

## **A Phenomenological Study on the Stress Experience of Rural Mothers-in-Law with Highly Educated Foreign-Daughters-in-Law**

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(Received September 9, 2017; Revised September 28, 2017; Accepted October 23, 2017)

### **Abstract**

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study is to understand the stress of rural mothers-in-law by identifying the nature of their stress experiences with highly educated foreign daughters-in-law using phenomenological methods, and to provide basic data on nursing intervention plan.

**Methods.** The method of this study is to first examine the relationship between marriage and marriage of highly educated immigrant women in Philippines, centered on the nuclear family, through literature reviews such as existing media reports, papers, books and reports, and then to analyze by using Colaizzi's phenomenological research methodology.

**Results.** The results of this study were based on interviews with an elderly women who lives in a rural area and accepted a highly educated foreign daughter-in-law 10 years ago. The essential themes that fit into the context of the 4-existential grounds of Making an Inevitable Choice, Augmenting Conflicts, Expecting hope beyond the endless fence, Crisis in Crisis - Still my family

**Conclusions.** Recently, interest in multicultural families and societies is growing, but there is little empirical study of the system for adopting international marriages, especially for rural mothers to live with foreign wives and to intake such cultural interactions.

**Key Words :** Southeast Asian international marriage, rural mother-in-law, conflict with foreign daughter-in-law, cultural stress experience, nursing intervention

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## I . Introduction

### 1. The Need for Research

International marriage has become an inevitable social phenomenon in conjunction with various domestic and international circumstances. According to the statistics of multicultural population dynamics in 2013, it is statistically indicated that “multicultural restoration policies such as strengthening international marriage regulations, decreasing age difference of multicultural couples, and increasing demand for higher educational attainment, are effective,” as the average duration of marriage was 5.4 years, indicating a steady upward trend<sup>1)</sup>.

Family discord among international marriages mainly occurs between the husband and the mother-in-law of a foreign daughter-in-law, especially with regard to conflicts with her mother-in-law. The occurrence of family conflicts around mother-in-law revolves around a variety of factors. Although there is considerable differences between the two people in their life style and role expectation, each of which is perceived natural and deemed appropriate by their own standard, they stay aloof in recognizing the existence of the difference while firmly asserting their individual perspective in establishing a new relationship, and this renders a cultural clash within a family that needs to be addressed<sup>2)</sup>. In other words, the mother-in-law demands the order of the role and relationship that she takes for granted, and the daughter-in-law, who never expected such behaviors and demands, feel embarrassed and offended. In addition, the mother-in-law’s proactive stance to help is deemed as the most important factor for foreign wives in rural areas to perform well as a ‘daughter-in-law’<sup>3)</sup>.

It is said that even trivial changes in everyday life require adaptation, and stress is rendered during this process. Despite positive intentions of a

marriage, the situation in which the two individuals from the different cultural background live together for a considerable period of time must be a stressful event, and these stresses are known to affect mental and physical health and illness along with a variety of physical symptoms<sup>4)</sup>.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the stress of rural mothers-in-law by identifying the nature of their stress experiences with highly educated foreign daughters-in-law using phenomenological methods, and to provide basic data on nursing intervention plan.

### 2. Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to better understand the meaning of the rural mother-in-law’s stress and to provide basic data for nursing intervention. Some examples of the research questions to address this goal would be to ask rural mothers “What kind of stress did you experience by living with a highly educated foreign daughter-in-law?” and “How did you manage to deal with the stress?”

## II . A Literature Review

### 1. Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law Relationship of a Married Immigrant Woman

In the case of multicultural families, migrant women and Korean mother-in-law are also required to establish new relationships, absorb and integrate unfamiliar cultures, thus conflicts are likely to occur. In Korean society, the daughter-in-law is inferior to the mother-in-law especially when the daughter-in-law is foreign born. The mother-in-law would engage and control throughout the daughter-in-law’s life to transform her into a ‘daughter from our house.’ On the other hand, the daughter-in-law, being an immigrant, is highly

likely to have conflicts among high-ranking members because she claims her own authority within the nuclear family and family. In addition, her mother-in-law's attempts are not a trivial solicitation, but rather a coercive command that cannot be imagined in a daughter-in-law's culture<sup>5)</sup>.

In Previous Studies, foreign daughters-in-law have experienced many difficulties due to communication problems, differences in conceptions and lifestyle, excessive interference and oppression in relation to mother -in-law; conflicts are reported to be related. Parents-in-law are reported to have the highest level of conflict with their foreign daughters-in-law. Parents-in-law are one of the most important factors affecting the couple's marital conflict as the most immigrant women feel conflicted because of her distrust and serious cultural differences and prejudices<sup>6)</sup>.

## 2. Family and Women; Filipino wife

Family system in Philippines is basically based on the nuclear family. The nuclear family is composed mainly of married couples, and marital relations are relatively equal, and gender equality of two-way relatives does not give women a dependent status. In this structure, being a wife / mother / daughter-in-law does not appear to be a conflict. The position of the daughter-in-law is hardly noticeable in family or kinship, and is not much different from the position of the son-in-law. Instead, the family relationship in the Philippines is described as matrifocal, and the mother's role is the center of family relations<sup>7)</sup>.

Mothers' roles include housekeeping and emotional support, as well as the management of kinship networks, family rituals, and village rituals, and extend to economic applicants<sup>8)</sup>. This mother's role is related to the sacrificial ideology of the woman for the family, but it does not conflict with the social activities of the woman<sup>9)</sup>. In other words,

in the Philippines family relationship, women are also caretakers of other family members, but they also have the capacity to serve as applicants<sup>10)</sup>. In a rapid social change, the need for men to maintain a family based on paternal bloodline and gender division, and the motivation of women to choose marriage migration for their new future and the welfare of the birth family were appropriately matched and established.

On the other hand, the daughter-in-law from the Philippines, where there is no paternal blood group, is unable to fully accept the position of the Korean mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law has to use a variety of strategies to involve her daughter-in-law, and high-ranking relationships can become conflictual. The Filipino daughter-in-law does not accept a paternal immediate family as a "given family," but wants to "make a family" by excluding or including her husband's relatives or other relatives in her family. Cultural differences in international marriage, including the kinship system, have no fixed meaning in themselves, and are meaningful as resources mobilized in family survival strategies and individual's pursuit of happiness<sup>9)</sup>.

## III. Research method

This study used phenomenological research method to understand the essence of stress experience of rural mother-in-law with foreigner daughter of higher education.

### 1. Research Design

This study is a qualitative study applying Colaizzi's phenomenological methodology<sup>11)</sup> to investigate the structure and essence of the experience of stressful life in a rural mother-in-law with a highly educated foreign daughter-in-law.

### 2. Data collection

### 1) Data collection procedure

In order to select the participants for this research, there was a visitation to the Multicultural Family Support Center in S-County and requested the center coordinator to cooperate with the research, but failed to receive formal cooperation due to the internal regulations of "Personal information, privacy and security."

The head of the Multicultural Family Support Center mentioned that researches about multicultural families have immensely grown in recent 2-3 years as they constantly receive numerous inquiries and interview requests. There was also an explanation that this, in turn negatively stimulates multicultural families and married immigrant women, and also renders tremendous amount of stress among such individuals as they are differentiated feels as though they are being viewed as 'pair of animals in a zoo.' In particular, issues revolving around the mother-in-law to cause high-level conflict was said to be almost 100%, and thus the exposure was considerably rejected. Due to the fact that there are many multicultural families in the rural areas, many program is often ask to individuals to appear in broadcasting stations, but everyone refuses. The marriage immigrant women who may appear on the broadcast are most likely to be of a very optimistic and lively character, or they may be seeking financial grant to visit their home country from the broadcasting agencies.

### 2) Selection of research participants

Therefore, by approaching informally, we selected one person who was informed and agreed with the purpose of this study, at G-hospital in kyungsangbuk-Do k-Kun.

Interviews with the participants were carried out for about 50 minutes starting from the second hour of dialysis during the 4 hours of hemodialysis. We

formed a trust relationship with the subject before the interview. Also, The interview was conducted with a screen to prevent interference from other people. It started with everyday conversation and allowed the participants to speak for themselves using an open question form<sup>12)</sup>.

### 3) Ethical considerations for participants

The study participants were informed about the purpose and method of the study, and interviewed after receiving the voluntary participation agreement. The interview promised that the contents of the interviews will be solely used for the research purpose and guaranteed the anonymity of the participants. The participants were also informed that they can stop the interview at any time if they were having any difficulties due to fatigue or any discomfort.

### 3. Data Analysis

Data analysis of this study used the analysis method suggested by Colazzi<sup>13)</sup>. After interviewing to obtain the experience of the stressful experience of a rural mother-in-law with a highly educated foreign daughter-in-law, the participant recorded there cording as a statement of the statement. By repeatedly reading the transcribed material, we extracted statements that were directly related to the phenomenon. Then the extracted statements were reconstructed into the language of the researcher. We grouped similar topics among the restructured meanings of the researchers' languages. Similar topics were gathered together to derive topic collections<sup>14)</sup>.

## IV. Results

### Research participants

The research participant (Female/72) residing in

the S county is a rural mother-in-law who lived with a highly educated foreign daughter-in for 15 years. She was diagnosed with unspecified CRF and was receiving hemodialysis three times a week. A highly educated foreign daughter-in-law is a Filipino marriage immigrant, graduated from a prestigious university in the Philippines, and currently works as a private English tutor. The participant's son met his wife during Philippine missionary work.

### 1. Making an Inevitable Choice

The participant attempted to fulfill her duty and responsibility for the marriage of her son as a mother living without her husband.

“I lived with my son until he got married internationally. My son went out of his mission to the Philippines and lived there for a few months, and one day he told me he would marry a Filipina woman. I've heard about international marriage before here and there, but I never thought my son back to me talking about such marriage. I heard a lot about Philippines but I did not have any interest in it. My husband passed away early and I had difficulty raising my only son, I refused at first when he said he wants to marry a foreign woman. I doubted a many things such as whether a foreign woman would come in to my house and be willing to faithfully perform the ancestral rites for her husband's father. But I still wished what was best for my son, as there isn't any parents in this world who would win over their own child. So I approved...”

### 2. Augmenting Conflicts

Participants appealed with stressful experiences that they experienced while living with their highly educated foreign daughter-in-law.

“So he got married, then went to Philippine, lived there for about 3 years, and had a baby when he came back. When they were living in Philippine, I was thankful and happy that my son's wife was pregnant. I had a little money saved up all my life and did not hesitate sending them whatever I could afford at that time. I wished that they live well and I am pretty sure they did when they were down there.”

“When they came back to Korea, we lived together for about a year. At first, breakfast, lunch, dinner, I prepared and served everything as if my daughter-in-law was my superior.”

“I felt sympathetic of how lonely and alone she would be living in a new environment by simply following my son to Korea. I tried best to treat her as if she was my own daughter, but she did not give me any attention and seem to take everything for granted. What in the world... Now I look back it seems as if I had taken the role of a daughter-in-law instead of the real daughter-in-law. My son was going back and forth trying and having troubles to alleviate the conflicts that were arising to the surface.”

“While we were living together for a year, one thing that gave me the most stress and frustration was the fact that all three were talking in English whether I was there or not. I could never understand what they were talking about. Initially I was going with it, later I asked my son or grandson to speak Korean once in a while when I am around. They would not respond and continue talking in English. I got angry I kind of asked my grandson if they were trying to kick me out of the house in frustration. I frequently fought with my own son for these kinds of issues.”

“It's so frustrating and suffocating not being able to speak Korean. One day I fought with the daughter-in-law and got very angry. I packed all my stuff thinking I will leave the house in the

morning, and put them outside of the house. All my neighbors saw this happened, and it was very embarrassing but I had to do it.”

“My son stopped me relentlessly and asked for forgiveness, so I came back in, tried to calm myself very heavily that day. Then I decided to pretend not to care or argue anymore. I just lived as if I was just there simply looking. But one day, they came to me and told me they want to start living outside separately. So I told them to do so. After couple days later, they never looked back and left out of the house.”

“Can this happen in this world? I still can’t fathom what had happened back then, even if it’s because the daughter-in-law is foreign born...”

“After they left the house, I’ve never seen the daughter-in-law again. She never called me either. I got sick about 10 years after they got married. Doctor tells me I’m sick because of my stress.

“It’s been about 5 to 6 years since I started living alone, before I die, I doubt they would, and even if they do ask me to live together again, I will never do so.”

### 3. Expecting hope beyond the endless fence

Participants chose religion as a way to cope with the stress they experienced while living with their highly educated foreign daughter-in-law.

“I went to church one day in hope to relieve some stress. My son was a deacon of church, I wasn’t a part of consistent congregation, and I was here and there. I went to different church than where my son attended.”

“So I went to this one church in my neighborhood, this deaconess of church came up to me and started saying demeaning remarks and ignoring me because I’m poor. It was apparently an Easter weekend, and I was wearing something red colored clothes, the woman scolded me what is

wrong with me for wearing such colored clothes, then told me to get out.”

“The other day I was at a different church eating lunch at church cafeteria, another so called the deaconess came up to me and told me that I was sitting in her spot, and told me to move away and eat somewhere else. Do you see what I’m saying? So God or whatever, after those points on I am just not going to churches anymore. So what do I do? I just go around places and calm things down and try to keep my own composure. So how can I not be sick?”

### 4. Crisis in Crisis - Still my family

Despite much stress experiences, the participant tried to communicate with a highly educated foreign daughter-in-law.

“Although I didn’t see it with my own eyes, my daughter-in-law came from a prestigious family in Philippine, and graduated from a well-known university, I heard. At first I was very proud and boasted about her to my neighbors. Neighbors reacted with jealousy saying that it must be conspicuously different from the typical foreign daughters-in-law as my daughter-in-law is highly educated. You know, she speaks very fluent English and she also used to tutor people.”

“Who would have thought though? My highly educated daughter-in-law had a very bad reputation around the neighborhood and the church, as she did not know how to greet people and be respectful. She used to run her English academy business in the town, but students started leaving quickly, and heard it didn’t go well eventually. Now apparently she went back tutoring privately at her own place...”

“When she first came to my house and soon after started tutoring English, kids’ eraser and pencil residues... and other trashes were always

laying around the floor. I used to be the one who ended up cleaning everything up. After a while I scolded her to help clean afterwards as well, she got angry and complained that I am always up on her nose and never leaving her alone.”

“She says she would never hesitate to go back to Philippine when the right time comes, but she can’t go back at the moment because she does not want to scar or disappoint her own parents back in Philippine. So she only care about her own parents in Philippine while she can certainly bear seeing her mother-in-law. This isn’t fair…”

“When they broadcast on TV about Philippine of how they are having bad weather. She would call her mother land countless times a day. She would always complain that she is broke, but when the vacation time comes, the whole family leaves to Philippine after spending \$4000 - \$5000 easily…”

“I guess they are able to save up some money after all. But why is she always angry at my son demanding him for more money day after day?”

“My grandson is going to high school next year or so, he visits me once in a while. He’s spectacular at English subject and I heard he has won some type of an academic award recently, so I gave him some allowance. When he says he is going to some place to make a trip, I gave him some pocket money. After all, I am her grandmother and it’s my duty to care for my grandson. You know.”

“Who am I gonna blame? It’s all because I raised my son wrong...(in tears)”

## V. Conclusion

Recently, interest in multicultural families and societies is growing<sup>15)</sup>, but there is little empirical study of the system for adopting international marriages, especially for rural mothers to live with foreign wives and to intake such cultural interactions. At this point, the study will be a

useful resource for developing an effective intervention program to fundamentally understand the stress of rural mothers with highly educated foreign daughter-in-law.

Kim MJ(2007) suggests that the daughter-in-law in the Philippines, where there is no paternal lineage family, is not likely to fully share the role and position of the mother-in-law in paternal family in South Korea. Especially for a highly educated Filipino wife, her mother-in-law is solely perceived as a mother of her husband, and therefore it is natural for the mother to embrace and help her with household chores. As a result, her mother-in-law needs to use various strategies to recruit and involve her foreign daughter-in-law, while on the other hand the daughter-in-law hopes to distance herself from her mother-in-law to maintain balance the relationship of reciprocity. Therefore, the degree of cultural adaptation and the stress caused along with it can be reduced if the mother of a foreign daughter-in-law is able to understand the cultural differences beforehand.

The participants in the study are differentiated as they are entitled to ‘highly-educated foreign wives’ with a typical ‘foreign wives’ syndrome. However, considering the reality of the rural areas that have high numbers of the elderly women, this research will help to obtain basic data to help promote the health of multicultural families overall.

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