

# Living for the Children: Immigrant Korean Mothers' Re-creation of Family after Marital Dissolution

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**Purpose:** This study was a grounded theory research aimed at generating a substantive theory that accounts for the explanatory social processes in which immigrant Korean single-mother families were engaged in the United States. **Methods:** In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 immigrant Korean single mothers who were living with children under 18 years of age at the time of the interviews. Data collection guided by theoretical sampling and concurrent constant comparative analysis of the transcribed data was conducted to identify the core social process. **Results:** The emerged core social process was "living for the children," which represented the driving process by which these women made transition to their new lives as single-mother families. The major task throughout the entire transition was re-creating their families. The women's transition involved practical and psychological transitions. The practical transition involved three stages: assuring family survival, struggling between the father role and the mother role, and stabilizing. The psychological transition involved becoming strong and settling in with a new supportive network. **Conclusion:** Study results added to the literature by elaborating the women's emphasis on maternal identity and the resilience-provoking nature of the women's transitions.

**Key Words:** Qualitative research, Grounded theory, Immigrant, Single parent

## INTRODUCTION

Once Korean families immigrate to the United States, they experience a great deal of socioeconomic challenges, including high rates of marital conflict and disruption and having no insurance or being underinsured. In 2000, divorce rates of Korean immigrants were the second highest Among Asian Americans in the U.S. (Chang, 2003). The divorce rate for Korean immigrants after migration increases to five to six times higher than the divorce rate for Koreans who live in Korea. Annually, 36.8 per one thousand Korean American women get divorced while 6.2 Korean women divorce. Fifteen per one thousand for Korean American men get divorced

whereas only 3.6 per one thousand for Korean men (Park, 2000). Also, divorced Korean American women are more likely to remain unmarried for a longer amount of time than divorced Korean American men; and Korean women are more likely than men not to remarry (Chang, 1998).

Koreans are one of the top five ethnic groups with high rates of no insurance among all ethnic groups in the United States (APIAHF, 2014). Almost one third, or 31%, of Korean Americans were uninsured from 2004 to 2006, which was much higher than 17% of all Asian Americans and 12% of non-Hispanic Whites. Among all Asian American groups, Korean Americans have the lowest rate (49%) of health insurance coverage from em-

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ployers (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2009). Although there are no available data on the numbers of immigrant Korean single mothers, there is a high possibility that the Korean community in the U.S. includes a high percentage of single-mother households. More importantly, the combination of a high percentage of economic and health disadvantages and a high divorce rate suggests that Korean immigrant single-mother families are likely to be at great risk for multiple socioeconomic and health disadvantages.

While a vast amount of research has been conducted on vulnerable families, such as single-parent or immigrant families in the U.S., limited research has been undertaken with immigrant Korean single-mother families. An analysis of the published literature on Korean immigrant women's experiences also revealed an under-representation of immigrant Korean single-mother families in research. The vast majority of published studies are based on married women and only a handful of studies directly addressed issues related to post-divorce adjustment of Korean immigrant women.

Existing studies indicated that raising children as a single mother, dealing with financial difficulties, and managing emotional difficulties were the most pressing problems for the women (Chang, 1998). Self-reported health status, reasons for divorce, social support and income affected the quality of the women's post-divorce adjustment (Chang, 2003). Of these factors, self-reported health status and reasons for divorce were the most powerful predictors of the women's quality of adjustment (Chang, 2003). Despite the value of the small number of existing studies, results to date are primarily limited: to data obtained from standardized measures that reflect the researchers' a priori perspective; and in their ability to explain the complexities of the situations women were facing in their everyday lives as a single woman, a sole parent, and an immigrant. Absent were studies that reflect the women's own viewpoints in their own words. Published studies are also limited in their ability to explain the complexities of the situations women face in their everyday lives as a single woman, a sole parent, and as an immigrant.

The majority of the literature on single-mother families in general has been carried out within a deficit-oriented approach (Coll & Patcher, 2002; Weinraub, Horvath, & Gringlas, 2002). Findings from the early studies comparing outcomes by family structure reinforced stereotyping female-headed households as problematic and malfunctioning (Ford-Gilboe & Campbell, 1996). However, a deficit-focused perspective cannot be the sole

valid way to understand socially disadvantaged families (Levine, 2009). Thus, it is necessary for health researchers to see the family as capable actors in their contexts and investigate their strengths as well as weaknesses who actively interpret and respond to their contexts (Ford-Gilboe & Campbell, 1996; Kong, 2000), in order to provide appropriate services to empower such families (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988).

To meet such needs, this study employed Grounded theory methodology to generate a substantive theory that accounts for the explanatory social processes in which immigrant Korean single-mothers were engaged in the United States. Grounded theory methodology was chosen for the current study because this methodology is particularly recommended to study research areas that are relatively under-studied and in which basic problems and relevant processes need to be identified (Creswell, 2008; Stern, 1980). The goal of the methodology is to generate a theory that accounts for key social and psychological processes in a particular social setting (Stern, 1980). A theory generated by use of grounded theory will be empirically grounded and work properly with the specific group of participants, immigrant Korean single-mother families. Since nursing is a practice profession, information that will assist interventions and nursing practice is critical to the advancement of science. The emerging theory will serve as a foundation for developing nursing programs and services that are culturally appropriate and accessible to the special population.

## METHODS

### 1. Inclusion Criteria

Eligibility for this study included immigrant Korean women who were 1) born in Korea, 2) divorced or separated and whose former husbands were Korean, and 3) currently living with children under 18 years of age. Each single female parent did not have a cohabitating partner. Other conditions of the participants were not limited for the purpose of expanding, refining, and enriching the emerging theory. A total of 15 women participated in this study.

### 2. Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews took place at a time and location selected by the participant. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, the researcher's hotel room, a room in a community center, or an uncrowded corner in a coffee

shop or bookstore. Interviews usually took about one and a half hours; they ranged from 40 minutes to 3 hours. Each participant participated in a face-to-face interview and six participants were interviewed twice. A total of 21 transcripts were analyzed.

Since theoretical sampling is completely dependent on emerging categories, data from the first four interviews were transcribed and coded; theoretical sampling technique was applied until major codes became saturated. The first interview guide was revised based on the analysis of the first four interviews: questions and probes were added to inquire about how children contribute to getting the housework done, fulfilling the father's role, emotional hardships and comfort and support that mothers get when having such difficulties; comparison before and after the divorce/separation; and working experiences. Data from the next five interviews were coded and compared with data from the initial interviews.

Constant comparative analysis revealed that data from the five new interviews were quite comparable to the data from the first four interviews. Newly emerged codes and categories were interrelated around childrearing, both sense of self as an individual and a mother, and psychological adjustment to and protection of the family from discrimination in the community. Based on the analysis results, the interview guide was revised again and questions and probes were added to inquire about mothers' introspection, filling in for the father's absence, and how to deal with negative emotions.

Data from the last round of interviews provided more stories about mothers' lives that were prioritized to nurture their children's growth. Participants in the last round of interviews were comparable to earlier participants in terms of the path to become a single mother, dependency on public assistance, and the ways in which they related to the community. To saturate codes and categories emerged from previous data, participants who were already interviewed but had not asked the newly added probes or questions were contacted again. The theoretical sampling procedure was stopped when the researcher found that no new data were added to the major codes and categories that were already established.

### 3. Establishing Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness criteria delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) have been used most by qualitative researchers (Polit et al., 2004), aspects of which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Based on Lincoln and Guba's criteria, building trustworthiness of the data in this study was pursued in five ways including: peer debriefing, member checking, material collection for an audit trail, reflexive journals, and thick description of the study context. Four nurse scholars served as peer debriefers and peer debriefing provided opportunities to examine the researcher's bias and confirm that the interpretation of the data was not arbitrary and was understandable to others. For member checking, three participants reviewed the summarized findings. The participants confirmed that the researcher's interpretation of their life experiences conveyed the essence of their stories. A collection of materials for an audit trail was kept by the researcher and lastly, the researcher provided thick description of the context where the findings were emerged. By providing detailed information about the context, readers can evaluate the transferability of the data in this study.

### 4. Protection of Human Rights and Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee at the author's institution. The interview took place at a location selected by the participant. At the beginning of each meeting, the study's purpose and procedures, benefits and potential risks and the participant's rights were reviewed. The consent form, in either Korean or English, was distributed and participants were allowed to ask questions and express concerns. Participants were given 48 hours to think about what they had told the researcher and to request that deletions or additions be made to the interview records. To ensure confidentiality of the participants' data, each study participant was given a code number and no identifiers were linked with the audio-recorded interview data. The participants' privacy was also protected during the translation and verification processes. The researcher intentionally translated the interviews into English on her own; verifiers were sought outside of the Korean community to prevent unintended disclosure. Participants received a \$25 gift card for a store of their choice for each interview they completed as a token of appreciation for making a contribution to nursing knowledge.

### 5. Characteristics of the Participants

Fifteen immigrant Korean single mothers living with children participated in the study. The age of the participants ranged from 33 years to 53 years, with the average being  $43.6 \pm 6.1$  years, (median=44). Four of the par-

ticipants became single due to separation; the other eleven mothers divorced. Length of marriage ranged from one year to 16 years, with a mean of 9.9 years. Time of being a single mother ranged from 6 months to 18 years, with the average being  $5.8 \pm 4.5$  years, (median=5). Eleven participants were Protestant; two were Catholic; one stated she was both Christian and Buddhist; and one did not have a religion. The average level of the participants' education was 16 years. Average time of being in the U.S was 12.6 years, with a range of one year to 29 years. In summary, study participants were highly educated; in their early to mid-forties; had one or two children who are mostly in early adolescence at the time of the interviews. The majority of the mothers had been single mothers for about 5 years; had no natal families nearby; were Christian; and two-thirds of the mothers started working one or more low-paying jobs outside the home after becoming single mothers.

## RESULTS

'Living for the children' was found as the core category that explained and logically linked all the emerged core categories; living for their children was the powerful driving process which enabled the mothers to move forward and achieve their major task of 're-creating' the family after marital dissolution. The process of living for the children encompasses 3 major categories (stages) and 11 subcategories.

Immigrant Korean single mothers go through multi-dimensional, complex processes through which they make a substantial transition to their new lives as single-mother families. They are engaged in two major transitions: a practical transition for family survival and the mother's psychological growth. Processes involved in the mother's transition are depicted in the text that follows as linear processes. However, the transition, overall and for each of the two major transitions, occurs as a non-linear and non-unidirectional transition. Women in the transition might progress or regress throughout the processes. In particular, unlike the practical transition, tasks and processes in psychological transition were so closely intertwined with each other in a complex way; it was difficult to distinguish stages. Thus, the next section describes the women's transition focusing on the stages in practical transition and psychological processes are interwoven when appropriate. Relevant conditions and relationships between processes are also presented.

### 1. Practical Transition: The Stage of Assuring Family Survival

The first challenges that the women were facing after becoming single were re-creating the living conditions for their families. Re-creating in this stage involved primarily with 'assuring a place to live' and 'securing income'. As a new head of the household, the mother was taking the sole responsibility of family survival. Assuring a place to live is not a simple task to merely find a physical space to eat and sleep. Rather, it includes a complex process that involves multiple actions and repeating strategies to retain the family's dignity and protect the children from negative consequences of separation.

The process of securing income was not linear. Mothers took different trajectories to make a living by combining some of the sub-processes for the purpose of obtaining financial security and meeting the family's financial needs, which was related with her children's age. Unless the former husbands were providing sufficient child support or covering housing fees, getting employed was the first step taken by the mothers to secure income for their families. Depending on the family's financial strain at the time of physical separation, mothers would take a set of actions to secure income. Housing choices and the family's financial needs were closely associated; securing physical environment for the family was also accompanied by overwhelming stress and intense emotions, especially for those who were former full-time mothers.

Five major conditions affected how easily the mothers could succeed in securing income: mothers' previous working experiences during the marriage in the U.S., level of education (especially having a U.S. degree), English proficiency, both the mother's and the children's age at the time of physical separation, mother's health conditions, and having an available support network for the family. These conditions were intertwined and had the greatest impact, particularly on those who never worked outside the home during marriage and had no or few qualifications for a job; the process of securing income, getting employed in particular, was intensely stressful for them. Having higher education in the U.S. and having English proficiency (especially speaking ability) were perceived by the mothers as essential to getting a secure job. For some mothers, the lack of English proficiency overrode all other qualifications that prevented them from getting and maintaining an employed status.

It takes 2 years to finish ESL, but you can't get a job by finishing ESL. So you need to study something that you can get a certificate from at the same time. Anyway, it didn't work out for me because I didn't plan it well, I got a bookkeeping license but I couldn't take advantage of it because I can't speak English very well. It was really hard to understand textbooks written in English. Nevertheless, I was good at math, so I passed the test. Although I was able to understand 70% of the class, writing was really challenging because I didn't learn English in a systematic way. If I submitted my resume, usually I could get interviewed because I have some qualifications, but in the end, I couldn't get or keep the job because I can't communicate in English over the phone or in emails. (Participant 10, a mother of a teenage daughter)

Although separation or divorce was an outcome of long-term marital conflicts and (subsequent) domestic violence in most cases, mothers did little to prepare or plan how to stand on their own in advance. Former full-time mothers started to take actions to get a job after the actual process of separation or divorce. The mothers' level of financial dependency on their husbands during married life accounted for their emotional reactions to unemployment. Being unemployed, they experienced overwhelming anxiety and fear of failure to survive.

At a glance, for 3 months, if I divide my time period, I was at the edge of a cliff for 3 months, but... It's not depression. It was fear...just fear.(...) Once I got a job, regardless of whether I had two part-time jobs, or one full time [job], once I got a job, a little bit, my fear subsided. (Participant 03, a mother of three daughters)

When the mothers were successful in obtaining a steady income to cover basic living expenses, such as rent or a mortgage payment, car-related payments, and utility fees, the family entered into the stage of struggling: the mothers were struggling to re-create their new ways to operate their new families.

## 2. Practical Transition: The Stage of Struggling between Father Role and Mother Role

The stage of struggling was a period in which the mothers' endeavors to integrate fulfilling the fathers' tasks

into the mother role took place. As a sole provider and parent, mothers were taking on new roles previously filled (or supposed to be filled) by fathers while continuing with their roles as mothers. The stage of struggling involves four major parts: 'struggling between working and childrearing'; 'living month by month'; 'filling in the father's absence'; and 're-organizing family lifestyle'. Being the sole individual to take the lead and responsibility for family survival was the major condition under which single mothers' struggle to fulfill multiple roles became so challenging. Since the mothers' ultimate goal was raising the children well all by themselves, the stage of struggling was characterized by mothers' persistent attempts to retain their mother roles despite the multitude of barriers to integrating working and childrearing.

'Filling in for the father's absence' was one of the single mothers' responses to raising children without their father and refers to actions taken by single mothers for the purpose of addressing their sons' needs for a father. It was a dominant response among mothers who had a son. Mothers tried to carry out what an ordinary father usually does with his son and provided support, including assisting their sons going through puberty.

Since resolving one demand was closely related to managing another, unresolved practical issues made the mother emotionally intense; having to address emotional issues delayed the women's ability to attend to their children's needs. Having natal families nearby, which was really rare among the participating mothers, was the most helpful condition under which mothers were able to navigate demanding situations with more ease. In addition, mothers had to bear psychological and emotional pains due to the loss of marriage. Mothers were suffering from a damaged sense of self as well as others' discrimination, which resulted in their avoidance of people in response to public embarrassment due to being a single mother. A mother's story illuminates the 'entangled' nature of her challenges, which is likely to begin in the assuring stage and last through the stage of struggling:

When the situation got financially worse, it [= emotional difficulties] got worse, too. It was like a train, one affected another; affected the other and on and on, I mean, I wasn't able to straighten up my thoughts. This was tied with that; that was tied with another thing - it was like my heart was nothing but a hell. So, meanwhile, I wasn't able to be easy with my child; I got so easily upset with small things. And, I didn't want to mingle with people. Really, for



a while, it lasted for the first 1 to 2 years. I didn't want to get to know brand-new people, just stayed at home, avoided change to meet others as much as possible. It would have been better if I met a stranger. It was much harder to bump into someone who remembered my life living with husband, who knew who I was. It felt like I failed something, failed in something. Men would feel like that if they failed in business, but in my case I had that feeling [at that time]. It was so embarrassing for me to let it show and it hurt my pride a lot. (Participant 15, mother of a 10 year-old boy)

As time went by, finding and adopting new ways in which they could take care of housework and household maintenance work helped mothers to reduce intense emotions usually associated with such tasks. 'Re-organizing family lifestyle' refers to adopting a process in which mothers changed their ways to manage housework and household maintenance. Re-organizing family lifestyle was necessary for the mothers' successful integration of working and motherhood; it also helped mothers avoid and protect their children from unnecessary intense emotional reactions associated with doing housework.

The second stage of struggling in practical transition was likely to overlap in part with the first stage of assuring, which depended on how quickly single mothers could achieve financial stability. Although it is not always possible for the practical transition for family survival and the mother's psychological transition to be achieved concurrently, mothers who are successful in handling both transitions together are more likely to enter into the most stable stage in their transition.

### 3. Psychological Transition: Becoming Strong and Settling in with a New Supportive Network

Single mothers went through major psychological transitions that consist of two parts: the mother's psychological restoration and growth of the self and the psychological strategies needed to deal with discriminatory treatment toward her family by others in the community. The loss of marriage had two different psychological impacts on the women's lives. Since they suffered from emotionally and physically abusive relationships, their distorted or oppressed sense of self was given opportunities to be restored by the loss of marriage. However, the loss of marriage also resulted in significant social stigma and discrimination in the ethnic commun-

ity due to their status as husbandless women. The women's internalization of such social values and their actual experience with their community's discrimination added the women's psychological burden and made them socially withdrawn.

In the meantime, the children provided a turning point for the women. 'Gathering myself up for my children' refers to the mother's psychological process of making up her mind to move forward for her children and to get out of the negative mindset, into which she was drifting in the previous stage of getting lost and isolated. Their children were the motivation that kept the mothers from drowning in too much negativity and made them go back out into the world. The children provided a sobering reminder that made the mothers make up their minds to put to an end to their psychological and social withdrawal.

And as I told you before... my children, they are the major influence. If I don't have them, I would lie down, weep and wail, I would do like that. But, crawl out of bed, prepare their meals, go to work, and come back at night, suffer from insomnia, fall asleep at the dawn, and get up again - my life was like this. Even so, because of my children, I had to crawl out of the bed and cook meal for them, when my youngest daughter called me 'mommy, mommy,' then what could I do? I couldn't have gone crazy, nor take drugs. Then I had no choice. In my children's shoes... Once I can get up, then can go out. So, it's like if you can stand up, then can walk; if you can walk then you can run. Just like that. (Participant 03, mother of three daughters)

Recovery from damaged self-esteem was important in dealing with relational problems with others. If the mother's self-esteem was restored, they were likely to build close (but not including romantic) relationships with others. Conversely, when they felt supported or loved, that helped restore their confidence, find the self, and enhance their ability to move forward. Once women entered that stage, external discrimination would not affect them as much as it did before. Mothers called this phenomenon 'self-healing.' In addition, successful experiences during their practical transition provided opportunities for them to develop a positive sense of self, which was also important to take active actions to make progress in their relational transition.

The relational transition involved making substantial changes in three major areas: First, in the norms and

boundaries regarding disclosure of their status and distance from people; second, in their mindset to see others' discriminatory reactions; and the primary groups that they socialize with, those who are not judgmental about their status and behaviors. As the consequence of the transition, new supportive relationships were found and a new support network built for the family. Ultimately, mothers were approaching to gain psychological strength to get through everything by herself and practical stability with a new supportive network in the community.

#### 4. Practical Transition: The Stage of Stabilizing

Stabilizing refers to a process through which single mothers gained confidence and stability, both practically and psychologically, in their current situation. It was also the most stable phase in the women's entire transition of re-creation. With a few exceptions, stabilizing was more likely to happen among those who had been a single mother for three to five years and had no additional acute crisis such as health issues or unemployment.

When the women reached the stage of stabilizing, mothers felt confidence in handling practical issues and maximizing their ability to nurture their children and extract them from restricted living conditions. Mothers succeeded to restore or develop a positive sense of self, often expressed as 'becoming strong.' Women were able to settle in with a new support network with close interpersonal relationships and exchanged interpersonal support.

After the first two, three years passed, it felt better a little bit and it's been four years, almost five years now. I escaped from home with my son when my son was 4 months old. Run out of there when he was 4 months old and now he is five years and 4 months. After three years passed, I felt like I could live by myself. Other problems such as external environment or something like that, I felt comfortable to handle them. (Participant 12, mother of a 5 year-old boy)

Stabilizing involves five major features: being assertive and capable in handling problems alone; being content with the current life; having supportive relationships; having positive sense of self; and forgiving the person, that is, the former spouse. These components include ultimate outcomes in each aspect of their psychological and practical struggles after becoming single

mothers: being assertive and capable in handling problems alone was the outcome of the practical transition; having positive sense in their psychological growth; and having supportive relationships in their relational transition. Practical and psychological transitions were not necessarily achieved concurrently but managing both transitions together facilitated mothers' entry to the most stable phase in their transitions.

## DISCUSSION

The women's stories about transitioning to new lives as single-mother families illuminate the exacting nature and complexity of their multi-layered processes. Comparison of the findings with other models for divorce and its aftermath adjustment revealed that the findings extended our understanding on the post-separating adjustment in two major aspects. First, the study results not only support for those models but also provide further understanding of how these women make transitions to their new life of working single mothers. Although there is a large body of research on marital dissolution and post-dissolution adjustment, the mechanisms by which people make adjustment have been much less studied (Fasching, 2011; Gregson & Ceynar, 2009). The models in comparison (Guttmann, 1993; Radford et al., 1997) acknowledge the complexity and multidimensionality of the post-divorce transitions but except four-phase staging, dimensions after legal separation were simplified and their sub-stages were not explained. The model of living for the children provides further accounts for the initial five years of transition processes and how these women move through stages and transitions are explained. Second, the major similarity among the models and the findings in this study is the importance of reconstructing or redefining a new identity in post-divorce adjustment (Baum, Rahave, & Sharon, 2005; Gregson et al., 2009).

The major difference between prior literature and the current findings is which new identities are reconstructed-redefining a new identity as a divorced individual or reinforcing the maternal identity. The Korean women's strong reinforcement of their identity as a mother has no precedent in prior research on divorced White women's adjustment. Their identity as a strong mother was different from their maternal identity during marriage because: they became a mother as well as a solo provider who needed to take on multiple roles and responsibilities to maintain the family; and it was combined with the identity of a wife who was submissive and had a distorted

self-image. In this sense, identity of a strong mother was their newly developed identity after becoming a single mother.

Study findings also reveal important external conditions under which the women's transitions were significantly disturbed. The women's experience of being neglected and treated with derision was striking. Although studies of White divorced women conducted in the 1990s and earlier in the United States mention social stigma being imposed on divorced women, (Radford et al., 1997; Sakraida, 2005), stigma appears to be less important in more recent studies. But social disapproval and prejudice of divorced individuals and their children continue to be important in studies of Korean women's adjustment after divorce in the U.S. and in Korea (Kim, Park, & Choi, 2010; Lee & Bell-Scott, 2009; Whang, 2007; Yang, 1999). Nursing interventions to increase community-awareness for such discrimination should be designed, modified and implemented to create an empowering environment for these strong but socially vulnerable women and families.

Major challenges that the women in this study identified were not significantly different from those in the literature, such as financial hardships, parenting difficulties, dealing with psychological issues, and experiencing changes or loss in social contacts (Chang, 1998, 2003; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Kim, 1998; Ricciuti, 1999). However, among the variables or factors that were identified to consistently predict the women's post-divorce, elapsed time after becoming single (i.e., psychological adjustment would increase over time) and decider status (i.e., non-initiators are likely to exhibit the worst adjustment) did not have differential impact on the women's movement through their transition processes.

Literature showed that most of the women who experienced separation or divorce were able to obtaining a new stability two to three years after separation or divorce (Amato, 2000; Hetherington, 1989). However, that 2~3 year time frame is not applicable to the women in the study except for the few participants who had been self-supporting since marriage. Instead, the Korean mothers needed more time to gain such stability in each layer of transitions. Also, the findings showed the evidence of regression in their transitions or being confined in one stage due to unexpected crisis. Furthermore, these women's transition outcomes were more likely to depend upon post-divorce problems solving and critical life events than their decider status.

In sum, the women's social status as immigrants, cultural influences on their perception and reconstruction

of self, and the ethnic community's responses to these women and its consequences are unique to these women. Each of these aspects has significant implications for research and clinical practice. Reinforcement of maternal identity and child-centered lives should be understood as the primary mechanism for these women to rise above their devastating experience with marital dissolution, rather than a pathological resolution which needs to be corrected. Early intervention for successful transitions related to both psychological and practical stability, including the necessity of creating a supportive environment in the community, are pertinent to assisting these families gain resilience and confidence in maintaining their newly created family environment. Nursing interventions need to be synchronized to the situations in which these women and their families reside.

## CONCLUSION

The study findings substantiate further understanding of non-White women's experiences of marital dissolution, the transition, and their aftermath. Immigrant Korean women's subjective portrayal of their transitions provides further understanding of the processes occurring in different cultural contexts in the United States. Since the study was dependent upon one informant of a family and one-time and a single method of data collection, it is necessary to conduct research with more diverse groups of single mothers; to study children of single mothers or mother-child dyads; and explore community members' experience of living and working with single mothers.

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