

An Exploratory Study of Influences on Vulnerabilities to Family Violence Among Vietnamese Wives Who Marry South Korean Men

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Abstract This article describes an exploratory study of why Vietnamese women who migrate to marry South Korean men are vulnerable to abuse. Inductive qualitative analysis of data from 22 Vietnamese wives who experienced abuse reveals inconsistencies in their expectations and their Korean husbands' and in-laws' expectations about their roles and influence in their Korean families and their provision of assistance to their Vietnamese families. A marriage broker system in both Vietnam and Korea supports these inconsistent expectations. Abuse and control result when Korean husbands and in-laws act to enforce their expectations of the women's role in the family and to prevent their leaving the home.

Cross-border marriages have become a common global phenomenon. In one well documented pattern of marriage migration, women from a less developed Southeast Asian country marry men from a more prosperous East Asian country (Cheng and Choo 2015; Jones and Shen 2008; H. K. Kim 2012; Palriwala and Uberoi 2008; W. Yang and Lu 2010). Exemplifying this pattern, since the 1990s South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of foreign wives, which grew from 619 in 1990 to 29,665 in 2006, but has since declined to 16,152 in 2014 (Seol et al. 2005; Statistics Korea 2015). Vietnamese women constitute the second largest group of foreign wives in Korea (4743 of 16,152 in 2014, and 29.4 % of the total between 2006 and 2014). The largest group is from China, and many in that group are ethnic Koreans, who are descendants of Korean immigrants; although most are Chinese citizens, they typically speak both Chinese and Korean and are familiar with Korean culture and cooking (S. J. Kim 2003). In contrast, most Vietnamese women who marry Korean men lack information about Korean culture and cuisine and have little or no Korean language competence; as a result, many of them

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feel very isolated from Korean society and find it difficult to build social networks or obtain employment (Thao 2016a).

As the numbers of Vietnamese wives in Korea grew, evidence mounted that they and other migrant wives experience high levels of domestic abuse (Byun et al. 2008; Choi and Byoun 2014; Seol et al. 2005, 2006). The many Vietnamese brides who experience abuse highlights the need to better understand the nature of their abuse and the reasons for their vulnerability.

Despite the size of the Vietnamese marriage migrant group and concerns about their abuse, few available publications present research findings on domestic violence against Vietnamese women married to Korean men. One study found that all of the Vietnamese women who participated in the research were responsible for the domestic work in their Korean families; to prevent their leaving, some were locked inside the home or denied access to their passports (Le et al. 2014). This dynamic is similar to what Kojima (2001) found from research on Japanese men who sought foreign wives to carry out reproductive and housework labor that is no longer readily available from Japanese women. A few additional studies have focused on difficulties of Vietnamese women in Korea, but have not examined domestic violence. Thao (2016a) surveyed 301 Vietnamese wives in research on the association of the women's acculturation with stress related to family life, including family conflict, and with depressive symptoms. He (Thao 2016b) also showed that family life stress is positively and directly related to depression, and family life stress is indirectly related to depression through its effect on self-esteem and high use of avoidant coping. Finally, in a survey of 216 Vietnamese women in Korea, Chae et al. (2014) found that social support and acculturation prevented depression and promoted health-related quality of life, but again their research did not directly examine domestic violence.

Some research on foreign wives in Korea is based on samples of women from a mix of countries. For example, Chung and Yoo (2013) obtained narratives from 10 women, but only two were from Vietnam. They documented several problems: communication difficulties, cultural misunderstandings, women's isolation, and Koreans' mistrust of foreign wives. J. Lee et al. (2016) surveyed a larger sample of 194 foreign-born mothers in Korea, and concluded from their analysis that husbands' alcohol abuse contributed to their abuse of the women, which in turn created the women's acculturation and parenting stress. Although this study provided some insight into the experiences of the Vietnamese-origin women, it did not holistically examine the connection of those experiences to domestic violence. Similarly, Wie and Lee (2015) found that marriage migrants in Korea were more likely to be hired as regular workers and had increased decision power in their households after they became citizens, but they did not specifically study the effect of citizenship on domestic violence. Finally, a few literature reviews (Byoun and Leung 2015; J. Lee et al. 2016) have summarized research findings about marriage migrants to Korea, but these sources are not available outside of the country.

The state of available research results led us to conclude that there is a pressing need for cohesive and detailed accounts of domestic violence as experienced by Vietnamese wives in Korea. It is important to focus on multiple women with the same country of origin so that they are not decontextualized from their country of origin. To begin to fill the gap in knowledge about marriage migrants, the research described in this article drew on the accounts and insights of abused Vietnamese wives in Korea. It revealed common themes that include the reasons for migration, the incongruent expectations for the marriage between the women and the Korean families, the typical matchmaking process, and abusive behaviors by husbands or in-laws in a general pattern of control.

In the present study, the interpretation of the women's accounts of their abuse requires consideration of the larger context of structural arrangements and social forces relevant to marriage migration between Vietnam and Korea. Therefore, the next section of this article explains the circumstances in both countries that created the marriage migration pattern.

Gender and Class Structures Influencing Vietnam-to-Korea Marriage Migration

Gender arrangements and conditions of poverty in both Vietnam and Korea set the stage for the migration of Vietnamese women to marry Korean men. In both Vietnam and Korea, changing economic policies and conditions altered gender arrangements in the last several decades. As part of Vietnam's shift towards a market economy, land ownership reforms required farmers to generate increased income to maintain control of their property, and the government withdrew from ensuring employment to all its citizens and from providing care for children, the elderly, and disabled individuals (X. Nguyen and Tran 2010). These changes resulted in especially rural women's increased responsibilities for caring for family members as well as their long-standing responsibility for bringing income into the family. The majority of Vietnamese women come to Korea from the Mekong Delta (Than 2006), which along with the Red River Delta has a very high proportion of Vietnamese who live in extreme poverty (Minot et al. 2006). A survey of 635 household members in the Mekong Delta revealed that daughters' marriage migration was seen as a common solution to a family's poverty: over 81 % of parents hoped that a daughter's overseas marriage would provide financial help through the remittances sent back to the family (X. Nguyen and Tran 2010). In another study of Vietnamese brides who migrated to marry, interviews with the women confirmed that all of them wanted to stop working as subsistence farmers and move to urban areas where they could hold non-agricultural jobs, and a small number viewed migration as a way to avoid living with abusive Vietnamese husbands or fathers (Le et al. 2014). Creating further incentive to migrate, emigrant daughters gain increased status and influence in their natal families because of their potential to send remittances from another country (Belanger and Linh 2011). The burdens on rural women in Vietnam, who are expected to work both in and outside the home, their poverty, and the potential for generating income for their Vietnamese families and achieving increased status in those families constitute multiple reasons for women to migrate to marry (P. Nguyen 2007; Seol et al. 2005).

Turning now to Korea, historically women did not work outside the home. Instead they concentrated on caring for family members. Because of traditional expectations that wives and daughters-in-law would handle household reproduction and the care of other family members, the Korean government has not invested heavily in family assistance programs (Chang and Song 2010; Le et al. 2014). However the increased education and employment of women and rapid economic development has resulted in a low fertility rate, women's tendency to delay marriage, women deciding not to marry at all, and a greater proportion of the population being elderly individuals in need of care (Chiu and Wong 2009). The combination of rapid economic development, more women in the workforce, and changing demographics has created a shortage of women available for marriage.

A higher proportion of male than female births has further intensified the shortage of Korean women available to marry and to fill the traditional roles of family reproduction and caregiving. The current sex imbalance in Korea results from a period marked by

considerable sex-selective abortion based on son preference (Chun and Dasgupta 2009; Park and Cho 1995; Seol 2006). The imbalance peaked in the early 1990s, after which attitudes about sex preferences changed and laws were passed against fetal-screening for sex identification (Chun and Dasgupta 2009). However, the lack of marriage-seeking women currently persists for men in their twenties and older, especially if they live in poor rural areas or are for some other reason not favored as husbands (Belanger et al. 2010; Seol 2006). To address the shortage of women, through its policies and programs, the Korean state has supported the marriage migrants' role as reproducers and caretakers of Korean children (M. Kim 2013). In fact, in the 2000s, local governments passed legislation to support international marriages of local men, in many cases by providing financial support (H. Lee 2014).

A marriage broker system has developed to link Vietnam and Korea as a source and destination for marriage migration. According to the National Survey on Multicultural Families in 2012, 27.3 % of marriage migrants to Korea from all countries and 65.8 % of Vietnamese marriage migrants met their spouses through the commercial marriage-brokerage agencies (Ministry of Gender Equality and Families 2013). Studies of advertisements have revealed that marriage brokers communicate to Koreans that Vietnamese wives will be "traditional women" with Confucian values (i.e., respect for elders and husbands, hard-working, and family oriented) (H. Lee 2014). The women are depicted as "gifts" who will meet their husbands' and his parents' need for care, and who are willing to partner with men who might depart from the perception of an ideal husband for a young woman, for example because they are handicapped, poor, or up to age 65 (Le et al. 2014).

Although commercial marriage brokers are illegal in Vietnam, limited enforcement, small penalties, and high profits encourage Vietnamese brokers to travel through the rural areas in Vietnam and bring them to large cities (Pham 2013). As Song (2015) indicated, marriage brokers businesses are "transnational, having local partners in sending countries who recruit young women, help organize meetings or weddings and the processing of immigration documents" (p. 165). Until married, the women live at a facility operated by the brokers and they meet a series of Korean men. In the process, Korean men are regarded as clients with the right to select their brides; they meet with at least 20–30 women and with up to 200 or even 300 (Goh et al. 2005).

In summary, powerful economic and social changes left some Korean families without a wife and daughter-in-law to fill traditional patriarchal roles that include bearing and raising children and meeting husbands' needs and the needs of aging and ill family members. Equally powerful economic and family forces provide incentive for Vietnamese women to migrate to Korea, though their intent is not to fill the Korean household labor shortage, but rather to escape poverty, take advantage of increased employment opportunities, and provide financial assistance to their Vietnamese families.

Research Focus

The present study sought to add to the existing literature by identifying both previously recognized and as yet unrecognized reasons for Vietnamese wives' vulnerability to abuse after they marry Korean men. Specifically, it used a grounded theory methodology to draw on women's experiences of marriage migration and of family life in Korea to develop an explanation of why particular forms of abuse occur among Vietnamese-origin wives in Korea.

Methodology

Overview

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with a sample of 22 Vietnamese women who had experienced abuse by their Korean husbands or in-laws and through telephone interviews with 8 key informants who included social service providers and a translator who worked for a marriage broker. The telephone interview participants were selected because they were knowledgeable about a large number of abused Vietnamese women in Korea. Since women might be vulnerable to abuse and/or immigration regulations, great care was taken to apply the IRB approved protocol for ensuring the protection of the study participants and the related confidentiality of their participation and the information they provided. Consistent with the method of grounded theory, data were collected and analyzed simultaneously (Charmaz 2006). In other words, as the data were collected, responses were analyzed inductively with constant comparison within the data to identify themes and patterns of connections between themes, and to identify the types of additional cases that should be added to the sample to verify themes and interconnections identified earlier in the research process.

The Sample

The primary participants in this study were Vietnamese women, age 18 or older, who married Korean men and who had a history of abuse from their Korean husbands or in-laws. To obtain access to abused Vietnamese wives in Korea—a population that is very difficult to study—the first author spent several months interacting with staff and participants in social services programs and with the emerging Vietnamese community in Korea (e.g., a restaurant owned by a Vietnamese woman). She began data collection with interviews with a few women who experienced abuse by their Korean husbands. Guided by her ongoing analysis, she selectively recruited participants from women referred from social service agencies, shelters, and other study participant. For example, at one point her analysis showed that some women experienced abuse by in-laws, and this finding led her to seek more study participants with these experiences and to add questions about in-laws so she could better understand their involvement in the dynamics of abuse. Similarly, early interviews suggested that there might be rural–urban differences. Extra effort was made to safely locate and recruit six rural women. Great care was taken to ensure the confidentiality of the rural women’s participation, because of the women’s concern that in their close knit communities, their Korean families would hear that they disclosed the abuse. Finally, to ensure a diversity of marriage pathways, women who entered Korea as industrial trainees and married Korean men they met in Korea were recruited into the sample, which in total numbered 22 participants.

The study participants are not, of course, a representative sample, but rather a sample selected to develop an explanation of the reasons the women were vulnerable to abuse. However, the process through which their marriages were arranged and the characteristics of women and their families appear to be typical of Vietnamese marriage migrants. Sixteen (72.7 %) women in the sample met their husbands through matchmaking by marriage brokers, and friends or relatives introduced two women (9.1 %) to their future husbands. Only four women (18.2 %) had so-called “love marriages,” in which a man and woman freely chose each other. Two (9.1 %) of those met Korean men who were in Vietnam for

either work or a vacation, and two (9.1 %) immigrated to be trained as unskilled foreign workers in Korea. The 16 women who relied on a marriage broker described high costs incurred by husbands and their families (i.e., between US\$10,000 and \$12,000).

The women were substantially younger and less educated than their husbands. Their ages ranged from 20 to 38 ($M = 26.9$, $SD = 4.6$). The husbands' ages ranged from 35 to 53 ($M = 44.8$, $SD = 4.9$). Fifteen (68.2 %) women did not graduate from high school, because in Vietnam they were expected to work in a family business, take care of siblings, or bring in income instead of attending school. Five women (22.7 %) completed high school and two (9.1 %) either attended or completed college. About a third of women (31.9 %) lacked knowledge of their husbands' education, but the remainder reported that the men either completed high school ($n = 9$ or 40.9 %) or college ($n = 2$ or 9.1 %).

Less than half the women had information about the financial situation of their Korean families ($n = 10$ or 45.5 %). Those with this knowledge reported fairly low family incomes for the Korean context. Specifically, four women (18.9 %) had a monthly household income of U.S. \$2000–\$3000, and three women (13.6 %) had a monthly household income of U.S. \$1000–\$2000. Two women's (9.1 %) monthly household income level fell under U.S. \$1000. Only 1 woman (4.5 %) had a monthly household income of more than U.S. \$3000. According to Statistics Korea (2008), the average monthly income for a household in Korea was U.S. \$3225 in 2007; the median income for a household in Korea was U.S. \$2799. In addition, the 2005 survey by the Ministry of Health and Welfare indicated that 52.9 % of internationally married families fell under the absolute poverty line with incomes less than the minimum cost of living, which was about U.S. \$1136 for a family of four people (Seol et al. 2005). Professionals interviewed for the research confirmed that most abused Vietnamese wives did not live in Korean families that would be considered to be financially well off.

At the time of the interview, thirteen women (59.1 %) were not employed. Of the nine (40.9 %) employed women, six had started working either right before or after leaving their husbands. Six of the women (27.3 %) resided in rural areas during their marriage. With regard to marital status, at the time of the interview, nine women (40.9 %) were living with their spouses, twelve (54.5 %) were separated, and one (4.5 %) was divorced.

A second source of data for this study was telephone interviews with key informants. Key informants were selected based on their knowledge of domestic violence among Vietnamese women. They included seven social service providers and one interpreter who worked for a marriage broker. Social service providers were chosen based on their professional work experience with abused Vietnamese women (e.g., counseling and shelter service, legal assistance, childcare service, or Korean language education for Vietnamese women). The reason for including a translator for a marriage broker is that her job included mediating marriage conflicts between Vietnamese wives and Korean husbands. 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.

Interviews

The first author conducted in-depth, one to two hours long interviews with the Vietnamese wives at private locations chosen by the participants between June and August 2008. She provided participants with the questions that were routinely asked of all women and consent forms in both Korean and Vietnamese. 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. The interviews were audio-taped with consent ($n = 20$ or 90.9 %) or responses were noted in writing ($n = 2$ or 9.1 %).

Key informants were interviewed after most Vietnamese women had been interviewed. They were asked about their experiences as service providers including the support and information they provided to Vietnamese women, and their perceptions of the women and their situations in Korean and Vietnamese families.

Analytic Strategy

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and then all interviews were translated into English by the first author, who is bilingual. Throughout the interview process, the interview transcripts in Korean and the English translation were imported into NVIVO software and analyzed using line-by-line coding to identify emerging themes and patterns. Several themes that characterized women's marriage were identified: motivations of the women, involvement of marriage brokers, women's expectations, the expectations of men and their families, and abusive behaviors the women experienced. After identification of emerging themes, subthemes were developed to specify the dimension and properties of themes. Analysis of women's reports of motivations to marry and migrate revealed the subthemes: expectations of a better life, desires to assist Vietnamese families by sending remittances, and desire to avoid local men who were violent. Subthemes for the involvement of marriage brokers were the cost for commission fees paid by Korean men and the accuracy of information given to women about the men and their circumstances. Analysis of women's descriptions of Korean families revealed the following subthemes pertinent to the Korean families' expectations: be dutiful and submissive, fill family roles of reproduction and caretaking, and meet men's sexual demands. All of the abusive behaviors towards women were coded as geared towards maintaining total control over the women, with the following subthemes: use of violence in a general pattern of control, control of mobility to reduce associations with other people, prohibitions against working outside the home, accusations of infidelity, and control of the women's immigration status. In addition to identifying single themes, the analysis identified common combinations of themes (e.g., multiple reasons women had for marrying Korean men).

The first author carried out the ongoing analysis during the project. The second author also reviewed the transcripts in the English version in NVIVO. The first author discussed the coding scheme developed and the interpretation of findings with the second author to improve the credibility of the findings.

The telephone interviews with the eight informants were also used to improve the credibility of findings through the triangulation of sources. For example, since many Vietnamese women lacked information on their annual household incomes in Korea, the first author confirmed through social services providers that most of the women lived in Korean families with financial hardships. As another example, because the unexpected high involvement of in-laws in abuse was discovered in Vietnamese wives' responses, the first author questioned the social service providers about this and obtained further evidence of the extent of this problem. The social services providers' responses were also particularly helpful in corroborating the Vietnamese women's descriptions of the marriage broker system.

Findings

The data analysis process led to the identification of key themes that helped to explain women's vulnerabilities to abuse. First, women were highly motivated to migrate and marry by their interest in providing financial assistance to their Vietnamese families and at the same time improving their own financial standing. Marriage brokers misled women to expect to be financially well off and thus able to help their Vietnamese families. Second, Korean men and their families had very different expectations than the women had for the marriage. They expected women to bring resources in the form of household labor and caring for other family members, and in a few cases, income. The Korean families did not expect women to provide support to their Vietnamese relatives. Third, Korean husbands and in-laws used abuse as a tactic to enforce the realization of their expectations for the marriage. Finally, the Korean family members used a variety of tactics to entrap women in abusive families and in their roles as subservient household laborers, caretakers, and sexual partners. Each of these themes is presented in more detail below along with supporting evidence from the data. In the presentation of the qualitative data, pseudonyms are used to clarify which comments were made by the same woman as well as to show the variety of women who are quoted. The explanation of the type of abuse women experienced and why women were vulnerable to abuse constitutes the theory that emerged from the data.

Women's Expectations About the Marriage

Most women expected to be well off financially and therefore able to assist their Vietnamese families after they moved to Korea. Eighteen of the 22 women (81.8 %) specifically said they married Korean men so they could assist their Vietnamese families (15 women, 68.2 % with just this motivation), have a better life (9 women, 40.9 % with just this motivation), or to realize both of these financial benefits (6 women, 27.3 % with both motivations). Many of them assumed that they would be able to send some of their husbands' earnings to Vietnam. Making this assumption, Cúc said, "Although I didn't know much about living in Korea or marrying a Korean man, my family was so poor and I thought that I could become rich by marrying a Korean man and help my parents in Vietnam." Others, like Vân, planned to send some of their own earnings to their families: "Living in Vietnam was so difficult. My father was sick and all my family members relied on my income. Through hearsay I learned that I could make money myself and become well-off if I married a Korean man. So I made a decision for international marriage."

Connected with desires for a better life, a few of the women ($n = 3$ or 13.6 %) disclosed that they married Korean men because they were not abusive like Vietnamese men. Binh explained, "I saw men hitting their wives many times in Vietnam. I heard that in Korea, unlike Vietnam, husbands did not hit wives. It was alright for me for a husband to drink a little but I wanted a man who would not hit his wife." Some Vietnamese women, then, were trying to avoid marriages in Vietnam that they viewed as likely to result in their future abuse.

Even women who knew that some international husbands abused their wives agreed to marry in order to help their Vietnamese families. Hiền's case showed how she balanced positive and negative outcomes in her decision to marry a Korean man even if it put her life at risk. Her family was heavily in debt and her father's health was deteriorating. Creditors pressured her family for immediate payment. Her mother and the people around her persuaded her to marry a Korean man. Hiền said,

I have thought about international marriage negatively because it was not often grounded on love. Usually, Vietnamese women got married with Korean men for money and Korean men got married to meet their needs. So, I didn't want to marry a man of a different nationality because it was an undesirable thing for me. In addition, I have heard about several problems including domestic violence among Vietnamese wives in Korea. However, we were in dire need of money and thus we had no choice. I thought I should go to Korea and I was ready to die.

The marriage-broker system left many women incorrectly believing they would be able to help their Vietnamese families because they would be financially well off after marriage. A broker initially told Ngọc that her husband owned a restaurant and made the equivalent of U.S. \$1500 per month, but later said he ran a fruit shop. She told the interviewer, "In fact my husband was a stall keeper selling vegetables and fruit." Another woman, Binh, explained,

I thought that I could be economically more stable [in Korea]. I heard that my husband worked for a company in Seoul with 2.5 million Won [U.S. \$2500] of monthly income and that my mother-in-law was running a business. But when I came to Korea, I found that the mother-in-law was well over 80 and was unable to move her body.

Binh's statement not only conveys her dashed hope for improved economic well-being, but it introduces the next key theme that emerged in the data, the Korean families' expectations that the Vietnamese women would have the primary role of providing domestic labor to their Korean families.

Korean Families' Expectations About the Marriage

Husbands and their families appeared to expect a highly patriarchal marriage arrangement that restricted wives to meeting the needs of their Korean families, in a few cases by working and turning income over to the husband, but in all cases by working within the family and meeting the needs and fulfilling the desires of their husbands and his relatives. As Binh's above-quoted comments show, she was expected to assume the care for her seriously disabled mother-in-law. Binh confirmed that she was brought into the marriage primarily because of the caregiving she would do in the family,

I had to live with my mother-in-law, whose legs were crippled, and I had to take care of her as she could not move her body. It seems to me that instead of taking care of his own mother, my husband's older brother was looking for a woman who would marry his brother [my husband], who had mental disorders, and take good care of his disabled mother. It turns out that my husband's older brother provided the money to arrange the marriage between myself and my husband.

Other women's comments similarly suggested that families viewed the Vietnamese wives as service providers they had purchased and were therefore entitled to control. For example, Oanh said her mother-in-law "told me to pay all the money spent for the marriage if I wanted to divorce and return to Vietnam. She said that she would return my passport and visa only when I gave her the money." The high fees charged through the marriage broker system contributed to the Korean family members' perception that they had purchased women's services and were entitled to them.

Husbands also expected their wives to fulfill their sexual demands regardless of the women's desires. When they spoke about forced sex, the women often described the husband's sense of ownership of the women and the women's duty to engage in sex. Hiên said,

He always forced me to have sex and did it whenever he wanted. It was not two or three time per week. He did it even if I was too tired or sick and didn't want to have sex. He got extremely angry if a look of unpleasantness came to my face, and he said to me, "Just sleep. I can do this alone while you are sleeping." I was afraid of having sex. He made me follow the porn video.... He told me that he kept having sex because he loved me so much. However, he didn't use birth control and thus I had to abort my child two times. He didn't want to have a baby with me. He only wanted to serve his sexual needs.

Just as Binh thought her marriage was intended to provide a caretaker for her elderly mother-in-law, Hiên concluded that her husband married her so he could have sex with a woman at any time and in any manner he desired.

Abuse as Tactics of Control and Entrapment

Researchers have identified different types of intimate partner violence: (1) intimate terrorism (multiple tactics to control a partner), (2) mutual violence (partners battling to control each other), and (3) situational couple violence (arguments escalating to occasional physical violence) (Johnson and Ferraro 2000; Kelly and Johnson 2008). Analysis of the data revealed the prevalence of intimate terrorism in the present research. In all cases, the husbands and in-laws attempted to control their wives or daughters-in-law, but wives did not try to control the aggressors. Data analysis led to the identification of multiple control tactics, including physical violence, economic abuse by denying access to all financial resources, isolation, and captivity. The aim of these combined tactics was total control of the women, with the result that common forms of interaction such as women's talking back to their spouses or in-laws or having arguments with them, were the most common immediate reasons for abusive incidents. For example, Hạnh reported that her husband grabbed her hair and beat her, saying that she was talking back to him rudely when she asked him why he was not helping with housework or child rearing. The data contained many other similar examples of husbands' and in-laws' expectations that women would not express opinions or make demands about financial matters, housework, and parenting issues.

Many of the women described severe forms of physical abuse. Huyên described her situation,

My husband battered me all over my body with his fists and also hit my arms with umbrellas or books. When he beat me, I was just quiet, being beaten without saying a word. Since he always locked the door when he beat me, my neighbors could not help. I had to hold my breath while he said, "shut up and be quiet." I had to keep quiet even when he battered me wildly with his palms. While it hurt, I couldn't cry. I just had to bear it all to live.

Economic abuse was common too. Most ($n = 20$ or 90.9 %) women were financially dependent on their husbands. A few ($n = 2$ or 9.1 %) of them were expected to work outside the home and turn earnings over to husband or in-laws. Anh, was one of the women who worked,

My husband made little money. I worked in a restaurant, but all the money went to his bank account. He gave me only 50 to 70 thousand Won [U.S. \$50–70] for allowance. I spent the money to fuel my motorcycle and to buy clothes for my kids. After that, I had nothing left. When I asked him why he gave me so little money, I was beaten almost to death.

Other women were prohibited from working outside of the home. Either scenario could support economic abuse in the form of denying women needed funds and discretionary control over any funds. Thúy explained that her husband only gave her money to purchase infant formula, and Mỹ said that when her husband was away and she wanted some special food when she was pregnant, her husband had his adult daughter withdraw money from the bank and purchase the food rather than giving her any money.

When Korean husbands and in-laws felt they had paid high marriage broker fees to bring women to the family as domestic workers, they used various tactics to entrap the women in the family so they could not leave. First, some husbands and their families did not allow Vietnamese wives to go outside the home, contact other people, and make calls to Vietnam. They monitored women's movements and associations constantly. Lý described this tactic,

There are several Vietnamese women in my neighborhood, but I do not see them often as my husband's parents do not like it when I see Vietnamese friends. They don't want me to visit other places to have some fun. There was a Vietnamese girl who married a Korean man, but she left home. I was told that my mother-in-law's acquaintances told her [the mother-in-law] that I shouldn't be allowed to go for a meeting. They think that I might hear of such bad situations and leave home.

Women stated that their husbands or in-laws were afraid that they would flee after they gained information and learned to speak Korean. Isolation was used to prevent wives from "running away."

Second, prohibitions against working outside the family not only served the Korean families' plans to have wives be the family caretakers and laborers, but again prevented women from leaving home. Binh described her Korean family's actions to keep her home by not allowing her to work,

I wanted to go out and make money, but all the family members, including my husband, were opposed to my working outside, and this was the main cause of conflicts. My husband's two sisters came and, while grabbing me by the hair and beating me, said, "You want to run away. You want to go out and live together with another man."

Third, husbands' accusations that their wives were having affairs justified men's restricting the women from socializing with friends or forcing them to quit their jobs. Thúy described her husbands' use of these justifications to limit her contacts outside of the family,

Last summer, I had an outing with a close Vietnamese friend who was my neighbor who, like me, had one daughter. He [my husband] suspected I cheated on him and hit me severely. He said, "Why did you go out? Did you play with your boyfriend? You're cheating on me. I already told you, you stay home."

Mỹ provided a similar example,

In the middle of a quarrel about his doubts about the relationship between me and my employer, I went to work. My husband called me and told me to resign and come

home immediately. I talked back, saying that he could not force his own way on me. Then, he came to the shop, shouted and swore at me, and told me to get out of the shop immediately.

Finally, husbands and in-laws controlled the wives' immigration affairs by keeping or hiding their passports. Oanh's case, which is described above, is an example of this practice. According to Korean immigration laws, immigrant women who enter Korea on spousal visas can obtain citizenship after two years of residence, but only with the consent of the spouse (Byun et al. 2008; Choi and Byoun 2014). Thus, women's immigration status depends on the continued support of their Korean husbands. Thúy's comments revealed that she was entrapped in an abusive family by her insecurities about her immigration status and dependence on her Korean family to stay in the country,

I finally dropped a lawsuit for several reasons. First, I heard from a lawyer that even if I get a divorce, it was not certain I could get parental rights and child custody, because I do not have Korean citizenship. I worried that if he got child custody after a divorce and I had to leave Korea due to trouble with my visa, it would not be good for my daughter, because he drank every day and would not take care of my daughter well.

Discussion

This article has identified a theoretical explanation for why the Vietnamese-origin study participants were vulnerable to domestic violence after they married Korean men. The Vietnamese women were primarily motivated to marry by their desire to better their Vietnamese families' and their own financial situation. These desires were rooted in structural conditions in Vietnam, their heavy burden of work both inside and outside their Vietnamese families, and their Vietnamese families' poverty and unmet needs.

Once they were in Korea, the Vietnamese wives found themselves in families at the extreme in expecting patriarchal control, with little or no influence and restricted to the home so they could devote themselves to meeting the needs of husbands and in-laws. The broker system of arranging marriages contributed to the conflicting expectations about the marriage in two ways. First, Korean and Vietnamese marriage brokers led women to incorrectly believe they would be financially well-off in Korea; instead many of the Korean families were poor, and the family members prohibited the wives from working and gave them no say in financial matters. Second, Korean family members had invested considerable money in obtaining a wife who would do essential tasks for the family, so they felt entitled to demand that women fill these roles. Other scholars have identified the gender arrangements of the type expected by the Korean families and supported by the marriage broker system as an extreme form of patriarchy (Chaudhuri et al. 2014; Stankuniene and Maslauskaitė 2008). The shortage of marriageable women in Korea and the persistent patriarchal beliefs and expectations of a subset of Korean men and their families contributed to the desire for a Vietnamese wife who would fill highly patriarchal expectations. Within the international marriages where husbands or in-laws abused wives, the conflicting expectations for the marriage led to husbands' and in-laws' use of often severe control tactics as means to enforce extreme patriarchy within the family.

The forms of economic, emotional, and physical abuse the women described were intended to force women to fulfill the prescribed family roles and submit to all demands of

the Korean family. This pattern is consistent with feminist theory, which recognizes that wife abuse and control is often used to hold women accountable for fulfilling gender-related expectations (Jakobsen 2014). The control tactics the women described have been found in other research. For instance, Kyriakakis et al. (2012) found that isolation is a key tactic used to control women by limiting their knowledge of resources that might help them escape from abuse. Korean families feared that women would leave and, despite their payment of large commissions to bring the women into the marriage, vital family care-taking roles would not be filled (Jung 2014).

Ironically, the extreme patriarchy sought by the Korean families is far from the norm in contemporary Korea. A recent survey revealed that in over 70 percent of Korean families, wives manage household expenditures, and even for financial decisions as important as purchasing a home, over three quarters of couples made decisions jointly (Chin 2011). Although Korean women assume more responsibility for care of other family members and housework than men, gender arrangements have on average changed so that women in Korea have considerable influence over family finances and decisions and are less available to serve as primary caretakers for others in the family (Chin 2011). For the participants in our research, the migrant wives were expected to serve the interests of Korean men by reproducing an extreme version of Korean patriarchy (S. Kim 2015). The reliance on migrant wives provides “a cheap solution to the reproductive crisis arising from care deficits in the areas of childcare, eldercare, and domestic work” (Jones 2012, p. 15).

As found in prior studies of Asian women, our analysis revealed that in-laws contributed to abuse either by tolerating it, encouraging husbands to be abusive, or by engaging in abuse themselves (Abraham 1999; Dasgupta and Warriar 1996; Mehrotra 1999; Raj et al. 2006). 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 highly motivated to participate in the control of the women through abuse.

Although our study shows how abuse is related to structural arrangements in both Vietnam and Korea and the desires of Vietnamese women to migrate and of Korean families to accept them as brides, it is important to recognize that researchers have identified other influences. For example, Menjívar and Salcido (2002) identified common experiences of domestic violence among immigrant women: language barriers, isolation, change in economic status, and legal status. The present research provides confirmation of some previously recognized influences, but its primary contribution is to highlight some influences that were not previously emphasized and to provide an in depth focus on abused women from one nation, in this case Vietnam.

Need for Future Research

It is important to recognize that the present research recruited study participants who were known to be abused. This was intentional, because we wanted to better understand the dynamics that led up to their vulnerability and that could potentially shape the purpose and nature of their abuse. As a grounded theory study, results of the present research are the generation of an explanation, not confirmation of the explanation in a larger or random sample. Thus, there remains a need for research to replicate or further develop the study findings, and to compare findings for Vietnamese versus other groups. It also would be helpful to compare findings before and after policy changes, such as those discussed below, are instituted.

Additional research is also needed on migrant wives who do not experience abuse and who have positive outcomes. Not all similarly arranged marriages result in abuse against

the wives. Writing about positive results from patterns of marriage migration, Levitt (2011) noted that depending on the originating country's culture and history, migrant women may send back not only remittances, but new ideas, knowledge, and practices that challenge conventional ideas about marriage, women's work, and women's rights. Writing specifically about their field research in Korea, Le et al. (2014) described how some women were able to negotiate their roles and increase their influence in their new homes, and also preserve their identities and carry out responsibilities as daughters in their natal families. It would be useful to conduct additional research to determine whether resources and characteristics of the wives, the process of setting up the marriage, the expectations of the husband and his family, or some other influence accounts for these marriages without abuse. Knowing this may suggest prevention and intervention strategies for the women who experience abuse after migration.

Finally, the current sample might omit women who tried to control or fight back against the aggressors. According to Chaudhuri et al. (2014), women try to gain power and security within patriarchal constraints by using a variety of strategies. There has been very limited research on women's strategic responses to domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands and/or in-laws, focusing on how women seek to maximize security and life options within patriarchal constraints in Korea. Additional research on migrant wives' different responses to domestic violence is necessary to improve knowledge on women's resources or constraint and to support women's use of effective strategies.

Implications for Law and Government Policy

A number of Korean laws and policies affect marriage migrants who experience abuse. The Marriage Brokerage Business Management Act regulates the marriage broker system that led to most of the study participants' marriage. Korean immigration law establishes foreign wives' status to enter and remain in Korea. National policies to promote multicultural families (funded through the 2008 Support for Multicultural Families Act) offer programs and services to families with foreign wives, with most of these services directed at the wife. Finally, social services, usually in the form of NGOs or religious organizations, provide assistance to foreign wives, including aid to those victimized by domestic violence. The current study has implications for these various laws, policies, and services.

Regulation of the Marriage Broker Industry

To regulate the marriage broker system in Korea, 2007 legislation and several amendments have required businesses to register, banned certain types of advertisements deemed to be misleading, required professional and ethical training for brokers, and required client (i.e., future husband and wife) protections in the form of understandable and true information in contracts between the parties to be married and the agency (H. Lee 2014; MacLean 2014). Complementing these regulations, in 2014, the Korean government strengthened requirements for marriage immigration visas to prevent fraudulent marriages and avoid problems resulting from international marriages (M. H. Kim 2016). Those applying for a resident-through-marriage visa must pass a Korean language proficiency test, and the men seeking visas for their future wives must provide proof of an annual income in excess of 14.8 million won (about U.S. \$14,000) (Kwaak 2014; Yoon 2015). Some of the government regulations are clearly intended to protect the men from marriages that women seek just to obtain entry into Korea, but not to form a permanent union. Others were intended to protect the brides, for example by ensuring the husband had some income. MacLean (2014), a

researcher and activist, reports that there is some evidence that husbands rather than wives most commonly use client protections by filing complaints about contract-related issues. Moreover, because marriage brokering is a commercial industry and Korean men are the paying customers, the marriage broker model is highly consistent with the belief of many of the Korean families that we studied that foreign wives are purchased commodities (Cheng 2011; H. M. Kim 2015). Reinforcing the conclusion that the primary effect of current regulations is to protect husbands, based on an economic analysis of the marriage broker industry, M. H. Kim (2015) concluded that legal reforms to protect the women would be ineffective as long as the industry remained a for-profit entity serving the men and their families who paid high fees.

There have been other criticisms of the law regulating the marriage broker business. It is unclear how the broker operations in another country could be monitored or how violations of Korean regulations could be enforced outside of Korea (MacLean 2014). Monitoring would be especially problematic in Vietnam, where brokering is illegal, and thus conducted under clandestine circumstances. Also, the law is very liberal in its specifications of a person's eligibility for engaging in the brokerage business in Korea, such that even a person convicted of human trafficking is eligible to head or be employed as a marriage broker business after a period of time (MacLean 2014). Criticisms of the law have led to a series of changes, including the requirement that companies have a fairly large minimum capital to operate a business. Although these measures resulted in the decline of marriage migrants from Southeast Asian countries (M. H. Kim 2016; Yoon 2015), there remains a need for empirical research to examine the effects of current regulation as a means to reduce abuse of women who migrate to marry.

Wives' Immigration Status

According to Korean immigration law, Korean husbands guarantee their migrant wives' residency and maintenance of their marital status at the time a wife's visa is renewed each year and when she applies for citizenship. To renew her visa or apply for citizenship, women must provide a bank statement proving that she or a family member she lives with has 30 million Won or more (about U.S. \$30,000). These requirements limit abused women's options to take actions to seek help and to stop or escape abuse (Choi and Byoun 2014; MacLean 2014; H. Yang 2011). They also make it difficult for women to divorce, since migrant wives seeking citizenship must prove they had no responsibility for the dissolution of their marriages. Women who are abused are eligible for naturalization after a divorce, but they must prove they were abused by producing police, court, or hospital documentation (M. H. Kim 2016; H. Yang 2011). Lack of familiarity with the Korean language and laws and difficulty in obtaining supporting documentation act as barriers for women to escape abuse through divorce (Choi and Byoun 2014; M. H. Kim 2016). As we found in some of our study participants' accounts, fear of being deported or losing custody of children influences some women to stay with abusive men. MacLean (2014) recommended a major overhaul of immigration law so that women could obtain residency status independent of their husbands, but as yet there does not appear to be any move in this direction.

Multicultural Families Policy

As noted in the introductory sections to this article, a general policy thrust in Korea is to encourage the creation of multicultural families as a means of addressing the unavailability

of women who desire to marry (H. Lee 2014; MacLean 2014). To this end, the Korean government enacted the Support for Multicultural Families Act in 2008 to ensure security and social integration of foreign-origin members of multicultural families. Korean law mandates that local governments provide services to members of multicultural families to help the immigrant, who is usually the wife, adjust to Korean life, to avoid problems such as domestic violence, and at the discretion of the local government, assist with divorces. These provisions hold promise for assisting marriage migrants in avoiding and contending with abuse (J. Kim et al. 2014; H. Lee 2014).

Despite the law's potential to protect and support domestic violence victims, criticisms highlight limitations of the law. First, only victims who have a legally recognized marital status can benefit from the law's protections. Women in common law relationships with Korean men, for example industrial trainees or foreign workers, are not covered by the law (Choi and Byoun 2014; J. N. Kim 2015). Second, the Korean government's policies for multicultural families focus heavily on helping migrant wives assimilate to expectations for Korean citizens, wives, and mothers (H. M. Kim 2015; Song 2016). Most commonly, the programs teach wives Korean cooking, language, and customs, but they do not empower women or encourage them to preserve their own heritages and family ties (Choi and Byoun 2014; H. M. Kim 2015; J. Kim et al. 2014; S. Kim 2015; MacLean 2014). Consistent with this critique, a social services provider interviewed for the present study said,

Programs of some Multicultural Family Support Centers funded by local governments are predominantly focused on assimilating migrant wives into Korean society through the Korean language classes, Korean culture and cooking lessons, and child rearing programs. They focus less on offering community education programs on domestic violence including prevention training and protection of human rights of victims and providing support services for migrant victims. The government policies aim at the support and protection of the family rather than the support of individual human rights.

Highly relevant to the present study findings that abusive families aim to enforce extreme patriarchy, the multicultural families policies and the programs they support can be viewed as emphasizing the patriarchal family system and cultural paternalism (Song 2016), which may actually reinforce the acceptance of abuse of foreign wives who do not conform.

Social Services Response

The entrapment tactics that were applied to several of the women who participated in our research create a dilemma regarding effective social services responses. How can service providers assist women who are isolated, monitored, or held captive by not just the husband, but by multiple family members? Regulations passed to protect both the husbands and their foreign wives have generated funding that has allowed many local Korean governments to contract with marriage brokers for women's advocacy. However, MacLean (2014) contends that this approach could actually pressure brides to comply with the demands of their Korean families. It may be more effective for governments to use fees collected from the groom and his family to support regular contact with new wives by independent service providers. Given Korean government support (through financial help for grooms and through legalizing and regulating the marriage broker process) for addressing the shortage of marriageable women, the state also has a responsibility to the women who migrate and then experience abuse.

It is important to recognize that the government policies and regulations aimed at overcoming domestic violence against immigrant wives disregard a fundamental issue. To prevent the patterns of domestic violence documented by our research, it is critical to empower women by improving their legal and economic status. At the community level, family educational programs focusing on development of egalitarian relationships might be an option. It also is crucial to reform or abandon the marriage broker system as a commercial enterprise, and to revise immigration laws and multicultural family policies that stand as barriers to foreign wives empowerment.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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