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Culturally Embedded Values Relating to Domestic Violence: A Study of Korean Migrant Women in Sydney, Australia*

Gyung-sook Jane Lee

Chonnam National University, South Korea

Abstract

This paper questions why Korean migrant women who reside in Sydney, Australia tend not to access Australian information and services designed to address domestic violence. It identifies the recognition of domestic violence as a key issue, in which traditional Korean notions of feminine virtue may obscure or disallow any discussion of disturbance in the family unit. These notions include those of “couple fight,” endurance, obedience, shame or “face,” and marital and wifely duty. Migration to Australia does not alter many of these notions, which remain as powerful constructive elements of their life stories. Through the analysis of the life stories of 33 Korean migrant women, it is argued that it is impossible to be a “good Korean woman” and to recognise and discuss domestic violence as presented in the Australian context. The paper points to the necessity of Australian information and services designed to address domestic violence to appeal to Korean ideals of feminine virtue if they are to be effective.

■ **Keywords** : discourse analysis, domestic violence, Korean migrant women, perceptions, culture of victim blaming

Introduction

This study explores the issues experienced by Korean migrant women¹⁾ (KMW hereafter) residing in Australia who are victims of domestic

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violence, and the likelihood that they will utilise existing support services established to assist women in such situations. A survey previously conducted by the researcher revealed that more than 40% of 197 KMW respondents had been physically abused at least once by their spouse. However, very few of the KMW sought help from domestic violence services, including services catered specifically towards the Korean community. A lack of awareness exists within both the Australian and Korean communities of the true nature and extent of domestic violence, and there is little research into the reasons why KMW experience difficulty in seeking support. Korean migrant women are categorized as a culturally and linguistically diverse group (CALDG² hereafter) in Australia. This study seeks to identify the apparent barriers that prevent KMW who are victims of domestic violence from seeking appropriate support.

Family, domestic, and sexual violence are major health and welfare issues in Australia and around the world. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one out of three (30%) women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15 (WHO, 2013). According to a study conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, about one in five (17%, or 1.6 million) women and more than half a million men (6.1%) aged 18 and over have experienced violence from a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15 in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

According to a recent survey on domestic and sexual violence in Australia (Henry, Powell, & Flynn, 2017), Australians overwhelmingly believe that violence against women is not justified. The survey also showed that people born in non-English speaking countries are more likely than their Australian-born counterparts to attribute at least some of the responsibility for domestic violence to the victim.

Up to one-third (from up to 22% to 34% depending on the country) of people born in non-English speaking countries attributed at least some responsibility for such violence to the victim (Henry et al., 2017). This was substantially higher than for respondents born in English speaking

countries. Compared with the participants from English speaking countries, both men and women from non-English speaking countries were as follows:

- more than 2 times as likely to agree that a woman was partly to blame for domestic violence; and
- more than 3 times as likely to agree that domestic violence could be excused if the abuser was heavily affected by alcohol (22% compared with 7%) (VicHealth, 2014).

The survey provides comprehensive national data about Australia's attitudes towards violence against women; however, there are no comparable national data sources to differentiate the results between migrant groups as all CALDG participants were grouped together. While there is a considerable body of knowledge concerning Australian-born women in situations of domestic violence, there is limited research available on immigrant women from non-English speaking countries. No studies to date have specifically addressed the issue of domestic violence with respect to KMW in Australia.

This study adopts the definition of domestic violence of Schecter and Ganley (1995). Schecter and Ganley (1995, p. 10) have developed a definition of domestic violence around the notion that it is a "pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviours, including physical, sexual and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners." This definition leaves the gender of the perpetrator and that of the victim unspecified.

A further specification of the definition of domestic violence in this study must be one that acknowledges the cultural context and background of the KMW, cultural and socio-political factors relevant to Korean society and that of transplanted Korean society in Australia, and the impact of international migration on KMW. Cultural context is required to understand experiences of domestic violence so that preventative measures do not require a total rejection of cultural identity.

Literature Review

In a review of relevant literature, no reference was found to Korean women in situations of domestic violence in Australia. In addition, there was a minimal amount of research on domestic violence with respect to women from CALDGs. Literature, while not specific to KMW, suggests that women who experience violence at home actively seek support from various resources including safe shelters, police, and social services (Cho & Wilke, 2005; Hutchison & Hirschel, 1998). However, support-seeking behaviors appear to differ across race and ethnic background. These barriers are further exacerbated for CALDG women who experience communication and language difficulties in accessing these services. Importantly, these migrant women do not know how to navigate and access these services, are often unfamiliar with Australian law, have concerns of social isolation, fear of deportation, and have different cultural interpretations of what constitutes domestic violence (Bonar & Roberts, 2006).

A number of studies highlight that the two main reasons that CALDG women do not, or cannot access these services are due to a lack of bilingual workers in domestic violence support services and a lack of cultural sensitivity among such workers (Allimant & Ostapiej-Piatkowski, 2011; Carline & Easteal, 2014; Easteal, 1996). This deficiency in resourcing means that the services are inadequately prepared to deal with diversity, resulting in victims who feel a sense of isolation and cultural dislocation. They also consider the possibility of the loss of community support, within an already culturally dislocated context, if they do use the services.

In the United States, there are several Korean community based studies of KMW showing rates of domestic violence that are comparable to, or higher than, national prevailing rates, with physical violence rates ranging from 29% to 60% across the studies (Ahn, 2002, 2014; Lee, 2007). However, victims of domestic violence turn to churches and Korean clergies for assistance and guidance, if they seek help at all (Boodman, 2007; Moon, 2005). The studies find that Korean clergies often prioritise recon-

ciliation of the couple over the safety of physically assaulted women, turning only to outside support services when such reconciliation is unsuccessful (Asian Women's Shelter [AWS], Korean Community Center of the East Bay [KCCEB], Korean American Coalition to End Domestic Abuse [KACEDA], 2000; Choi, 2015). Choi (2015) concluded that Korean cultural values were found to be the strongest predictor for a Korean clergy's response to domestic violence, and was more influential than gender role attitudes or fundamental religious beliefs. Several studies (Moon, 2005; Tran & Jardins, 2000) found that factors that contribute to the low utilisation of formal services by abused Korean American women emanate from their Korean cultural values, including the priority of family over individual interests. Factors also included feelings of shame, perceptions of the withdrawal of support from extended family members, and cultural expectations for women to endure hardship to preserve the family unit. Additionally, the studies point out that their status as immigrants means that language difficulty and lack of knowledge about available services and resources are also contributing factors.

Lee (2007) claims that some Asian women may not report violent incidents to service providers or law enforcement authorities because of strong family values among Asian communities. These communities are likely to discourage the victims of domestic violence from seeking external assistance (Lee, 2007). Studies also found that it is possible victims may not request help for fear of deportation if there are existing issues with immigration status or if they are dependent on their husbands for legal residency (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000).

The lack of knowledge of the services available in the community is also given as a reason for not utilising those support services (Coker, Derrick, Lumpkin, Aldrich, & Oldendick, 2000; Ingram 2007; Krishnan, Baig-Amin, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Waters, 1998; Yoshioka, Gilbert, EL-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003). These researchers found that Asian women were more likely to gather information from informal sources such as friends and family, and they were less likely to seek formal sources of

information from service providers than other communities in the United States. This demonstrates that Asian victims of domestic violence were less likely to interface with and therefore report incidents of domestic violence to the formal institutions that were established to support them (Hutchison & Hirschel, 1998). Other commonly cited factors included the fear of loss of dignity, shame and guilt, mistrust of professional confidentiality, and the limited history or tradition of engaging experts for external consultation. Fear of racism, fear of law enforcement, and an ignorance of available support services or of human and legal rights were also mentioned. Language and cultural factors feature highly in the reasons why CALDG women do not access domestic violence services.

Research Method

Data Collection and Participants

The participants consisted of 33 first-generation KMW in metropolitan Sydney interviewed between February 2014 and February 2017. Semi-structured interviews were designed to facilitate the expression of participants' experiences of domestic violence and their experience with seeking support. Despite a basic level of English competency across most participants, interviews were conducted in Korean, as was the preference of the KMW. Pseudonyms were used in this article to provide anonymity to participants.

Demographic Information and Characteristics of Participants

The interview participants were identified using the snowball sampling technique. The participants were contacted through personal contacts, who were not themselves included in the study in order to reduce bias. Experience of domestic violence was not a selection criterion for the participants.

The participants in the group had migrated to Australia within the past 30 years, all as first generation Korean immigrants, and all, with the

exception of one, being married to a Korean husband. More than 75% of the participants had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher and many held postgraduate degrees in Korea or Australia. More than half of the participants would be considered socio-economically middle class in Korea, with some level of university education in either Korea or Australia. The participants were between 35 and 63 years of age, and had been living in Australia between 5 and 30 years. Married participants had been married between 5 years and 35 years, some having married in Korea and others in Australia. Eighteen married in Korea before coming to Australia.

The majority of the participants self-reported that they needed assistance in certain situations with respect to their use of the English language. Nine of the participants watch mainstream television (Australian or English language programs) and conversed adequately in English. None are fluent in English and all prefer to visit Korean doctors, even if seeing those doctors requires lengthy travel.

Research Findings

The key findings of non-recognition of domestic violence closely relate to cultural embeddedness or the importance of Korean cultural values. The interviews revealed the following information:

1. There is no equivalent terminology for domestic violence in Korean.
2. Most of the KMW who experienced domestic violence did not recognise that they were being abused.
3. Domestic violence was associated with excessive alcohol consumption and this was often used to justify systematic inaction.
4. Sexual compliance is perceived as a marital duty for these KMW.
5. Due to cultural values, KMW placed the interests of their family before their own.
6. Psychological and emotional abuse is not recognised as domestic violence.
7. In Korean culture, abuse is viewed as normal and widespread.

Non-recognition of Abuse is a Significant Barrier

The findings reveal that non-recognition of abuse is a significant barrier to the understanding of, and action against, domestic violence. Non-recognition of domestic violence may be seen as existing at a number of levels.

First, the failure to recognise domestic violence as violence can be attributed to the societal context of patriarchal societies, including the existence of male supremacy and dominance over women through experiences of emotional and sexual abuse (Christ, 2016; Hanisch, 2017; Pun, Infanti, Koju, Schei, & Darj, 2016).

Second, for some KMW, domestic violence may be an unfamiliar term and concept, not having been used widely in the public domain while these KMW were resident in Korea.

Third, domestic violence may be recognised only as pertaining to lower social classes and in connection with excessive alcohol consumption. Thus, by association, it may appear socially beneficial to a woman experiencing domestic violence, but wishing to maintain her sense of social status, to deny or fail to recognise that domestic violence is occurring.

The majority of the participants provided the narrative that strongly embedded cultural values, despite their having migrated to Australia, preventing KMW from reporting abuse.

Finding 1: There is no equivalent term in Korean for “domestic violence”.

Many participants did not recognise the term “domestic violence” even though they could understand the term in a literal sense. The non-recognition of the term could be culturally linked to Confucian notions of femininity and social order. Upon being questioned about their knowledge of the term domestic violence in Korean (*gajungpokluk*), the most immediate answer was that the participants did not comprehend the term. For many participants, domestic violence may not be understood as a term used in common parlance, nor related to the individual in question.

The potency of non-recognition varied from whether the respondent acknowledged the general existence of domestic violence at all to perhaps acknowledging its generic existence but not with regard to them or anyone they knew. In such cases, the discourse embraced a genuine ignorance or inability to connect general knowledge and personal experience.

Upon the explanation of the definition of domestic violence by the researcher, according to the definitions presented, the majority of the participants defined domestic violence as “couple fighting” (*Bubussaum*). For the participants, the use of the term “couple fight” was far more common than the term domestic violence, with the latter being seen as something akin to the term “wife battering,” and far more limited in scope. The term couple fight implies that both parties have equal responsibility for the fight and are equal participants.

However, the discourse may also be employed by those who do recognise domestic violence in either its generic or personal terms, but choose to deny it. That is, the participants are not willing to recognise the term, and may also encompass aspects of active self-denial or non-acknowledgement. In this sense, the notion of “truth” confronts a barrier to exploration.

According to Betty, a 45-year-old high-school educated participant who has been in Australia for 10 years:

It looks like her stupid behaviour has made her husband physically abuse her. If women did behave wisely, they could avoid their husbands' violence. If a woman controls the situation wisely, it should not happen. She is just stupid. Both of them are the same. (Personal interview 2014)

Lucy, a 34-year-old respondent with a university degree obtained in Korea and a hairdressing diploma obtained in Australia, draws much of her knowledge about domestic violence from the Korean television, videos, and magazines that she consumes in Australia. Lucy sees domestic violence as a joint responsibility of both the husband and wife:

I heard about domestic violence in Korea and Australia, includ-

ing stories about wives being battered by their husbands. Domestic violence occurs when both the husband and wife have problems. (Personal interview 2014)

For Lucy, if the wife were without problems or could deal with her husband wisely and appropriately, she would be able to avoid physical harm from him. She also believes that women who suffer domestic violence are weak, stupid, or ignorant. According to Lucy, the woman did not perform her “wifely duties” adequately, which has resulted in a lack of domestic harmony, and therefore reflects poorly upon the woman’s intelligence and skill as well as on the husband’s behavior.

Young-sook, a 54-year-old community volunteer worker, commented on a woman who lodged an Apprehended Violence Order against her husband:

Her husband has been forced to move out and he is not allowed to come to near her house. When she told me, I thought, ‘she is very a bad woman, how could she do that to her husband?’ One day, the husband rang me and told me his side of the story. I felt sorry for the husband and thought the wife was a terrible woman. (Personal interview 2014)

Couple fight and “victim blaming” constitute examples of social attitudes that exist in other cultures under different names. For Korean women influenced by traditional values, speaking out against perpetrators is not just a demonstration of self-assertiveness, but it also reveals the weaknesses of the family unit to outsiders. Speaking out is viewed as bringing shame upon the family name. It also violates the virtues of perseverance and endurance, and leads to divorce or separation from the family. Participants tended to describe women complaining of domestic abuse as having “instigator mentalities,” implying both stupidity and malevolence.

Finding 2: Domestic violence is associated with excessive alcohol consumption and used to justified the abuse

The majority of the participants (85%) associated wife battering (i.e., their understanding of domestic violence) with excessive alcohol consumption among the lower classes. Similarly, participants associated husbands who engaged in wife battering with either alcohol abuse or mental illness. Young-sook acknowledged that domestic violence occurred quite often but felt that it was “not normal” and related primarily to excessive alcohol consumption. Young-sook explained:

Often men get drunk and their wives complain about this, which leads to acts of physical violence. This is the typical story of physical domestic violence as far as I know. Physical damage and pain are considered violence. When a husband gets angry and upset and shouts at his wife and a wife shouts at her husband, physical violence occurs. (Personal interview 2016)

For Young-sook, if the wife did not complain about her husband’s alcohol abuse, physical violence would not occur, in another example of victim blaming. Betty also described domestic violence as related to alcohol, saying:

I have heard about domestic violence a lot of times on the TV news and in Korean language newspapers, where they have talked about the temper of Korean men and their alcohol problems. (Personal interview 2016)

For Hanna, 48, who has been living in Australia for 18 years, the perceived relationship between domestic violence and alcohol abuse is also apparent. Hanna believes domestic violence only occurs in very special circumstances, such as when the husband is inebriated. The relationship between alcohol and domestic violence has been studied extensively, and several theories have been formed regarding alcohol and violence. Ultimately, there is inadequate support for the theory that alcohol in itself causes domestic violence.

Finding 3: Sexual compliance as a marital duty

Historically, Korean cultural and legal non-recognition of rape and sexual violence within marriage form the institutional bases of non-acknowledgement. Research (Jang, 1999) conducted in Korea concerning rape has found that nearly 70% of women have experienced unwanted or forced sexual intercourse with their partners. However, when further questioned, less than 20% of participants considered that this constituted rape at the time of occurrence. Only 5% acknowledged this behavior as rape either at the time or after the fact. At the time the KMW resided in Korea, rape within marriage was not legally recognised, and this remained the reference point for the KMW. These attitudes were reflected in responses from the participants. Over half of the participants had not heard of sexual violence or marital rape, and were confused by the expression “sexual violence or rape in marriage.” There was a strong tendency to accept the male right to have sex with his wife and the rationalisation that men are biologically different from women and required sexual satisfaction in a way that women do not.

Many participants had experienced forced sexual intercourse with their husbands. Sexual compliance was identified as a marital duty. Young-hee described her attitude to being forced to have sex with her husband:

If a man urges someone to have sex, it seems that he must have sex, because he is insisting. I have to engage in sexual activity. I never refuse him even if I am tired and I do not want to do it. (Personal interview 2016)

Young-hee has a Korean university education degree and is employed on a full time basis. Despite being educated and being financially stable, her independence was not expressed in her sexual relationship with her husband. For Young-hee, sex with her husband was altruistic, as she felt that men had a stronger biological need for sex. Her own sexual needs or desires were not important to her, and she did not feel they were an adequate basis for refusing sex upon demand, which she believed was

one of her duties.

Eun-mi, a 40-year-old high school educated participant from a lower socio-economic background, said that she had to engage in sexual activity with her husband regardless of her own desires, and would think to herself: “Okay, do whatever you want to do, I do not care whether I want it or not.” Eun-mi did not use the term “rape” to describe this kind of sexual encounter, even though it was unpleasant, preferring to finish it as quickly as possible and forget about it.

Finding 4: Psychological and emotional abuse not recognised as domestic violence

The majority of the participants (85%) did not identify or recognise either notions of psychological or emotional abuse, nor indeed, that these were often borne by the wives. Most of the participants agreed that constant physical violence was a good reason to seek help from outside of the home; however, they felt that other marital problems or abuse did not justify leaving, as human relationships inevitably involved conflict.

Sun-young, a 35-year-old respondent with a postgraduate degree obtained in Korea, did not identify psychological or verbal abuse as a form of domestic violence. Sun-young admitted to suffering from psychological and emotional problems with her husband, but as she did not identify these as domestic violence or abuse, she had not addressed them. Hye-young, one of the participants who has suffered long-term physical violence, was admitted to psychiatric hospital several times and attempted suicide on more than one occasion.

Recognized as a Domestic Violence, but...

The next stage in awareness and ability to address domestic violence in participants was found in the discourse of recognition. The distinction between true recognition and non-recognition is difficult to establish, as the mutual and overlapping discourses of the two are employed to rationalise the maintenance of domestic violence. That is, while the same dis-

course is employed with similar outcomes of inaction, different levels of interpretation result, depending upon the woman's level of recognition and acknowledgement of domestic violence. For example, while some of the participants recognised and acknowledged the occurrence of domestic violence, they were reluctant to act to change their situations, and used the discourse of non-recognition (privacy, stigmatism, family harmony, and endurance through hardship) to justify their passivity.

Finding 1: Protecting feminine virtue is an over-riding cultural value.

The virtue of women is a discourse that allows recognition of domestic violence but prevents action against it. In this discourse, domestic violence is understood as a pertinent term involving patriarchal and damaging behavior to the woman that may become physical. Through this discourse, some recognition and self-identification has occurred and the discourse is one of guilt, blame and shame. That is, domestic violence occurs only to women who deserve it or who are unable to manage it properly. Its existence indicts the victim, the woman herself, as responsible for both the cause of, and the solution to the problem. These two responsibilities can be seen as self-reinforcing, or rather, self-weakening. That is, if the woman is in a position that requires a solution, her confidence and ability to find one is impinged upon by her understanding of her own guilt in creating the problem. The punishment is hence exacerbated: the woman suffers the burden of domestic abuse in concert with the burden of the responsibility for stopping it by herself.

This discourse has strong and clear roots in the Korean language, in which the collective pronoun "we" is used rather than the singular personal pronoun "I." It is thus difficult and unnatural for Korean individuals to speak of themselves as separate from their family. To complain of one's husband or situation is thus to complain about oneself and becomes a humiliating exercise in self-criticism.

Finding 2: Due to their cultural values, Korean women place the interests of their family before their own.

A second discourse that does not allow action is one of maternal and filial duty—the situation is maintained for the sake of the children and other family members. In this discourse, the perceived guilt of the abused woman is kept hidden from public view in order to preserve both her and her family’s public face. The woman may express fear that her children will be shunned because she is stigmatised, particularly if she divorces. Here, domestic violence is acknowledged, as is the hopelessness of the burden of sole responsibility, but action is prevented by fear of social judgment and retribution.

The participants often referred to this discourse when justifying remaining in a domestically violent situation. Hye-young is 60 years old and has been in Australia for thirteen years. She was continually beaten by her husband from the second week of her marriage and for the next 35 years. She finally separated from her abusive husband when her children grew up. Hye-young said.

While my husband was beating me, we had three children. I lived for my three children and I enjoyed them very much. I did not want to put them in a miserable situation, even if my husband regularly beat me up (on average, once a month). I lived for my children even if I feared their father. Whenever he came home, I tried to hide myself as much as possible. Now my children are all grown up, I do not have to worry about them anymore. Now I have freedom. (Personal interview 2016)

Despite a university education and a career as a high school teacher (a highly respected career in Korea at the time) when she married in her 20s, Hye-young was unable to extricate herself from a highly violent domestic situation. She described her husband beating her until she lost consciousness and her inability to live without sedation and antidepressant medication. Nevertheless, she believed she should remain in the situation

in order to provide her children with a father, a future, and social acceptance. There is a common belief that it is important to “keep the family together” or that “children need two parents.” This is seen by the participants as typically Korean rather than a universal or individual truth, which complicates the discourse with the addition of nationalism.

Social acceptance and filial duty combine to subordinate the well-being of the woman to the well-being of others. Sun-young says,

If I did not have children, I would divorce my husband. I live for my children and to save my parents’ face, since my marriage was arranged between my parents and my husband’s parents. If I divorce, they will be very disappointed with me and maybe they would even disown me. (Personal interview 2016)

Some of the participants agreed that the children of divorced or separated women suffer social and economic disadvantage and that remaining in the violent situation represented both a lesser evil and the virtues of endurance and sacrifice. While economic disadvantage can be seen as a fact of life, the social stigma Hanna refers to below arises from a Korean legacy of male-instigated divorce. Korean divorce has a historical basis in the notion of male banishment of the female: wives were unable to divorce husbands and divorced women were seen as rejected and guilty of a sin leading to that rejection. Children of divorced women have thus been viewed as coming from a position of moral weakness. Hanna says,

The reason for not leaving the abusive home are firstly, financial concerns, secondly, children and lastly, social pressure. I do not want to my children to suffer because of my divorce. (Personal interview 2016)

Finding 3: Abuse is viewed as normal and natural.

The discourse of couple fight also involves strict notions of privacy, with outside intervention discouraged. The majority of participants (over 85%) referred to another Korean adage, that “a couple fighting is like

cutting water with a knife” (*Kalro-mul-begi*): that is intervention is not necessary as, after the fight, the relationship will remain on its course as if the fight had never occurred. The discourse of privacy crosses paths with other discourses. In this discourse, domestic violence is acknowledged or recognised, but subverted to discourses of shame, “face,” and the perception that patriarchal abuse of women in marriage as normal. The term thus involves a sense of resignation-domestic abuse is a natural part of married life that requires tolerance in order to maintain harmony in the family. The idea of “endurance” is invoked here, an often-used Korean term. Translated, it may be read as “to put up with” or to “suffer,” but has an added connotation of almost religious or military-like notion of service, in which bearing up against adversity is a virtue necessary for success. This discourse also involves a sense of fatalism and acceptance identifiable in some Buddhist discourses. Privacy is a form of personal recognition but public non-acknowledgement. The expression of the discourse of privacy is through silence, a virtue defined in opposition to the womanly sin of talkativeness. The occurrence of domestic violence allows the woman to express her virtue by maintaining silence and harmony through stoic acquiescence.

Betty describes her unwillingness to seek outside help as arising from her fear of others’ perceptions of her. In silence and privacy, Betty maintains her virtue in the community:

If my husband physically abused me, I would not tell anyone. Who would tell their shameful things to others? If I tell others, they will think that I must be at fault in some way. They do not even want to listen to my story. They just will say that only bad women are hit by their husbands. They would talk behind me, with their friends, and eventually the whole Korean community would know how bad I am. (Personal interview 2016)

For the participants, the occurrence of a couple fight is, however, supposed to be only natural for the lower classes. Traditionally, less educated, less virtuous, and less wealthy families were more likely to display their

low status through open arguments that could be heard by neighbors. Harmony and peace were the hallmarks of the upper classes, such that the higher a woman's station in society, the greater the pressure upon her to be submissive and silent. An effective means of social control, this expectation meant that women who spoke out "lowered" their own and their family's social standing. The entire participants self-identified as middle class, which they explained they had measured by reference to their education. To recognise or discuss couple fighting was thus a betrayal of this class alignment and hence difficult for many of the women.

Australian Context Discourse

Finding 1: Immigration factors

The last identified barrier that prevented the use of support services is one of survival. This has two facets: financial and legal. Financial independence and power were rarely discussed, and when they were, the topic was brought up by the participant. This is a question of survival, particularly if children are involved. There is perhaps a cultural/political link here, as Korea is not a welfare state. The second facet may be seen as one of legal/immigration status. In this justification for remaining in the violent home in Australia, the KMW may fear deportation, lack of support from the state, or not be able to work because of her visa status. If a KMW is not an Australian citizen, her rights are diminished and her dependence upon her husband is increased. This survival discourse may be seen as one of the final barriers to seeking help or leaving the domestic violence situation, once all other barriers have been overcome.

Finding 2: Language barrier

An English language barrier is one of the primary reasons for not seeking mainstream assistance services. Lucy and other participants explained that they were not willing to use Korean community services for fear of revealing their identities to the Korean community in Australia, but would have sought counsel from mainstream services if their English

language skills had permitted. Several participants mentioned that they had tried to use English-based services when they were physically abused by their partners. An interpreter was only available when they urgently needed counsel, which could take a number of days to arrange. Despite the availability of interpreters, many KMW (90%) were reluctant to communicate through them since the interpreter would be Korean, and therefore be able to reveal their identity to the Korean community in Australia. One of the participants mentioned her experience of communicating her experience of domestic violence through an interpreter. Jung-ok says,

I went to the police station to report my husband's violent behavior, and after making an initial report, the officers asked me come back as they wanted to arrange an interpreter for me. After three days, I went to the police station, where there was a Korean male interpreter. As soon as I saw him, I did not want to talk to him. However, I did not have any choice, and since I was already there, I told him about my husband's violent behavior. Before he translated what I said to the police, he looked at me in a very dirty way, and said to me, "these are very minor events that happen in all families—they are nothing serious; you are only trying to make trouble for your husband; you are a troublemaker." Then he told the police: "It is nothing serious; she realises that she has made a mistake." When I heard this, I was very upset and just left the police station. (Personal interview 2016)

Jung-ok explained that despite her lack of confidence in speaking English fluently, she was able to understand what the interpreter was saying to the police officers. Although able to communicate in English, her confidence was undermined by the unrequested use of an interpreter. Jung-ok felt that the interpreter automatically assumed she came from a lower socio-economic background and had a low level of education. Many of the participants who had experience of communicating via an interpreter described their experience as humiliating.

Some of the participants said that if they were proficient in English, they would be more likely to seek counsel from an Australian counselor. Betty said,

If I did not have English language problems, I would go to an Australian counselor and discuss my domestic violence experiences since I would not have to worry about revealing my identity to the Korean community. (Personal interview 2016)

For Hanna:

It is not the way to go to a Korean counselor. I do not want advertise my private matters to the Korean community. Even if my English is not fluent, I would go to an Australian counselor. (Personal interview 2016)

Some women knew of available services in the Korean community but were reluctant to use them for fear of revealing their identities to Korean community workers. Some women did not know of any of services available for women experiencing domestic violence.

Sung-jin is a 45-year-old woman who came to Australia as a spouse of a Korean man who holds Australian citizenship. Her husband's first wife left him because of his continuous physical and psychological abuse. Sung-Jin did not know about his previous history because she was not informed in Korea. After her arrival in Australia, she discovered his abusive behaviour, which soon became serious. Sung-jin said that:

My brother-in-law told me that I should report my husband's behavior to the police. First of all, I did not know we should report the couple fighting to the police, as it is a private matter - I did not know it was a police matter. And how can I report anything to the police with my poor English? Do you think that my husband would not do anything while I made a phone call to the police? Maybe he would kill me while I phoned the police. (Personal interview 2016)

For the KMW in the modern Australian context the legal system, the police, and community service providers are the significant sources of discourse that affect the way KMW interpret and respond to domestic violence. A vital aspect of the women participants in the study was their status as migrants. Even upon receipt of citizenship, the participants remained “new Australians” in terms of their language skills and cultural mores. In the initial period of arrival in Australia, the nature of Australia’s immigration policy in combination with standing gender inequities in Korea meant that many KMW migrating to Australia were highly dependent upon their husbands for their immigration status. A report published by the Office of Women’s Policy (1996) stated that this dependence was “having a profound gendering effect on Australian immigration” (p. 2). A large majority of Asian migrants in general, and Korean migrants in particular, gained permanent entry to Australia through the Business Skills migration stream that allowed primary members plus secondary applicants. The clear majority of primary applicants both applying for and receiving business visas were men, with their wives nominated as secondary applicants. As the visas are assessed on the attributes and assets of the man, the wife is rarely assessed for or informed of the realities of becoming part of the Australian lifestyle.

Migrant women suffering domestic violence from husbands upon whom their immigration status relies may not perceive themselves as holding any power to alter their situation. The situation is not necessarily improved by the achievement of a migrant woman’s “own” status. Many women who gain permanent residency or even citizenship continue to experience assaults under intimidation of deportation by their husbands.

The Korean focus upon the home duties of the women (which are not regarded as adding value to the Australian economy or skills base) effectively eliminates her from competitively applying for a visa in her own right. As an assistant to her husband, however, her efforts to continue traditional home duties in Australia are frustrated by her lower English language skills, and as a result, her position and self-esteem are further undermined. The most striking example is that a Korean woman tradition-

ally runs the household, which includes managing household finances, making purchasing decisions, and saving for the family. In Australia, her access to financial institutions and knowledge of these workings requires her to either seek outside help or hand the task over to her husband or even children, both of which involve some loss of autonomy and decision-making. Korean women are also responsible for the health of the family and for overseeing children's education. These obligations are again frustrated by limited English language skills and the loss of a support network. The woman may feel unable to speak confidently with her children's teachers, or to help her children with schoolwork. For the majority who do not engage in work outside the home, the feeling of isolation is deepened with a corresponding loss of confidence in their ability to fulfil home duties.

An issue is clearly identifiable by many English language teachers of Korean students: with a focus upon rote learning in Korea and with many KMW possessing a university education, their reading skills may be advanced but their speaking and listening skills are a long way behind. As all migrants enter the Australian Migrant English Program³⁾ together and are assessed upon their English speaking skills, this means that the classes are often frustrating and vary between extremes of difficulty and utility for Korean migrants.

The lack of English language skills limits the participation of KMW in mainstream cultural activities and social services, and restricts their access to information. This further embeds them in the Korean community in Australia, evidenced by the high rate of church attendance in the participants (75%), far outweighing the attendance rate in Korea. Television provides the major source of information on support services regarding domestic violence. Some participants did not know of any of these support services or of the consequences of using of them. A lack of knowledge and corresponding fear of the unknown prevented many of them from considering reporting domestic violence to the police.

Beyond the necessities of daily life, limited English language ability translates too little, if any, knowledge of Australian law, legal processes,

institutions, remedies, and entitlements.

Korean migrant women are subject to the “double disadvantage” of being both migrants and women. This is compounded by evidence of racism against Asians in general within the wider Australian community, despite the move away from the White Australia Policy in the 1970s. A perception of racism was borne out in the research: Most (80%) of the participants claimed they had experienced either overt or covert racism in Australia. The fear of racism is a substantial motivator in avoiding mainstream services, as in so doing, KMW may add to mainstream Australian negative conceptions of Asian migrants. As a result, they tend to limit themselves to involvement with the Korean community, and thereby expose themselves to community surveillance and judgment.

Aside from English classes, the English language barrier is substantially approached through the use of translators. The use of translators is often problematic for Korean women as the translators may be members of their own community and confidentiality and anonymity may be compromised. For many Korean women, going to the police was already a significant venture, which was then complicated by the use of a translator.

Another factor worthy of discussion is the response of the criminal justice system to migrant women who report domestic violence. When no common language is shared, the use of interpreters can lead to biased or intimidating processes, particularly when some resources demand that it is the husband who interprets for the woman. Even with a working and competent level of English, legal language and processes are unlikely to be well comprehended among migrant women. Finally, although the “criminalisation of the perpetrator and the corresponding responses of the court system serve important and irreplaceable social control functions” (Lee, 1996, p. 187), they do not approach the greater question of how to foster and maintain non-violent intimate relationships. Further, the participants seek a solution that primarily prevents the occurrence of abuse rather than seeking to criminalize their husbands. Effectively, criminalizing one’s husband bespeaks the end of the relationship as father and husband rather than offering less drastic solutions.

Overall Discussion

The results of the study show why Korean women do not use services to support them when they experience domestic violence. The findings demonstrate that reason for not seeking assistance varied along a progression from a lack of recognition of violence, to an acceptance of violence as natural, to a resentment of violence but a perception of social, economic, or legal imperatives to remain in violent situations. The issues facing the participants were many and complex. These ranged from victim blaming to privacy, marital duty, class, alcohol consumption and reduced male culpability, language barriers, the use and role of translators and service providers, cultural conceptions of harmony and virtue, immigration factors and Australian society, racism, economic and legislation/criminal justice.

While the distinction between a discourse of recognition and one of non-recognition is significant in categorising responses from the participants, it would be misleading to suggest one is more insidious or difficult to contend with than the other. The two positions (non-recognition and recognition) may be seen as existing on a single scale, which moves towards awareness, efficacy, and a preparedness to act.

There is a possibility that the centuries-old idea of a woman's inferior position in Korean society has led to a negative image of modern Korean women, thus KMW. Although rapid industrialisation and westernisation in the 1970s brought changes in social and family structure, there existed cultural delays in the sense that marriage was based on emotional ties between husband and wife. In Korean society still, men's parents and boys are given priority, and women continue to see their role as housewives and mothers. This situation is perpetuated by the system of government, legislation, education, and industrial relations. This socialisation process has been going on for so long in Korean society that both Korean men and women tend to acknowledge the inferiority of women unconsciously. This remains a major obstacle to achieving gender equality in Korean society. Consequently, if women are not aware that they are

being subjected to domestic violence, they will not be able to seek for help from others. For those women who are aware of being subjected to domestic violence, they are reluctant to seek help from others because of the fear of negative perceptions and judgement. The most commonly used discourse for describing domestic violence was couple fighting. However, there is a remarkable difference between the couple's fighting/quarrel that the term refers to and actual physical, emotional, and psychological violence. The term domestic violence is seen as something akin to the term "wife battering," while the term, "couple fight" implies that both parties have equal responsibility for the fight and are equal participants.

However, inconsistencies are apparent in the use of the notion of couple fight. The discourse of couple fight is not only a refusal to acknowledge the position of women as the recipients of domestic violence but also holds women equally responsible for the violence. The majority of the participants (70%, $n = 23$) attributed the blame to the women victims of domestic violence, saying that if women had been able to adequately handle situations, physical violence would not occur. This viewpoint reinforces the dominant discourse of the Confucian virtue in which it is a woman's responsibility to maintain domestic harmony. Such a focus easily becomes a form of victim blaming. Any woman who chooses to resist the dominant discourse is immediately identified as "disobedient," deserving of, and creating her own problems. This perception may also be seen in the context of the three "obediences" (obeying her father, her husband, and her son) of Confucianism to which Korean women must traditionally adhere—any evidence of disharmony in the marriage indicates the dissatisfaction of the husband to whom his wife is disobedient. The position of the individual woman on this scale indicates how likely it is that she will seek help or leave a situation of domestic violence. In particular, if the majority of people believe that a woman who is a victim of domestic violence was partly an instigator of domestic violence, it will be difficult for women to seek for help in those circumstances. Studies have shown that both men and women from non-English speaking

countries tend to believe the victim of a domestic violence, most likely a woman, as contributing to the domestic violence (Henry et al., 2017; VicHealth, 2014), which is consistent with the discourse of the participants. This finding is also supported by studies on Korean migrant women in the US (Moon, 2005; Tran & Jardins, 2000), as part of the discourse of “blaming victims.”

Likewise KMW at one end of the scale are unlikely to identify domestic violence as occurring in their own lives or at all and are at a loss to begin to understand their situations.

Korean migrant women further along the scale, who recognise both the existence and the undesirability of domestic abuse, still identify their children as the main barrier to seeking help in their violent and oppressive homes.

In considering migrant Korean women as positioned upon a scale of recognition and ability to act against domestic violence, it must be stressed that the women are not seen as fixed in one position, but able to move along the scale. The relationship between the discourses of non-recognition and recognition is close and progressive, meaning that the use of one discourse can be transferred to another once recognition has occurred. That is, a woman who discovers domestic violence to be occurring in her life and identifies it as undesirable and abnormal may still resort to other discourses to limit her own actions.

In many cases in the Korean Australian situation, KMW resort to the traditional cultural value of “endurance” against adversity, in particular in the context of international migration. This was the most frequently mentioned coping mechanism for the KMW. In this cultural context, for a wife to leave her husband means she has shamed the family name, destroyed the family unit, broken family privacy, isolated herself from the support of the Korean community and violated her own virtues of perseverance and endurance. From a Western perspective, the KMW may be perceived as passive, ambivalent, and guilt-ridden: thus, all assistance, services, and education needs to be sensitive to those values.

One example of this was Hye-young, who recognised her domestic

violence situation but did not seek help until her children grew up and left home. Using the “for the sake of the children” discourse, she found the possible stigmatisation of her children worse than her violent situation. The problems was neither one of non-recognition nor lack of awareness of the nature of domestic violence. Discourse transfer such as this is the means by which women move along the scale towards full recognition and the ability to act. In this way, the discourse and positions upon the scale are mutable and overlapping. Full recognition of domestic violence is necessary but not sufficient to move the KMW to action. Many studies have suggested several ways for a non-English speaking country’s migrants and Asians to access support services. This includes well-trained bilingual speaking workers and services trained in cultural sensitivity (Allimant & Ostapiej-Piatkowski, 2011; Carline & Easteal, 2014; Easteal, 1996). However, no matter how great a support service may be, if the victim is not aware of or recognises that she is the victim but hesitates to use such a service because she is afraid of other’s negative attitudes or perceptions of her, then it will have little or no utility value.

Participants in the study highlighted the difficulties for KMW in simply moving from non-recognition to recognition and thence to action. For those who recognise and admit to the occurrence of domestic abuse, the question of how to proceed or act is overwhelming.

Conclusion

The significance of the study of discourse is to shift the focus away from the simplistic language barrier to action identified by much of the literature as the cause of the inaction of migrant domestic violence sufferers. Dutton (1996) warns against a single and simple understanding of the experiences of women suffering domestic violence. Rather, she argues, women must be seen in their unique individual and social contexts. In this way, a singular understanding of KMW in Australia based upon cultural factors would be misleading and unhelpful to these women. The extreme heterogeneity of individual factors identified makes them diffi-

cult to investigate in a meaningful way.

Nevertheless, factors such as English language barriers, the legislative environment, issues related to the use of interpreters, and the immigration experience in Australia can be usefully discussed. Equipped with limited English language skills and few skills for supporting themselves and their children, some KMW have a fear, well founded or otherwise, of deportation or loss of legal status as a greater threat than an abusive husband. If a woman's residency or visa status is dependent upon her relationship with her husband, as is often the case, she is beholden to her abuser.

The use of information campaigns defining domestic violence and the promotion of support services for migrant women experiencing domestic violence are two of the ways that Australia attempts to assist women to move along the scale. The underlying rationale is that information and services aimed solely at these women will enlighten and empower otherwise ignorant and submissive migrant women. The breadth of discourses and issues highlights the simplicity and inadequacy of this notion.

Similarly, legislative amendments, immigration processing changes, and improved training and use of interpreters can go only part of the way to empowering these women. These efforts may move the women along the scale somewhat, but cannot be fully effective until they address the full gamut of discourses available and the society as a whole.

Since the 1970s, the Australian Government has recognised the seriousness of domestic violence and has implemented policies and programs aimed to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence and support its victims. Korean community organisations and volunteer groups have worked hard to spread awareness and support Korean women in domestic violence situations, with the first Korean Australian community's Domestic Violence Expo held in Sydney in October 2018. The event focused on raising awareness of the severity of domestic violence and preventing domestic violence through early intervention. Increased Korean-language public awareness campaigns and community programs such as these, combined with education and training materials, should also work to sup-

port KMW to recognise domestic abuse and ultimately to develop skills to remove themselves from domestic violence situations. Enhanced training of service providers, including professional bilingual workers and interpreters trained to deal with culturally sensitive issues, would encourage KMW to approach and seek help when needed in an unbiased and safe environment, knowing that any consultation with specialists would be private and kept confidential from the wider Korean community.

Further Research and Recommendation

This research was conducted on the first generation KMW in Australia. Further research is required for the 1.5 generation and 2nd generation of KMW to explore their attitudes and perceptions of domestic violence, and how their parents' cultural values and perceptions affected the next generations of KMW.

Note

- 1) KMW refers to women who have emigrated from the Republic of Korea to Australia.
- 2) The term "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)" was introduced to replace NESB (Non-English speaking background) in 1996, when the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (MCMIA) decided that the term and acronym NESB was to be dropped from official communications.
- 3) AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program): An Australian Government initiative to encourage the participation of migrants in general in the Australian mainstream is to provide 510 hours of English tuition within 5 years on arrival. <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/adult-migrant-english-program/30846>

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Biographical Note

Gyung-sook Jane Lee earned her Ph.D. (Economics) at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her research interests are female migrant issues in the workplace and equal opportunity in the labor market. She is currently teaching at Chonnam National University and engaged in a research project on 1.5 generation and 2nd generation of Korean migrants in Australia, which was commissioned by the Academy of Korean Studies. E-mail: jane.gs.lee@gmail.com

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