Married Korean Professional Women with Children in U.S. and in Korea: A Mix of Occupational & Immigration Status
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Abstract
This qualitative research examined the work and family experience of Korean professional women in Korea and in the U.S. Fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted; seven Korean immigrant women with children in the U.S., and seven Korean women with children in Korea. Immigration status and occupational status are anchored to examine (a) how work-family experiences are different in the U.S. and in Korea; (b) how Korean women with children in a profession perceive their accumulated roles (i.e., conflict or enrichment); and (c) how professional women's economic power influences their marital relationships. Work and family spillover, self-confidence, language barriers, work environments, and wholeness emerged as main themes. Work-family policies will be discussed.

Introduction
Many theories have been developed to understand the nature of power related to resources, work-family interfaces, work-family policies, and family relation changes due to mother's employment. Little attention has been given to minority groups. In this study, I address experiences of married Korean professional women with children, focusing on their work and family experiences, and the differences between in the U.S. and Korea. This research focused on two main dimensions of married Korean women's: Immigration status & Occupational status. Target participants: Korean women who completed at least their bachelor degree in Korea and migrated to the U.S. to pursue higher degrees and now join a professional occupation in the U.S. Korean women who completed their higher degrees either in Korea or in the U.S. and now have a professional occupation in Korea.

Purposes
This qualitative research is examine - How immigrant factors play a role in married professional women's work and family; - How women's professional occupations with higher degrees influence their work and family in the U.S. compared to in Korea; - How married women with children in the professional occupation perceive their accumulated roles in terms of conflict or enrichment work-family spillover.

Background
- Work-family spillover: Conflict or enrichment
- Professional women with children
- Thereoretical perspectives
  - Social exchange theory: - economic independence effect
  - Symbolic interaction framework: - income effect
  - Policies for professional women with children in the U.S. and in Korea

Methods
- Purposive sampling or criterion-based sampling
- Semi-structured in-depth interview

Criteria
They (a) are between 35 and 60 years old; (b) were born and raised in Korea, completed their bachelor's degree in Korea, and migrated to the U.S. for higher education (i.e., highest immigant women criteria); (c) earned a master degree or higher either in the U.S. or Korea; (d) are currently employed in a profession (e.g., college professors, researchers, lawyers, etc.) either in the U.S. or Korea; (e) are currently married to a Korean man and have at least one child

Ten married Korean professional women with children & Ten married Korean immigrant professional women

The following questions guide this study:
1. How do married Korean immigrant professional women with children in the U.S. describe their work, family, economic power and overall well-being?
2. How do married Korean professional women with children in Korea describe their work, family, economic power, and overall well-being?
3. How does immigrant status and occupation status affect Korean immigrant women's interpretation of work, family, and life satisfaction?

Child Care and Domestic Work
Korean professional women (KPW)
- Manage child care & domestic work with their husbands
- Divide works according to their work schedule & workloads, not their traditional gender role ideology
- Work as a team, but not equal share; rather subjective feeling of fairness

KPW
- All KPW – Assists from family member or paid helpers (geographical proximity to their parents / cheaper labor in Korea)
- Most husbands – traditional gender role: child care and domestic works are not their responsibilities.

Roles as Professional Women
- Gender inequality.
  - Not because of their gender, but because of their being married and having children, KPW & KPW sometimes had to limit a choice of their jobs and their activities at their work by themselves.
  - KPW: Gave up their careers in Korea and followed their husband's job (or education), restarted (re) their higher education and careers, searched a job requiring less demanding work or a job close to husband's job.
  - KPW: Moved a job close to home, commuted (4 days at work, 3 days at home), refused to be promoted or out-of-state job.

KPW
- All KPW – Assists from family member or paid helpers (geographical proximity to their parents / cheaper labor in Korea)
- Most husbands – traditional gender role: child care and domestic works are not their responsibilities.

Emerging Themes

Language Barriers
KPW
- One of main themes in Korean immigrant women's narratives
- When discussing an assigned task, I do not have any problem. When talking about other than work, however, it is hard to jump in (to the middle of a conversation).

KPW
- Not mentioned children at work (sick day, school events, etc.)
- Overwork is quite regular – afraid to be viewed as incompetent
- Their husband colleagues – act confirmed by traditional gender role ideology.

Language Barriers, (cont.)
- Colleagues sometimes showed lack of patience when the job required speed in presenting oral reports. Women overcame with diligence, strong commitment to work, and cooperation with other colleagues.
- Students challenged participants (professors). They find better ways to communicate with students.
- Most of the problems arose from cultural differences but from the language itself.
- Participant D, a lawyer, said it was extremely hard to complete her degree and get a license because of language problems. She said she was very happy to be able to work for Korean immigrants who had very limited English fluency since she had already experienced how hard it was to learn a new language.

Family-friendly working environments.
KPW
- Work schedules were quite flexible (both husbands and wives)
- Available when children's sick day, conference, other activities

KPW
- Due to cultural or societal influences, KPW talked in subtle manner about their achievement, not quite overt
- Expressed gratitude to others to help them to achieve their careers
- Showed higher desire to be successful in American careers.

Wholeness
- I would not be happy if I had only my degree [Ph. D] and my job without my own family. I also would not be happy if I stayed home for my family and did not have my own work … Once I tried to be a stay-at-home mother, but I gave up in six months and decided to go to a graduate school. It does not mean that I do not value my family or underestimate stay-at-home mothers. I admire stay-at-home mothers because I know I am not able to do so … In my family, I am not a perfect mother, but I can be a wife because of obligations at work. At work, I don't think I am able to perform as perfect as I wish to be as a professional because of my family responsibilities, but I should accept it. I think we (married professional women) should not divide work and family into two worlds separately … I consider my work and my family as a whole instead of two separate spheres (emphasis added).

Discussion & Conclusion
- Balance between work & family
  - KPW & KPW valued both family and work, keep strong boundaries between, and strong sense of control in both areas enriched their quality of life and encompassed things happening around them as a whole.
- Family friendly work environment & flexibility
  - KPW were more challenged due to their working context (authority hierarchies, traditional notions on mothers' working as supplementary and the need for a longer time spent at work) need imperative awareness about gender equality and societal attitudes toward working mothers and fathers in accordance with the family policies.
- Income effect than Independence effect
- Immigration factors were not negative indicators of KPW's overall life satisfaction.

- Although KPW & KPW were selected from screened narrow pool, still variation in their professions and their children’s ages Participants from a similar professional occupation pool & similar family situations
- Hope to contribute to more in-depth understanding of Korean professional women's lives and to the development and expansion of intervention and prevention programs for diverse immigrant families.