

# The Adjusting Process of Foreign Wives Married to Korean Husbands

Panuncio, Rosel L.<sup>1</sup> · Bae, Jeongyee<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Assistant, Department of Nursing, Inje University, Busan

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Nursing, Inje University · Chair, Institute for International Safety Community ·  
Chair, Institute for Health Science Research, Inje University, Busan, Korea

**Purpose:** Purposes of this study were to explore the experiences of Filipinas living as foreign wives in Korea and to formulate a substantive theory that explains the basic social process of adjusting to life as a foreign wife in Korea. **Methods:** This descriptive qualitative study utilized the grounded theory design. In-depth, semi-structured, audio-taped interviews were conducted with 10 Filipino immigrant wives in Korea. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's constant comparative analysis. **Results:** Six main categories emerged: aspiring, confronting, suffering, coping, assimilating, and regretting. Fundamental to these was the core category of embracing a new life. A theoretical model showing the basic social processes of adjusting to life as a foreign wife in Korea was developed to reflect the inter-relationships among these categories. Extracts of the data were presented to illustrate the grounding of the theoretical model in the participants' accounts. **Conclusion:** The findings from this study provide an increase in the understanding of Filipino immigrant wives, which should help in designing effective coping strategies that consider the particular characteristics and problems of Filipino immigrant wives. Programs under existing policies need to undergo continuous improvement in order to increase the well-being of these immigrant wives.

**Key Words:** Acculturation, Immigration, Life experiences, Qualitative research

## INTRODUCTION

Marrying foreigners became a global trend in the early 1980s and has more recently evolved into a highly marketed business, more popularly known as the international marriage brokerage industry, with the booming presence of online matchmaking companies across Asia (Nakamatsu, 2005). The increasing population of mixed races existing in Korea today is a result of more foreigners immigrating to the country either for work or for marriage (Lee, 2008). Meanwhile, the marital preferences of successful and educated Korean women are of high standards, which in effect place average Korean men, especially those coming from the rural areas, at the bottom of

the preferred marital order. Consequently, Korean men experience difficulties in finding local women to marry and to satisfy their patriarchal nature (Morrisson & Jutting, 2005). This is further supported by Lee, Seol and Cho's (2006) study on international marriages in Korea showing that the demand for foreign spouses is particularly strong among rural Korean men. In a report, published by Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (2007), the Philippines is considered as "a popular place of origin of marriage migrants, as it is for labor migrants." In 2005, international marriages accounted for 14% of the total marriages in Korea, with 55,964 female marriage immigrants being recorded, of whom 3,692 were Filipinas (Seol, 2005).

Foreign wives who choose to marry Koreans are imme-

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**Corresponding author:** Bae, Jeongyee

Department of Nursing, College of Medicine, Inje University, 633-165 Kaegum-dong, Busanjin-gu, Busan 614-735, Korea.  
Tel: +82-51-890-6823, Fax: +82-51-896-9840, E-mail: jibai@inje.ac

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diately exposed to a new life upon settling down with their husbands. Some of the major obstacles that immigrant women face in Korea are cultural differences in daily lifestyle, language, food, health care services, cultural assumptions, gender structure, family relationships, expected roles within the family, and interpersonal relationships (Kwak, 2008). Consequently, these problems cause unfavorable effects on their self-esteem and also their performances as they play the role of a mother and a foreigner wife in a multicultural family (Malibiran, 2007). It is commonly assumed that acculturation is a stressful experience that may increase the risk of low self-esteem and ill health (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Additionally, the migration process produces "acculturation stress", and this stress could lead to development of psychiatric conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, substances use and abuse, alcoholism, and suicide (Hoschl et al., 2008). A number of studies also show that the process of acculturation or progressive integration produces changes in physical and mental health (Martins & Reid, 2007; Noh & Kaspar, 2003).

As most studies on foreign wives have covered the major ethnic groups such as Korean-Chinese, Chinese, and Vietnamese, there has been a scarcity of published data focusing on the increasing number of minority groups of foreign wives in Korea, including the Filipinas (Lim, 2005; Shin, 2004). Moreover, available literature on foreign wives in Korea includes topics on child-rearing and international marriage policies (Kim, Kong, & Lee, 2007; Kwak, 2008; Malibiran, 2007). From a research of a sponsor organization of mental health of immigrants, it was shown that many immigrants have weakened in both physical and mental health and show qualities of mental health issues such as depression, stress, loneliness, despair, and helplessness. However, medical institutions and the government tend to overlook these mental issues as common procedures occurring in the settlement of the immigrants (Toronto Yonhapnews, 2006). Consequently, little attention has been given to detailed consideration of the actual experiences of foreign wives. Knowing what they experience and how they adjust are essential in order for concerned authorities and health practitioners alike to develop culturally sensitive approaches when dealing with this increasing population.

Accordingly, the general purposes of this study were to explore the experience of Filipinas living as foreign wives in Korea and to generate a substantive theory that explains the basic social process of adjusting to life as foreign wives in Korea.

## METHODS

### 1. Research Design

This descriptive and qualitative research used the grounded theory design in order to establish a holistic understanding of the life experiences of Filipino women living in Korea with Korean husbands.

This qualitative approach focuses on social interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and so is an appropriate means to show the basic social process of how Filipinas adjust to a new society. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory technique was used instead of Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory because the former technique offers a clear guide for novice qualitative researchers (McCallin, 1996).

### 2. Study Participants

This study was conducted in Gimhae City. Although immigrant wives settle in many parts of the country, this city was chosen for two reasons. First, a large number of Filipino immigrant wives reside in this city. Second, the first author is a member of the Filipino communities in Gimhae and it was anticipated that this could facilitate the recruitment process.

The recruitment of participants happened over period of two months. Primarily, the recruitment method used was 'networking' or 'word of mouth' that involved contacting friends in the Filipino community whom the first author knew and requesting them to refer other friends who are eligible to participate in the study.

The interviewees were 10 Filipino immigrant wives. Purposive and theoretic samplings were used to recruit the participants. The participants were required to meet the following criteria: 1) be of legal age, 18 years old or over, 2) be able to communicate in Filipino/Tagalog or English, 3) have been married to a Korean husband for up to 1 year and had migrated to Korea at least one year previously, and 4) willing to participate.

### 3. Description of Participants

Ten Filipino immigrant wives participated in this study. The ages of the women ranged from 22 to 35, and their length of migration ranged from one year to ten years. In terms of age when they migrated to Korea, one was in her teens, seven were in their 20's, and two were already in their 30's. Before they migrated, six of them were unemployed in the Philippines, two were office employees,

one was a sales clerk and the other was a college student. Six were Roman Catholics and four were Protestants. Seven had college degrees yet only four of them were currently employed at the time of the study (Table 1).

#### 4. Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured and audio-taped interviews conducted within scheduled appointments from the first week of September 2009 to the last week of October 2009. Initially, nine Filipina wives were recruited for this study, and for data saturation, another respondent was included during the theoretical sampling, increasing the sample size to ten.

The interview were open-ended and semi-structured in order to emphasize the participants' feelings and life experiences as foreign wives in Korea, including the barriers they had to face as they were adjusting to their new lives. Specifically, this study was undertaken to address the following questions: "What are the life experiences of Filipino women living as foreign wives in Korea?" and "How do Filipino wives adjust to their new lives in Korea?"

The average interview time was around 50 minutes per interviewee, ranging from 40 minutes to three hours. The interview was recorded upon the permission of the participant; afterwards, the recorded interview was put into the computer and analyzed.

As the primary language of the respondents was Filipino (Tagalog), translation and back translation of consent forms as well as the interview data were conducted. A Filipino graduate student, fluent in both English and Filipino/Tagalog aided the back translation to secure the accu-

racy of the translated data.

#### 5. Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative analysis method was used. The transcripts of the interviews were repetitively and thoroughly read to obtain a sense of each participant's contextual background, history and relevancy. The data were manually coded line by line and sorted into categories according to their similarities and relationships. Data was saturated until no new information was found after analyzing the data consistently (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### 6. Ethical Consideration

It was thoroughly explained to the respondents that they have an option to terminate the interview at any time for any reason without facing any adverse consequences. Explanations of the study, objectives, benefits, confidentiality, anonymity and risks were provided to all the participants and written consent was obtained prior to data collection. Furthermore, this study obtained ethical clearance from the Pusan Paik Hospital Institutional Review Board (No. 09-077).

#### 7. Trustworthiness

The data and interpretation of the findings were checked for credibility, transferability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Debriefing was conducted with a qualitative research committee composed of nursing profes-

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Interviewee	Current age	Age migrated to Korea	Year migrated to Korea	Religion	Education	Previous occupation in the Philippines	Current occupation in Korea
Mrs. A	30	25	2004	Catholic	High school	None	Housewife
Mrs. B	27	24	2006	Protestant	College	Sales clerk	Housewife
Mrs. C	22	22	2008	Catholic	College	None	Housewife
Mrs. D	28	21	2002	Catholic	College	None	English teacher
Mrs. E	32	24	2001	Catholic	College	Office employee	English teacher
Mrs. F	35	25	1999	Protestant	College	None	Housewife
Mrs. G	28	18	1999	Protestant	College	Student	Housewife
Mrs. H	34	31	2006	Catholic	College	Office employee	English teacher
Mrs. I	31	25	2003	Protestant	High school	None	Housewife
Mrs. J	34	31	2006	Catholic	High school	None	Company worker

sors for credibility. Member checking was established with the 10 participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings and the interpretations. Transferability was established by displaying the data description, study methodology, overall interpretation process, and results to understand the phenomenon. Pilot interviews with five participants were conducted to strengthen the interview questions and promote dependability. This study's validity was further enhanced by using the participants' quoted statements.

## RESULTS

### 1. Paradigm Model

Six main categories and 21 subcategories were generated from the data and relationships were identified using the paradigm model recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The basic components of the paradigm model and the categories are presented in Table 2.

### 2. Substantive theory

A substantive theory was then developed entitled "basic social processes of adjusting to life as foreign wives

in Korea" (Figure 1). The way in which each of the properties within the paradigm model interacts with each other, and, in turn, how each relates to the development of the core category are detailed in Figure 1 and discussed below.

### 3. Categories

#### 1) Embracing a new life (Core Category)

The relationship between the ability to cope with sufferings and their adjustment to a new environment and a new role was seen as important for Filipino immigrant wives. The coping ability influenced the consequences of adjusting to life in Korea as foreign wives. Therefore, the core category that emerged was "Embracing a new life." Comments from Filipino immigrant wives showed the importance of coping and adjusting. "I believe that marrying a Korean is a good choice that I made. If other Filipinos would ask me what it takes to be able to survive this new life I have now, all I have to say is that they should be able to cope with the changes and embrace this new life." "Living in Korea is hard but it is possible to adapt to it. Filipinos are flexible enough to learn to adjust and accept this new life with open arms. It doesn't mean we are throwing away who we are as Filipinos. Instead, we are

**Table 2.** Embracing a New Life Paradigm

Paradigm component	Categories	Sub-categories
Causal conditions	Aspiring	Yearning for life abroad Improving quality of life Seeking better opportunities
Context	Suffering	Physical: Getting sick, worsening disease Social: Lack of support, parent-child gap, marital conflict Economical: Financial burden, difficulty getting a job Psychological: Fear, depression, uncertainty, low self-esteem, anxiety, oversensitivity, helplessness
Intervening conditions	Confronting	Language barriers Cultural differences Racial discrimination
Actions/interaction strategies	Coping	Changing life outlook Sacrificing Seeking information Seeking support Persevering Familiarizing
Consequences	Assimilating	Self-development Marital satisfaction Accomplishing roles
	Regretting	Homesickness Unmet needs

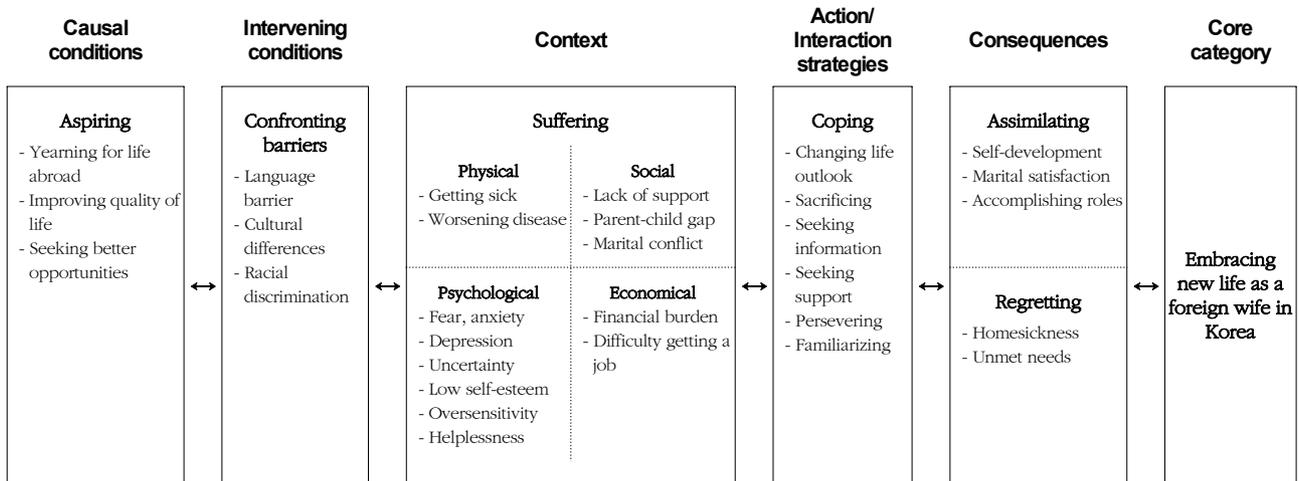


Figure 1. Basic social processes of adjusting to life as foreign wives in Korea.

integrating them both within ourselves."

## 2) Aspiring (Causal Conditions)

Causal conditions usually represent sets of events or happenings that influence phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, this second category, aspiring, was characterized by the Filipino immigrant wives' motivations to marry Korean men and immigrate to Korea. These Filipino immigrant wives saw international marriage as the key to reach their aspirations. Sub-categories comprised of yearning for life abroad, improving quality of life and seeking better opportunities.

### (1) Yearning for life abroad

Like most Filipinos, living abroad was a dream for these Filipino immigrant wives. Their curiosity about life outside the Philippines urged them to engage in international marriage. As described by one wife, "Like every Filipino, I thought it was interesting to go abroad and that life abroad is more exciting..."

### (2) Improving quality of life

All the participants expressed how difficult it was for them to live in the Philippines. The hardships in life made most of them register in matchmaking agencies, where they met their Korean spouses. They took their chances in hopes of improving their qualities of life by means of marrying a foreigner.

### (3) Seeking better opportunities

For most Filipino immigrant women, going abroad meant having better opportunities for employment. These hardworking Filipinas have responsibilities to help their

immediate families and they engaged in international marriage as a way to contribute to their parents. One wife lamented in own words, "Actually, I've wanted to go abroad for a long time but I don't have enough money. You know... I want to find a better job to help my family financially."

## 3) Suffering (Context)

Contextual conditions, according to the paradigm model, are the specific sets (patterns) of conditions that intersect at this time and place to create a set of circumstances or problems to which people respond through actions/interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The third category, suffering, highlights the Filipino immigrant wives' physical, social, economic, and psychological problems. These problems were brought about by two transitional events in their lives: immigration and marriage. Moreover, these sufferings are influenced by barriers or intervening conditions within the paradigm. These Filipinas encountered various barriers simultaneously, and so we were likely to observe common barriers leading to a certain suffering. However, not all of them underwent exactly the same suffering. The extent depended on the severity of the barriers, time and burden experienced.

### (1) Physical Suffering

Some Filipino immigrant wives suffered from physical problems like getting sick or developing sickness. Because of the cold winter weather as well as the absence of family members to help with the household chores, these women either got sick or suffered degradation in their conditions. As one immigrant exclaimed in exact words,

"My husband helps his mom run their condominium. As his wife, I am also obliged to help change [the] wall papers, seal roofs with holes, do the plumbing etc. They said we could save a lot of money if we all help each other that way. But my body is the one suffering from pain." However, accessing health care systems in Korea was difficult for them because of language problems, financial burden, and lack of information. As one immigrant said, "... when I feel sick, I couldn't go to any hospital because I don't know how to speak Korean, nor do I know any hospital or clinic near our place at all.

#### (2) Social Suffering

For Filipino immigrant wives with Filipino-Korean children, parenting became an instant burden as their children grow up with Korean values. As for marital relationships, some Filipino immigrant wives suffered from conflicts with their husbands. Culture played a huge factor in this as Korean and Filipino men have different perceptions on how they view their wives. One respondent commented in her own words, "I had a hard time when I was pregnant with my baby. I thought if I was in the Philippines, I would have more support and encouragement from my family and friends. I really felt alone that time."

#### (3) Economical Suffering

Filipino immigrant wives who sought better opportunities were disappointed to find out that they could not work in Korea until their husbands allowed them to. For some it took some time to earn their husbands' trusts so they suffered from financial constraints and lived on a tight budget. Not being able to get a job easily as language problem made getting jobs difficult. One respondent said, in exact words "My in-laws and my husband won't let me get a job. They always keep me at home, doing chores and serving them. It doesn't feel right because my husband doesn't give me any money for my needs."

#### (4) Psychological Suffering

Most immigrant wives suffered psychological symptoms such as fear, depression, uncertainty, low self-esteem, anxiety, oversensitivity and helplessness. From the moment of their marriage, knowing that they were to live in a strange place made them feel "scared and helpless", which decreased their self-esteem. Not knowing many things about Korea added to the anxiety that they felt. Many of them felt "anxious and depressed" because their families' futures remained uncertain even after they had thought that international marriage would have helped them ensure their families' stabilities back in the Philip-

pines.

This uncertainty caused them to become oversensitive about everything, which in turn may have led to marital conflict. One participant commented, in own words "The first time I met my husband, I felt anxious and scared to get married because we only met online. Actually, I hesitated to marry him then but I thought about my family. I still can't ensure my families (in Philippines) well-being and sometimes I become easily agitated when I think about that."

#### 4) Confronting (Intervening conditions)

Intervening conditions are the broader structural context pertaining to the phenomenon. These conditions act either to facilitate or constrain the action/ interactional strategies taken within a specific context (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As soon as they set foot on Korean soil, these Filipinas were immediately confronted with barriers such as language barriers, cultural differences and racial discrimination that hindered their adjustment in Korea.

##### (1) Language barriers

For most, the language problem was a major barrier while adjusting to life in Korea. This affected various aspects of their everyday lives such as working, communicating with their husband and in-laws, sending their children to school and doing day-to-day chores. One immigrant said, "If I can only speak Korean fluently, I can get a better job here," in own words. Due to their poor Korean language skills, the participants felt frustrated, afraid, shy and ill-equipped to mingle with other people. When certain events required them to voice their opinions, they either avoided it or remained passive.

##### (2) Cultural differences

Filipino immigrant wives had difficulties in adjusting because of cultural differences. Some verbalized their "uneasy" feelings towards the fast-paced lifestyle in doing things in Korea. Also, the expectations that their in-laws had from them greatly influenced their adjustments as they were not accustomed to these ways of marriage. These differences placed a great deal of weight on them as they struggled to survive each day by adjusting to this new culture. The following interview, taken from own words, extracts further illustrate these points. "Of course we are not used to eating Korean dishes but my father-in-law couldn't understand that. He forces me to eat what is served on my plate. Even if I don't want to, I can't voice out my feelings so I just swallow everything with water

instead."

### (3) Racial discrimination

Filipino immigrant wives expressed their concerns about the continuous existence of racial inequality in Korea. They felt that being a foreign wife living in a prejudice-filled Korean society was difficult. The way other people look at them once these people knew that they were foreign wives made them feel very low and decreased their self-esteem. Some lamented that even their own parents-in-law made them feel discriminated against at times, as illustrated as the following: "My first week in Korea, I was very open and willing to learn about many things like their language, their way of life, their history etc. But now, I feel discriminated by other people as well as my own in-laws so things are getting really rough in our marriage and my interest to learn about Korea's culture is diminishing each day. It's hard to accept things when you are not treated fairly."

## 5) Coping (Actions/Interaction Strategies)

Action/interaction strategies are purposeful or deliberate acts which are taken to resolve a problem and which shape the phenomenon in some way (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this category, immigrants used the following strategies to overcome their sufferings. Moreover, they used a variety of efforts to cope, such as changing their life outlook, sacrificing, seeking information, seeking support, persevering, and familiarizing.

### (1) Changing life outlook

Compromise took the form of "staying humble" and "doing their best" even under unpleasant conditions. As they sought meaning in their lives, they gradually transformed their attitudes and outlook from hopelessness to optimism. Whenever they encountered hardships, they saw it as "a chance to grow as a person." As another immigrant wife said, "Even if sometimes I feel like my in-laws hate me, I just ignore it. You know... I just tell myself, I chose this life so I have to live and endure it."

### (2) Sacrificing

Immigrant wives sacrificed personal gains and happiness in order to provide a better future for their family. As one said, "I comfort myself everyday by saying it is okay, it is for my family's future." Being able to face and resolve their problems made them feel fulfilled and proud. They sacrificed for the sake of their loved ones. One of them states "No matter how stressful life in Korea is, I will take all of this and be strong for my kids."

### (3) Seeking information

After realizing what they lacked upon identifying the barriers to their adjustment, Filipino immigrant wives equipped themselves by seeking information regarding various helpful topics such as Korean language programs and culture, job opportunities, children's schooling and health facilities. They used various sources such as the Internet, reading materials and other people. To overcome their language deficiencies, they searched for free Korean language classes.

### (4) Seeking support

Migration strengthened family bonds as immigrants sought "support from family in the Philippines." Aside from family, they also turned to religion when they experienced difficulties. Previously inactive practitioners became active participants of church activities in Korea. Through religion, they felt that they were able to rid themselves of grief and doubt, and they gained "peace of mind and stronger faith." Another account illustrated this subcategory, in own words, "I met my friends in church when I attended one time. It made me really happy to have met other Filipinos here."

### (5) Persevering

Filipino immigrant wives expressed their desires to achieve their goals and in order to meet these, they chose to stand up for their decisions of marrying Korean men and continue pushing and persevering in life no matter how hard it might get. As an immigrant wife stated in her own words, "I have a husband and a beautiful daughter. I plan to persevere even more for my family. My Korean is still poor so I will study Korean more to get better at it."

### (6) Familiarizing

In order to overcome their lack of knowledge and fear of living in a strange place, these Filipino immigrant wives familiarized themselves with the environment they were living in. This newfound knowledge enabled them to perform activities of daily living without the help of their husbands or in-laws. Such activities they familiarized themselves with included going to the market, sending their children to school, riding the bus and the subway train, and going to church, work, and other friends' houses.

## 6) Assimilating (Positive consequences)

Consequences result from the action/interaction strategies and are the final aspects of the paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In general, consequences become a part of the condition, which affect the next set of

action/interaction strategies that occur (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and are an important part of the grounded theory approach. In this study two consequences emerged from the data: positive and negative.

After applying coping strategies to overcome suffering, most immigrant wives felt "assimilated" and "satisfied" with living in Korea. Their benefits of a new life in Korea included fresh air, beautiful scenery, technological advancements, advanced educational environment for the children, better opportunities for employment, strengthened family ties and a deeper sense of patriotism and a chance for self-development. For immigrants who had become a mother, marital satisfaction and accomplishing the roles of a wife and mother while seeing their children growing up in a more comfortable environment gave them satisfaction and hope no matter how difficult living in Korea was. They successfully adjusted to this new life and were looking forward to a better future ahead of them.

#### (1) Self-development

Filipino immigrant wives who went through suffering and coped successfully with their new lives felt that they had developed themselves in the process, as seen from their own words: "When I look at it now, after I got through with all the sufferings, I felt like a heavy load was lifted off my shoulders. I go out more now and I feel hopeful of a good future. It feels like I learned and grew a lot since I first came here."

#### (2) Marital satisfaction

For immigrant wives who felt so loved and appreciated for who they were by their husbands, marital satisfaction was a fruit of their successful adjustments to life in Korea. Beyond cultural differences, these women learned how to love and be grateful to their Korean spouses. "Compared to my first time here in Korea, I feel that I have successfully adjusted to life here. I am thankful that God gave me a good husband."

#### (3) Accomplishing roles

Aside from self-development and marital satisfaction, assimilation also included immigrant women's accomplishing various roles. These pertained to their roles as a daughter or sister of their families in the Philippines, as a wife and daughter-in-law in Korea, and as a mother to their children. As they lived their new lives in their new homes in Korea, successfully accomplishing at least one of these roles was a sign that they had become well-adjusted to life in Korea. "I make my husband proud because I have my own career now. For now, I am only concerned

about raising my kids and saving more money"

### 7) Regretting (Negative consequences)

Conversely, other immigrants still had unresolved conflicts such as their homesickness and unmet needs. Some expressed regret in coming to Korea unprepared. They wished to return home to the Philippines when their children become more financially stable and independent. They worried about their employment, health and finances, children's education and their careers. They felt homesick and at times thought about going back to the Philippines. They reminisced and compared their old comfortable lives with their current lives as immigrant wives, which made them "feel down."

#### (1) Homesickness

As the Filipinas went on the plane to Korea, they left their comfort zones in the Philippines as well. Whenever they encountered hardships in their lives, they could not prevent themselves from feeling homesick and wanting to fly back to the Philippines. "If I had enough money, I would definitely go back home to the Philippines and stay there for good. Once I saved enough money, I will leave Korea and either go back to the Philippines or go to another country."

#### (2) Unmet needs

Filipinas who regret their decisions to marry a Korean usually have unmet needs aside from not being able to cope well with their situation and being homesick. These needs included economic stability and preparing themselves to face the Korean society at large. Once unable to meet these needs, Filipinas became regretful of their decision to engage in international marriage. As one immigrant wife described, "If I could turn back time, I would choose not to get married to a Korean. I was so disappointed when I came here and realized that I still can't work because I have to first learn to use Korean. Now, I haven't accomplished anything."

## DISCUSSION

The main goal of this study was to understand the experiences of Filipino women living in Korea as foreign wives. Through the results, we could see many difficulties during the acculturation process that the Filipinas had to face during their settling periods in Korea. As well, the results supported some findings that were shown in previous studies and extended the understanding of different relationships among many factors.

This study identified six major categories concerning the experiences of Filipino immigrant wives as they adjusted to life in Korea. These categories, considered through previous research, are as follows. The first category, aspiring, comprised various motivations that urged Filipinas to marry Korean men. Among these were yearning for life abroad, improving their quality of life and seeking better opportunities. On a similar note, Seol (2005) reported that among those women who got married through marriage agencies, 73% pointed out "economic reasons" as the primary reason for marrying a Korean.

The second category, suffering, was further divided into 4 sub-categories: physical, social, economical, and psychological. In Cha's (2010) study on the healthcare of immigrants in America, there were people who had complaints about their physical health problems sometime after their immigration. Especially women, who are given even more roles after the immigration, become vulnerable to health problems because of their limited time and effort to pursue hospitals. This finding was paralleled in the current study where most Filipino immigrant wives expressed their concerns about getting sick and not being able to access the health care systems in Korea. This is further supported by Seol's (2005) findings showing that only a very small portion of immigrant wives in Korea (16.2%) utilized medical services due to financial constraints and language problems. Jeong and Lee (2010) developed a health promotion behavior model targeting 271 foreign wives. In this research, it showed that social support and acculturation affected the foreign wives' health promotion behavior. Moreover, immigrant wives suffered from social role conflicts like lack of support, parent-child gap, and marital conflict. A number of psychological symptoms emerged from the data of the current study. However, most governments as well as medical institutions consider this a common migration phenomenon during the process of settling down (Saldanha, 2009). Additionally, Bae and Park (2010) evaluated the immigrant depression model and found that stressful life events cause depression and anxiety among the immigrant population. Not only do cultural differences cause anxiety and low self-esteem, but also become barriers in interpersonal relationships and bonding into the community. Decreasing immigrant life stress will help prevent mental health problems. Therefore, the Korean government and medical agencies should be more concerned about the immigrants' mental health and create better awareness in managing mental health problems. Aside from lack of social support networks, the parent-child gap is also associated with social suffering for immigrant wives. Accordingly, our study suggests provid-

ing parenting education to Korean immigrant parents for improving communication skills and problem solving strategies with their children. Moreover, immigrant wives also suffer from economic problems including having financial burden and difficulties of getting a job.

In the third category, confronting, Filipino immigrant wives faced barriers such as language, cultural differences, discrimination and self-concept in adjusting to life in Korea. Many studies (Choi, 2007; Cho Chung, 2010; Han, 2006) have stated some of the common experiences that foreign wives coming to Korea include disappointment at reality being quite different from their expectations, miscommunication and culture differences, as well as family conflicts. Some areas where foreign wives face high difficulties during acculturation are communication, food, housing patterns, intense financial strain, marital conflict, family violence, differences in values in terms of raising children, and the prejudice and discrimination against foreigners in Korea. Usually, communication problems, especially, make other problems, such as marital problems, differences in values in terms of raising children and discrimination from Korean people (Cho Chung, 2010; Lee, 2006; Mabiliran, 2007). The use of sign language could not compensate for complete self-expression. Seol (2005) also reported that language barriers hindered getting a decent job in Korea. Although, Korea and the Philippines are both oriental in nature, there are practices that differ in each culture. Because of this, Korea government put through a comprehensive community program which provides education services in Korean culture and language for the foreign wives (Seo, Suh, Lee, & Kim, 2009). However, Social Welfare Services in Korea reported that only 63.4% of immigrant wives participate in their cultural adaptation training or education programs (Seol, 2005). This illustrates the need to further promote available welfare programs for immigrant wives in the country. In addition, Filipina and other foreign women suffer from discrimination and unfair treatment. They experience difficulties in integrating and interacting in their local community with other Korean families. Since most of them were married through agencies or churches, they are accused of having false marriages. There are discriminatory words to describe them, such as 'people who just married for money', 'women who will run away from their husbands' or even 'prostitutes' (Mabiliran, 2007). This kind of racial discrimination, as cautioned by the World Health Organization, can influence the deterioration of health of immigrants; therefore it was recommended that better policies are needed to protect the rights of the immigrants (Wolffers, Verghis, & Marin, 2003). Self-perception in-

dicates how an immigrant wife handles hardships in life. The ability to adjust to life in Korea depends on a Filipina's ability to cope with the sufferings she encounters. On a similar note, Cha's (2010) research described that attitudes, integration and accepting in acculturation were positively correlated with health responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, self-actualizations and stress management. Especially in Korea, where families are very cohesive, it will be even harder for foreign wives to adjust to life in Korea and mingle with other Koreans. This can be similarly seen when the foreign wives are inclined to feel hopeless upon their first few days in Korea.

The fourth category, coping, was comprised of changing life outlook, sacrificing, seeking information, seeking support, persevering, and familiarizing. Immigrants try to adjust to their new living conditions, and thereby achieve progress and learn how to compromise, be resourceful, optimistic, and sacrifice themselves for their families. Moreover, the study findings showed that Filipino immigrants sought support from family and church activities to relieve immigration stress and help them with their adjustment to living in Korea. Support was found to be an essential factor when dealing with acculturation stress in immigrant populations. Kim and Lee (2009)'s research described that most of the foreign wives receive help from different social support systems to some extent, such as from other foreign wives from the same country as well as those in similar situations, churches, Korean language schools, non-government organizations, their families back at home, and cooperative and supportive relatives. These aspects are related with the theme of "coping" in this study. Martin and Reid (2007) reported that socialization facilitates the adjustment process among immigrant populations as building friendship networks give immigrants a sense of comfort, emotional support, and sources of information. When discussing familiarizing, some psychologists state that migration and acculturation plays a major part in this area. Hamilton (2004) asserts that things people do are strongly influenced by the places in which they find themselves. This can be seen in this study's findings that the women became more accustomed to the culture and ways of Korean society as they adjusted to the environment they are living in.

The fifth category, assimilating, covered self-development, marital satisfaction, and accomplishing roles. In general, this study proposes that time is the essential factor when it comes to adjusting to a new environment as immigrant wives who have stayed longer in Korea have reported better assimilation than those who have stayed for a shorter period. In assimilating, the importance of be-

ing able to alter or adapt activities to support one's sense of self throughout a time of change is acknowledged (Kamiya & Lee, 2009). Over time, immigrants became more suited to the Korean way of living and considered their new host country like their own country. They achieve self-fulfillment by moving onto the next transitions of their lives, that is, self-growth, familial stability, and child-rearing. Cho Chung (2010), through the phenomenological research that reported foreign wives' experiences in raising children, stated that they overcome challenges with self-directed efforts of looking forward to the future and adequate social support, and have a powerful source of energy which moves them forward.

In the final category, regretting, immigrants who were not able to find meaning for their new lives and who could not meet their needs even after trying to adjust experienced homesickness and regretted marrying a Korean and migrating to Korea. Similarly, a previous study of immigration literature reported that the experience of immigration was the point of realization that their dreams had collapsed (Bae & Rosel, 2010; Lee, 2006). Immigrants who chose to migrate became more miserable and unsuccessful in life than those who stayed in their home countries. This illustrates the need for support mechanisms and the promotion of welfare programs specifically developed for Filipino immigrant wives to cater to their culturally-specific needs.

Through this research, it was shown that most of the participants were actively trying to overcome difficulties. There were also suggestions for nursing practice and education based on the findings throughout the research. As well, comprehensive community programs are needed to strengthen community relationships, provide counseling for individuals as well as families, education and translation services, employment, and chances to learn the Korean language and culture. As well, ideas of multiculturalism, stress in acculturation, transcultural nursing as well as culturally competent nursing have to be included in not only psychiatric mental health nursing education but also public mental health education. This will decrease social discrimination against and isolation of the foreign wives and also help their adjustments into the Korean society.

Acculturation is usually considered as an important social factor for health promotion behaviors of international immigrants, including foreign wives. Health promotion behaviors are multidimensional and socially and culturally oriented (Burke, Joseph, Pasick, & Barker, 2009). Immigrants use social support from both home and host countries (Wong & Song, 2006) that requires them to ex-

plore the different social support available and their influences on health promotion behaviors. As a result, the Korean community needs to expand the social support system, so that the immigrant women will adjust well in our society, with a more open mind.

Through this research, we suggest that immigration authorities should consider integrating better and more appropriate support systems into immigration policies. Education about immigrant life in Korea and creation of culture-specific support groups should be offered for those interested in marrying and immigrating to Korea. There should be interventions and creation of programs to reduce stress and improve mental health of the foreign wives within the community.

## CONCLUSION

The study findings revealed a dynamic interplay in the participants' embracing of their new lives. This study contributes a qualitative basis for healthcare providers and concerned authorities to better understand the life experiences of Filipinas as they live as foreign wives in Korea.

This study found that Filipinas marry Korean men and immigrate to Korea to fulfill their yearnings to live abroad, improve their lives, economically help their families back home, search for better opportunities, or search for a lifetime partner. Once they set foot on Korean soil, they suffered from physical, social, economic, and psychological dilemmas. Moreover, they also confronted barriers such as language problems, cultural differences, and racial discrimination that hindered their adjustment to life in Korea. In spite of these difficulties, they tried to adapt by changing their life outlook, sacrificing, seeking information and support, persevering and familiarizing. Finally, some of them became assimilated and comfortable with the new culture, expressing satisfaction and hope for their futures. On the other hand, those who felt homesick and that their needs were not met after they had tried various coping strategies ended up regretting their decision to marry and migrate to Korea, and wished to return to their home country.

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