men dominate over women as the source of violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Theory and research have increasingly clarified that the form and degree of patriarchal arrangements vary by place and time and by subgroup (e.g., racial and age groups) (Hunnicut, 2009; Lerner, 1986; Lown, 1983; Ogle & Batton, 2009).

This study suggested how Vietnamese women could be affected by patriarchal arrangements in a particular setting or for a particular group. The gender arrangements expected by the Korean families are based on Confucian patriarchy which emphasizes a hierarchical family structure. The Confucian ideology influenced the value system of rural communities where the extended family households have largely continued (Kim, 2012; Jung, 2014). Ironically Korean women's and men's widespread rejection of Confucian patriarchy, coupled with a period when male children were preferred, has created a shortage of Korean women to participate in such marriages, thereby creating a demand for foreign wives. The notion of Confucian patriarchy seemed to persist largely among men and among in-laws who found themselves disadvantaged in the contemporary Korean marriage market, where the vast majority of contemporary Korean women reject highly patriarchal unions.

Findings from the current study show that women who lived with their in-laws were obligated to meet the needs of their in-laws as dutiful and subservient daughters-in-law, compared to women in the nuclear family settings. Vietnamese wives who resided with their in-laws were located in the family environment where Confucian patriarchy persisted. Since husbands and in-laws often expected the Vietnamese wives to be subservient and to take care of members of the extended family, in-laws were often motivated to participate in the control of the women through abuse. The experiences of Vietnamese women in nuclear families were similar with their counterparts in that they were expected to stay at home and focus on reproduction and domestic duties. However, they were relatively less exposed to a family environment which supports norms regarding obedience to parents-in-law, respect of elders, and filial obligations as daughters-in-law than their counterparts.

Finally, this study indicated that women who lived with their in-laws were different from others in the main reasons for abuse. They reported that conflict with their mothers-in-law mainly led to tension in their marriages and physical abuse by their husbands. As Chan et al. (2008) suggested, in-law conflict might be perceived by spouses as disrespect for their parents. This might intensify stress and conflict in marital relationship.

4.1 Limitations and Need for Future Research

It is important to consider findings from the current study in the context of certain limitations. First, the sample in this study was not randomly selected, and thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all Vietnamese women who marry Korean men. Second, the experiences of Vietnamese women residing in extended family settings are far from those of women in general in contemporary Korea. Korea has experienced a dramatic change in family patterns as exemplified by a decrease in the number of extended families. Korean census data reveals a decrease in the proportion of extended families from 17 percent in 1980 to 7 percent in 2005 (Lee, 2012). In contrast to these trends, as previously noted, a majority of Vietnamese wives resided with their parents-in-law. Thus many Vietnamese wives were situated in Korean traditional culture based on Confucian patriarchy (Choi 2016; N. Kim, 2006). They play a role in providing domestic labor and care to the extended family (H. Kim, 2012; Lee, 2013; Le et al., 2014).

Third, there were difficulties in recruiting a balanced number of participants in rural areas. Gaining access to abused women was especially difficult in the rural areas because the culture was extremely communal. However the key informant sample provided contextual information and corroborated the findings regarding in-law abuse in rural areas. Future research with larger samples in rural areas or different ethnic group samples is recommended to replicate or develop the study findings. Specifically, the current findings highlight the need for further research on the dynamics of household patterns and in-law abuse.

Additional research is needed on women's response to in-law abuse. There has been limited research on women's responses in the situation of in-law abuse or conflict, focusing on how women try to meet the need of in-laws or challenge patriarchal constraints in their family. Further research on women's response to in-law abuse is necessary to improve knowledge on women's agency and resources available.

4.2 Implications for Policy

The current research is relevant to social services. Vietnamese women were isolated and monitored by their husbands in nuclear families and by husbands and their in-laws in extended families. However, compared to women who lived in nuclear settings, women in extended family settings were more closely observed and controlled by multiple family members. This situation creates a dilemma for service providers to assist women victims. Social services and outreach to Vietnamese women is critical in preventing domestic violence and assisting and empowering victims of domestic violence.

The current study indicated the need to assess the role of in-laws in the abuse. Social service providers should recognize that differences emerge depending on the family environment and the composition of social networks among abused women. They should conduct assessments for in-law abuse and help women create safety plans to protect them from their husbands or multiple abusers. It is also important to inform the women about domestic violence policy and the services available to them.

Reference

- An, H. J., & Cho Chung, H. I. (2014). Adaptation process of mothers-in-law of Vietnamese women married to Korean men. *Journal of Korean Academy of Nursing Administration*, 20(1), 22-34.
- Chan, K. L., Brownridge, D. A., Tiwari, A., Fong, D. Y. T., & Leung, W. C. (2008). Understanding violence against Chinese women in Hong Kong: An analysis of risk factors with a special emphasis on the role of in-law conflict. *Violence Against Women*, 14(11), 1295-1312.
- Chan, K. L., Tiwari, A., Fong, D. Y. T., Leung, W. C., Brownridge, D. A., & Ho, P. C. (2009). Correlates of in-law conflict and intimate partner violence against Chinese pregnant women in Hong Kong. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(1), 97-110.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.
- Choi, W. M. A., Chan, K. L., & Brownridge, D. A. (2010). Unraveling in-law conflict & its association with intimate partner violence in Chinese culture: Narrative accounts of Chinese battered women. *Women's Health & Urban Life*, 9(1), 72-92
- Choi, Y. J. (2016). Immigrant women's acculturation stress and coping strategies in Korea: A qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 55, 79-85.
- Chung, G. H., & Yoo, J. P. (2013). Using the multicultural family support centers and adjustment among interethnic and interracial families in South Korea. *Family Relations*, 62(1), 241-253.
- Clark, C. J., Silverman, J. G., Shahrouri, M., Everson-Rose, S., & Groce, N. (2010). The role of the extended family in women's risk of intimate partner violence in Jordan. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(1), 144.
- Counts, D. A., Brown, J. K., & Campbell, J. (1999). *To have and to hit: Cultural perspectives on wife beating* (2nd ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. (1979). *Violence against wives: A case against the patriarchy*. New York: The Free Press.
- Fernandez, M. (1997). Domestic violence by extended family members in India: Interplay of gender and generation. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12(3), 433-455.
- Han, G. S. (2006). Family life and cultural encounter of foreign wives in rural area. *Korean Cultural Anthropology*, 39(1), 195-243.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1994). *Gendered transitions: Mexican experiences of immigration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hong, D. A. G., Lee, S. W., & Hwang, E. K. (2014). A study of immigrant wives' perceived conflicts with their mother-in-laws and coping experiences. *Korean Journal of Human Ecology*, 23(5), 789-805.
- Hunnicut, G. (2009). Varieties of patriarchy and violence against women: Resurrecting "patriarchy" as a theoretical tool. *Violence Against Women*, 30(5), 553-573.
- Jung, H. (2014). Let their voices be seen: Exploring mental mapping as a feminist visual methodology for the study of migrant women. *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 38(3), 985-1002.
- Kang, H., & Auh, S. (2014). Contextual factors in conflicts in multicultural mother and daughter in-law relationships: A qualitative approach with dyadic in-depth interviews. *Family and Environment Research*, 52(4), 355-369.
- Kim, G. S., Kim, B., Moon, S. S., Park, C. G., & Cho, Y. H. (2013). Correlates of depressive symptoms in married immigrant women in Korea. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 24(2), 153-161.
- Kim, H. K. (2012). Marriage migration between South Korea and Vietnam: A gender perspective. *Asian Perspective*, 36(3), 531-563.
- Kim, M. J., & Kim, Y. J. (2015). Experience of relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law among Korea rural married immigrant women: With a focus on daughter-in-laws from China, Vietnam and the Philippines who live with their mother-in-laws in Korea. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 8(S1), 307-314.
- Kim, M. H. (1996). Changing relationships between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law in urban South Korea. *Anthropological Quarterly* (1996): 179-192.

- Kim, N. Y. (2006). "Patriarchy is so third world": Korean immigrant women and "migrating" White Western masculinity. *Social Problems*, 53(4), 519-536.
- Kong, E. S. (2009). A case study on the conflict between a Korean mother-in-law and a Vietnamese daughter-in-law. *Korean Journal of Research in Gerontology*, 18, 123-134.
- Le, D. B., Truong, T., & Khuat, T. H. (2014). Transnational marriage migration and the East Asian family-based welfare model: Social reproduction in Vietnam, Taiwan, and South Korea. In T. Truong, D. Gasper, J. Handmaker, & S. I. Bergh (Eds.), *Migration, gender and social Justice: Perspectives on human insecurity*. (Vol. 9, pp. 87-103). Berlin: Springer.
- Lee, H. (2012). Political economy of cross-border marriage: Economic development and social reproduction in Korea. *Feminist Economics*, 18(2), 177-200.
- Lee, H. (2013). Global householding for social reproduction: Vietnamese women's marriage migration to South Korea. In *The global political economy of the household in Asia* (pp. 94-109). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Lerner, Gerda. (1986). *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford.
- Lown, J. (1983). Not so much a factory, more a form of patriarchy: Gender and class during industrialization. In E. Gamarnikow, D. Morgan, J. Purvis & D. Taylorson (Eds.), *Gender, class and work* (pp. 28-35). London: Heinemann
- Ogle, R. S., & Batton, C. (2009). Revisiting patriarchy: Its conceptualization and operationalization in criminology. *Critical Criminology*, 17(3), 159-182.
- Park, S., & Morash, M. (2017). An Exploratory Study of Influences on Vulnerabilities to Family Violence Among Vietnamese Wives Who Marry South Korean Men. *Critical Criminology*, 25(1), 1-19.
- Raj, A., Livramento, K. N., Santana, M. C., Gupta, J., & Silverman, J. G. (2006). Victims of intimate partner violence more likely to report abuse from in-laws. *Violence Against Women*, 12(10), 936-949.
- Raj, A., Sabarwal, S., Decker, M., Nair, S., Jethva, M., Krishnan, S., . . . Silverman, J. (2011). Abuse from In-Laws during Pregnancy and Post-Partum: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings from Low-income Mothers of Infants in Mumbai, India. *Maternal & Child Health Journal*, 15(6), 700-712.
- Seol, D., Kim, Y., Kim, H., Yoon, H., Lee, H., Yim, K., Jeong, K., Ju, Y., Han, G. (2005). *Foreign wives' life in Korea: Focusing on the policy of welfare and health*. Kwachon: Ministry of Health and Welfare.
- Statistics Korea. (2015). 국제결혼현황 [Current status of international marriage]. Retrieved from http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2430
- Thao, N. T. (2016). Different effects of acculturative stress and family life stress on depressive symptoms among married Vietnamese immigrant women in South Korea. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*, 10, 225-236.
- Yoon, M. S., & Lee, H. K. (2010). A phenomenological study on the experiences of mother-in-laws with foreign daughter-in-laws in rural area. *The Journal of Rural Society*, 20(2), 191-232.