

Korean Divorced Mothers' Experiences with Child Support
from Noncustodial Fathers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore Korean divorced mothers' experiences with child support. The data were collected from 17 Korean divorced mothers who were divorced between the years of 2004 and 2009 and were raising at least one minor child. Data were analyzed based on the inductive data analysis method. Most mothers negotiated to receive child support from noncustodial fathers without experiencing much conflict with the fathers at the time of the divorce, but only five mothers received child support at the time of the interviews. The mothers experienced difficulties in receiving child support from the fathers under the child support policy in Korea that treated child support as a personal issue and provided little systemic support for child support. Regarding required parenting agreements, most of the mothers acknowledged the need to have parenting agreements but they still wanted voluntary payment of the child support from the fathers. The results suggest that it is necessary to expand parenting education for divorced parents to encourage voluntary participation in parenting and to improve the child support policy by introducing child support guidelines and enhancing child support collection systems.

Keywords

Child support, divorce, noncustodial father, parenting agreement

Divorce has rapidly increased since the late 1990s and has become a significant family and social issue in Korean society. The crude divorce rate, indicating the number of divorces per 1,000 people, was 2.3 in 2012, which is the lowest level since 1997, but 52.8% of divorced couples had at least one minor child under age 20 in Korea when they filed for divorce (Statistics Korea, 2013). This number indicates that more than half of Korean divorced parents have to perform parental roles together with the other parent. Korean society, however, has paid relatively little attention to divorced families and provided few social resources for divorced families. While divorce is a stressful life transition for children, protective factors such as financial support, good parent-child relationships, and cooperative coparenting after divorce could facilitate the well-being of children (Barber & Demo, 2006; Kelly, 2006; Kim & Beak, 2002).

Child support from noncustodial fathers is an important financial resource for children of divorce and their custodial mothers who often have lower incomes than the fathers (Case, Lin, & McLanahan,

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2003). Financial inadequacy after divorce may contribute to negative child outcomes including low academic performance in school and psychological and behavioral problems (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Kim & Beak, 2002; Sun & Li, 2002). Some researchers claim that child support income is more helpful for the well-being of children than other types of income sources such as government transfers or financial contributions from a custodial parent or stepparent (Argys et al., 1998). Furthermore, child support from noncustodial fathers reduces the relative financial burdens of custodial mothers (Garrison, 1999). Therefore, it is important to provide appropriate financial support after divorce in order to protect the economic well-being of children following divorce. Limited attention, however, has been given to the research on child support during the divorce process and after divorce in Korea.

Civil law was modified in 2007 in Korea which requires parents to develop an agreement regarding child support and visitation after divorce in order to reduce conflict between divorced parents and to protect the well-being of children of divorce. Since the modified divorce law requires parents to submit a parenting agreement to the court, it may influence divorced parents' decision-making processes as well as their parenting after divorce. It is still unknown, however, what the differences in child support payments are between before and after enacting this law. How do parents actually negotiate child support, and what are the degrees of conflict parents experience while they negotiate these parenting agreements? Previous Korean research has shown that considerable numbers of noncustodial parents do not participate in childrearing or pay child support after divorce, or even have contact with their children (Jun, 2002; Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, 2013). Thus, it is important to examine whether the requirement of parenting agreements makes any difference in the noncustodial fathers' child support payments.

The purpose of this study was to explore Korean divorced mothers' experiences with child support. The research questions for this study were as follows: (a) How did Korean divorced mothers decide child support at the time of the divorce? (b) What were Korean divorced mothers' experiences in dealing with child support after the divorce? and (c) How did Korean divorced mothers perceive the parenting agreement required by the court?

It is important to listen to Korean divorced mothers' voices and to identify how they describe their own experiences of child support before and after divorce to better understand their experiences and situations due to limited research in this area in Korea.

Background

Financial Difficulties of Divorced Mothers and Child Support

Most single parents experience financial difficulties after divorce, especially single mothers (Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006). Previous research has reported gender differences in terms of barriers to divorce or problems after divorce in Korea (Ok & Sung, 2004a; Ok & Sung, 2004b; Son & Han, 2006). In particular, economic hardship after divorce was identified as one of the main barriers to divorce for women in Korea while men were more concerned about emotional aspects after divorce and social norms regarding a normal family (Han, Kim, & Kang, 2004). Bartfeld (2000) explained that mothers take care of childrearing responsibilities during marriage which results in reduced earning capacity of mothers. This is particularly true in Korea which has a long history of traditional gender roles. In addition, after divorce, mothers with minor children usually experience child care barriers to employment as well as a reduced earning capacity (Son, 2013). Thus, Korean divorced mothers point out that economic issues are the most difficult experiences after divorce (Kim, Jang, & Kim, 2006; Son & Han, 2006). According to the Ministry of Health & Welfare (2013), 11.8% of single-parent households lived in poverty in 2012. The poverty rate of single-mother households was 9.5%, which was much higher than the poverty rate of single-father households at 2.3%. Considering the financial difficulties of divorced single mothers, child support is an important income source for divorced single-mother households.

Little research exists on child support in Korea except for descriptive studies. According to the National Survey of Single-Parents (Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, 2013), 83% of single parents did not receive any child support from noncustodial parents and only 5.6% of single parents regularly received child support. However, only 4.6% of single parents sued noncustodial parents to receive child support. Even though they had a court

order for child support, 77.4% of custodial parents did not receive the child support that the court ordered. The Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations (2008) reported that approximately 40% of parents did not talk about child support at the time of divorce. Even if they made an agreement, only 12% of custodial parents received child support from the noncustodial parents. As these Korean studies show, only a small number of Korean divorced families benefit from child support.

Modification of the Civil Law and Child Support

A rapid increase in the divorce rate within a decade as well as research revealing negative outcomes of divorce led the Korean government to introduce a new civil law about divorce which went into effect in June 2008. This modified civil law includes the following requirements: a “cooling off” period and required agreements between the parents regarding custody, child support, and noncustodial parent visitation. The cooling off period requires parents with a minor child to wait for three months to finalize their divorce. In addition, parents with a minor child are required to submit a parenting agreement to the court regarding legal and physical custody, child support payments, and noncustodial parent visitation.

The purpose of parenting agreements is to provide important opportunities for parents who want to divorce to discuss parental relationships following divorce and to avoid anticipated conflict over parenting between divorced parents after divorce (Chin, Park, & Chung, 2008). Before the civil law modification, parents were only required to decide who would have legal custody of their children when they filed for divorce. Since the civil law did not require parents to decide on parenting plans regarding physical custody, child support, or visitation, little reliable information exists about divorced Korean families’ postdivorce living arrangements and parenting (Jeong, 2005). In addition, at the time of divorce, parents were less likely to talk about parenting issues after divorce compared to other issues such as the feasibility of divorce or property division (Lee, 2001). However, Korean divorced parents would often experience conflict after divorce concerning physical custody, child support, or visitation because they had not made such agreements or arrangements beforehand (Chin et al., 2008).

The effectiveness of the modified civil law is questionable

since there are no specific guidelines or compulsory execution to help parents make decisions about child support payments and visitation, or to follow up on their agreements (Chin et al., 2008). Changes in the civil law could improve contextual factors that influence noncustodial fathers’ involvement in children’s lives (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). The modified civil law identifies the fundamental needs of children including emotional, financial, physical, and social needs by requiring child support payments. This law also outlines the responsibilities of divorced parents so that they will become more aware of their obligations for financial support for their children. As Kruk (2005) indicated, the legal expectation for the parenting plan is that parents develop their own plans through direct negotiation, which could reduce the harm to divorced families. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate whether parenting agreements have changed divorced mothers’ experiences with regard to child support.

Methods

Recruitment and Interviews

The criteria for participants were divorced mothers who had experienced a divorce between the years of 2004 and 2009 and were raising at least one minor child in their household. The researcher distributed research advertisement to Healthy Family Support Centers, social service agencies, and Internet websites for divorced families. Some of the divorced mothers who were interested in the research left their contact information and the other mothers were referred by other participants. Seventeen divorced mothers were recruited. One-on-one interviews were conducted to help understand Korean divorced mothers’ experiences with child support and to develop richer and deeper meanings of the experiences. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 17 participating divorced mothers between July and September of 2009 in Seoul or a satellite city in Korea. The duration of each interview was approximately one and a half hours to two hours. Interviews took place at the participants’ homes or coffee shops near the participants’ homes depending upon each participant’s preference. Participants were informed before the interview of the purpose of the study, possible risks and benefits of participation, the protection of privacy and confidentiality, and the

Table 1. The Characteristics of Participants (N = 17)

ID	Age	Education	Job/ Income	Children	Divorce after the Law Modification	Agreement on Child Support	Child Support Payments
1	47	High school	Sales/ KRW 1,200,000	Son 18 Daughter 17	Yes	Yes/ KRW 200,000	No
2	39	4-year college	Teacher/ KRW 2,000,000	Daughter 14 Son 12	Yes	Yes/ KRW 1,500,000	No
3	38	4-year college	Child care/ KRW 800,000	Son 6	No	Yes/ KRW 500,000	Yes
4	35	High school	Self-sufficiency program/ KRW 700,000	Daughter 7	No	Yes/ KRW 300,000	Yes/ Lump sum
5	39	High school	Self-sufficiency program/ KRW 1,000,000	Son 8 Son 6	No	Yes/ KRW 500,000	No
6	36	2-year college	Tutor/ KRW 1,500,000	Son 10 Son 8	No	Yes/ Specific amount of child support was not decided	No
7	36	High school	Self-sufficiency program/ KRW 1,000,000	Daughter 10 Son 9	No	Yes/ Specific amount of child support was not decided	No
8	39	4-year college	Violin Instructor/ KRW 1,750,000	Daughter 14 Daughter 10	No	Yes/ KRW 2,000,000	Yes
9	43	High school	Cleaner/ KRW 1,000,000	Son 18 Son 15	Yes	Yes/ KRW 500,000	No
10	47	High school	Sales/ KRW 650,000	Son 12	No	Yes/ KRW 300,000	No
11	30	High school	Part-time worker/ KRW 800,000	Daughter 8	No	No	No
12	35	High school	Call center/ KRW 1,260,000	Son 11 Son 9	No	Yes/ KRW 250,000	No
13	27	High school	Nurse aide/ KRW 1,200,000	Son 5	No	No	No
14	27	High school	Office assistance/ KRW 950,000	Son 6 Son 3	Yes	Yes/ KRW 1,500,000	Yes
15	40	High school	Sales/ KRW 500,000	Son 15 Son 9	No	No	No/ Owned a house
16	39	High school	Part-time worker/ KRW 3,000,000	Son 12 Daughter 9 Daughter 7	No	Yes/ KRW 1,200,000	No
17	45	High school	Sewing worker/ KRW 1,200,000	Daughter 12 Son 7	No	Yes/ Specific amount of child support was not decided	Yes Irregular

voluntary nature of the study. Each participant received a gift card valued at KRW 30,000 for participating in the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants

Of the 17 Korean divorced mothers, 13 mothers had uncontested divorces, while four mothers had contested divorces. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants. The average age of the divorced mothers was 38 with a range of 27 to 47 years at the time of the interviews. In terms of the mothers' education level, all of the mothers had at least a high school degree and four mothers had a 2-year or 4-year college degree. All mothers were employed with some of them being sales personnel, part-time workers, or working for self-support programs. The mothers' median monthly household income was KRW 1,000,000 with a range of KRW 500,000 to KRW 3,000,000. Based on the 2009 Korean poverty guidelines¹, these mothers were relatively low-income. Six mothers received welfare at the time of the interview (ID 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, & 17). These mothers, however, were not on welfare before the divorce except for one mother. The average number of children they had was two with a range of one to three.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) was used to identify predominant themes. The researcher read each transcription independently and then compared the transcriptions across the cases. A qualitative analysis program, MAXqda2, was used to compare and contrast data across cases. More upper-level categories were derived from the purpose of the research and lower-level categories were identified by multiple readings of the data. Through repetitive revision and refinement of categories, predominant themes were identified. For credibility of the study, triangulation was used by including multiple respondents to support the findings. The researcher also had peer debriefing sessions where the research procedures and findings were examined with other colleagues.

¹The 2009 Korean poverty guidelines are KRW 835,763 for a 2-person family, KRW 1,081,186 for a 3-person family, and KRW 1,326,609 for a four-person family unit.

Results

Decisions on Child Support during the Divorce Process

Overall, the Korean divorced mothers did not experience much conflict with the fathers regarding child support at the time of the divorce since these Korean divorced parents did not take child support agreements seriously. Out of the 17 Korean divorced mothers in this study, 14 mothers agreed to receive child support, and three mothers agreed not to receive child support from the fathers at the time of their divorce. Out of the 14 mothers who agreed to receive child support, 11 mothers decided the specific amount of child support, while three mothers did not decide the amount. These mothers determined child support payments in four ways: (a) reflecting on the parents' financial or parenting situation, (b) agreeing to the father's arbitrary decision, (c) agreeing to the usual amount of child support set in the court, or (d) not receiving child support.

Reflecting on the parents' financial or parenting situation

Six mothers said that they decided the amount of child support based on both the mother's or father's economic and parenting situations (ID 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, & 16). One mother with two daughters said that she mostly determined the support payments based on the cost of raising children and the father's income. She said, "I asked him to pay KRW 2,000,000 [per month] for child support and he accepted it. I considered the cost for the children's education, food, clothing, things like that.... He makes enough money to pay it" (ID 8).

Another mother with two children explained that she determined the amount based on how much the father could pay. She said, "When he sent the children back to me, I asked for more money since costs for raising children were considerable. But since he had limited ability to pay it, he wanted to pay KRW 250,000 per month" (ID 12). One mother with two young children experienced some conflict when determining the amount of child support since the father did not understand the necessary expenses for raising children. This mother developed an official parenting agreement regarding child support based on the modified divorce law.

I asked him for KRW 1,500,000 [a month for child support] because I lived in this house with monthly rent, and private

education was very expensive these days. In addition to education expenses, I had to buy clothes for the children and to pay child care for the two children. So I needed at least that amount of money for raising these children. He questioned why I needed that much money. I responded by asking him to think about the total costs for raising children.... I also told him that I only asked him to pay KRW 1,500,000 after considering his economic condition (ID 14).

Agreeing to the father's arbitrary decision

Five mothers left the decisions about what to pay to the fathers (ID 1, 2, 6, 7, & 17) since they thought if the fathers cared about their children, the fathers would be willing to pay child support at their own discretion regardless of having specified agreements on child support. Two mothers who developed official parenting agreements under the modified divorce law said that they determined the child support payments based on the fathers' arbitrary decisions about what to pay (ID 1 & 2). These mothers, however, acknowledged that they decided the amount for child support only for the purpose of filing the parenting agreement forms with the court and did not expect the father to pay it. Some fathers may have even wanted to "save face" or to simply comply with the paperwork requirement by promising the mothers that they would pay an unrealistic amount of child support considering their ability. One mother said that the paperwork did not reflect any real amount she expected to receive:

If he had enough financial ability, I would ask him to pay child support. However, in my case, since he was poor, I asked him to arbitrarily write an amount of child support in the parenting agreement document. Then he said that he would pay either KRW 200,000 or KRW 300,000 a month. We easily did the paperwork, but I have not received any money from him after the divorce.... I told him that child support was not for me but for his children. If he sent that money to me, I would appreciate it. However, since this parenting agreement form was just a perfunctory piece of paperwork to get divorced, he just wrote down the amount that he wanted to pay. He wrote the amount by himself. I did not ask him how much he could pay (ID 1).

ID 2 provided a long discussion about the difference between the paperwork and the amount the father actually paid. However,

she thought that the unrealistic amount of child support the father wrote in the parenting agreements reflected how much he loved his children regardless of whether he paid the actual amount:

It was not difficult to write that document. He wrote that he would pay KRW 1,500,000 [per month] for child support.... (Interviewer: Did you think that you would receive that amount of child support from the father?) I half doubted at that time since the amount he wrote was more than I expected.... From my perspective, I tried to understand it as his way of showing love toward our children. And I didn't intend to take any legal steps even if he didn't pay the exact amount of money. When we worked on the document, I thought that I would be fine, even if I wouldn't receive the exact amount for child support that he wrote in the document, if he did his best for the children (ID 2).

Three mothers who divorced before the divorce law modification talked about child support with the fathers, but they did not decide on the specific amount of child support that the fathers would pay (ID 6, 7, & 17). These parents' excuse for not fixing a specific amount of child support was that they believed since the fathers were their children's biological fathers, even if the amount of child support was not decided, the fathers would be willing to pay it voluntarily.

When we negotiated child support, he claimed that he would not pay child support. He told me that his business was not settled at that point and what if he was not able to pay it even though he promised to pay it. He also said that since he was the children's father, if he had capacity to pay it, he would be willing to pay it voluntarily (ID 7).

Agreeing to the usual amount of child support set by the court

Three mothers went through contested divorces and the court or parental divorce lawyers suggested that they should simply take the usual amount of child support (ID 3, 4, & 10). ID 4 said, "A court ordered him to pay KRW 300,000 a month in child support until my child becomes 20 years old" (ID 4). Another mother received KRW 500,000 that was somewhat more than the usual amount of child support the court suggested. She described her situation:

My lawyer recommended that the average child support was KRW 200,000. Since this amount was fixed a long time ago, I

just asked the child's father for KRW 500,000 taking inflation into account.... My lawyer told me that if the father suggested KRW 300,000, I should accept that offer (ID 3).

Not receiving child support

Three mothers decided not to receive any child support from the fathers since these mothers did not want to have any contact with them anymore (ID 11, 13, & 15). In addition, one father tried to deal with child support and custody at the time of the divorce but kept changing his mind.

I just wanted to get divorced quickly.... I decided not to receive child support from him. I just asked him to give me legal and physical custody of the son. Anyway, he did not have assets. Since he also had credit card debt, more than half of his income had been used to pay his debt during our marriage. In addition, he was so cheap because he often changed his mind about paying child support. At first, I said that I would have legal and physical custody and not receive child support. Then, he agreed. Later, he said that he would pay it. He changed his mind again and said that he wouldn't pay it. I also didn't want to receive it since if I received it, he would meddle [in how I raised the child] (ID 13).

When one mother wanted to have legal and physical custody of the children, the father agreed to that idea at first. However, when they talked about child support, the father tried to negotiate with the mother on custody. The father thought that the mother would be selfish if she wanted both custody and child support payments since he also wanted to raise the child. In addition, this mother thought it would be demeaning if she asked for child support from the father.

I had custody of the children with the condition that I didn't expect child support. Because of my dignity, I did not want to ask him to pay child support at that time. These days, I wonder about it, realizing that receiving child support would not be related to my pride. But at that time, I thought that way and did not want to receive it from him. I also thought that if I received the money, I had to let the child see him. I did not want any more contact with him. If the child was old enough, I would send her to see him alone. But because she was young, I had to go with her or he had to come over to my house. I was

uncomfortable with that.... He told me that he would take the child from me if I asked him for child support. He said that I shouldn't ask for child support because I wanted to raise her not because he did not want to have her. In addition, the father's parenting environment was actually better than mine.... So I did not ask for either alimony or child support and only asked him to agree that I had legal and physical custody of her (ID 11).

Mothers' Experiences with Child Support after Divorce

Many mothers talked about the difficulties that they had faced when trying to receive child support from the fathers. Many of these difficulties related to the child support policy in Korea. Fourteen mothers had agreed to receive child support from the fathers at the time of their divorce, but only five of these mothers received regular or irregular child support payments from the children's fathers at the time of the interviews. Regardless of if the mothers received child support from the fathers, the mothers encountered several barriers to receiving child support payments under the current child support policy. The themes were categorized as follows: (a) child support as a personal issue, and (b) lack of systemic support for child support.

Child support as a personal issue

For some mothers, child support was an issue that they personally dealt with. They believed that child support payments depended on the fathers' sense of moral responsibility, but if the fathers did not follow their moral responsibility, the mothers had to personally deal with this issue whether they gave up receiving it or fought with the fathers. Two mothers who regularly received child support expressed concern that there was great uncertainty about whether the fathers' payments would end since they only relied on the fathers' sense of moral responsibility. The only preparation the mothers had for an uncertain future was to save the child support that they received in case the fathers stopped paying. One mother explained her concerns:

I'm worried since it is uncertain if he will stop paying it. He pays it regularly, but it is a fact that he could stop it.... I'm always concerned about this. It is very important for me to save his current child support payments while he pays since I have to support the children for high school and college. (Interviewer:

Do you think that the children's father could stop paying child support anytime?) He divorced me and was cheating on me.... I don't trust him 100%.... Ultimately, I'm worried whether he's going to pay child support to the end. I only depend on his moral responsibility (ID 8).

Another mother also talked about similar concerns. She brought up the problem of the modified child support policy, the provision of the child-support direct payment order, and that she could not rely on it for security. She said:

He is a self-employed truck driver.... I heard that a law would be modified this time. It sounds like if noncustodial parents don't pay child support, their income could be seized. Frankly speaking, since people who have obvious incomes such as company employees have to pay social insurance, their incomes would be clear. The law could work for them. But in terms of self-employed people, if they say "I don't have any income" or "My business is slow," then that's it. I doubt the feasibility of this law.... I'm concerned about when he's going to stop paying child support. (Interviewer: Do you think that he could stop paying it?) Yes. I would say 100%, if he either remarries or dates a new woman. Even if I take legal action, I can take legal action actually, but the law isn't realistic. His income isn't reported clearly by law.... So if the day comes and he stops paying child support, I think that I won't be able to do anything [legally]. So I have to save his child support payments. Since I can't depend on the law, then I have to deal with it by myself (ID 14).

ID 14 strongly insisted that she would receive child support from the father by all means if he did not want to pay. However, many mothers voluntarily gave up receiving it since they had to keep asking the fathers for child support and were forced to argue with them to receive any payment. They felt that it was pathetic to ask fathers for child support by themselves. One mother said that she did not want to receive child support unless the father paid it voluntarily and explained the different opinions regarding receiving child support between those who were divorced and those who were not divorced. She said:

My father said that since I had a hard time, I should receive at least a small amount of money [from the father].... I told him that if he [the children's father] voluntarily gave money to me, I would receive either KRW 10 or KRW 1,000,000. But

if he didn't, I wouldn't want to associate with him [because of money]. I also said that I had had a hard time so far even after the divorce since it seemed like we weren't separate. I didn't want to be associated with him in the future. My father told me that he's not able to understand me. But if I talk with people like me who raise children, they totally agree with me by saying, "Right, Yes, You're right." But if I talk with other people or friends around me who are not divorced, they say, "You should receive it." There are different points of view.... If the law changes like the courts call the fathers and enforce child support payment, it would be much easier for us to receive it. But under the current situation, I don't want to ask him for money, since it's demeaning to have to ask him. And I also don't want to argue with him (ID 12).

Lack of systemic support for child support

Social systems did not help divorced mothers who needed to receive child support payments from the fathers. Several mothers considered taking legal action to receive child support, but they faced barriers including no enforcement program, difficulties in receiving legal support services, having to personally verify the fathers' financial status, and a lack of social awareness of child support. There was no enforcement to help these mothers receive child support even if they received an official child support order from a court. One mother with three children sued the father to change legal custody of the children and to receive child support payments. She had made a verbal agreement regarding child support payments with the children's father at the time of the divorce, but he had not paid it. Although she received the court's decision by receiving help from a free legal advice service, she was not able to verify the father's financial ability to pay child support, so she could not receive unpaid child support from the father. She illustrated the recent ruling:

The decision of the court was that I couldn't receive unpaid child support from the father. I hired people to investigate [the father's income and assets].... He had nothing. If he ran his store register in his name, he would pay tax. Then, I could figure out his income, but he doesn't. He might expect that I would take this legal action, so he could register his car and store in another person's name. I didn't know if this was the case but

there was no way to figure out either his income or assets The court ordered him to pay child support KRW 800,000 per month for a couple of years and KRW 600,000 after that. I have the decision, but [I can receive it only when] the father is willing to pay it. Although I have the decision of the court, since there is no law enforcement, I'm not able to receive it from the father (ID 16).

Limited legal support resources are available for needy low-income mothers. Although several mothers received these free legal support services to help them take legal action, they experienced difficulties in getting free legal advice because the processes were time-consuming and somewhat complex for the mothers. In addition, the mothers were unable to verify the fathers' financial status to take legal action if the fathers were self-employed or hid their assets. Furthermore, the mothers were unlikely to benefit from these legal services since child support orders are not enforceable. One low-income mother noted that even if she took any legal action, it would not really help her receive child support from the father right away. She said:

He was self-employed, so there was no way to figure out his income.... I couldn't consult with even a judicial scrivener because of its cost. I filed the divorce suit by myself and ran around [to have free legal advice] since consultants from any free legal advice service didn't explain specifically via phone calls. I found this free lawyer, met with him, and listened to the lawyer. The lawyer told me that there was an execute order, but it was only possible when the father had a regular income. So I told him that it wasn't meaningful for me to have a court order [since I didn't know about the father's income]. But the lawyer recommended that I have the order anyway since he could have regular income someday (ID 10).

ID 16 also described the complex processes of receiving free legal advice services and taking legal action. She said:

Since I didn't know the process well enough, I had to go back and forth to different agencies several times.... The process was somewhat complex for me.... I have a part-time job right now.... But for example, if I had a full-time job, it would have been very difficult to take time off [to complete these processes].... It took me several months and I visited [the agency and lawyer] several times. I had to call here and there....

I did that, but there are many people who have dishwasher or factory jobs [who couldn't take time off]. There are also rich people, but with their money they will not have to go through these processes by themselves. However, it [the legal service] is free, but it is inconvenient for those of us to use them (ID 16).

ID 4 fortunately received some lump sum child support payments from the father by taking legal action since she had information about his assets. She said, "I asked the court to help.... I seized his bank account and his house. I took legal action and forced him [to pay child support]. He never listened to me, but he was afraid of the law." She, however, also complained about the difficulties of using the legal service. This mother got divorced due to domestic violence, but there was no consideration for her even though she had experienced domestic violence.

I had to answer to my phone calls and went [to the court] several times. I didn't let the child's father know my phone number, so he bothered the staff. The staff acted irritated and asked me to call the father since I knew his number.... The staff asked me to call and meet with the father since he told the staff that he would give money to me. Although the staff told me that the father would pay, when I called him, he cursed me and denied it. I didn't want to talk with him anymore. They only helped me with documentation. I heard that courts in foreign countries collect child support [from fathers] and then give it to mothers, but since we don't have that kind of system, it is too difficult for mothers to receive it (ID 4).

Mothers' Perspectives on Parenting Agreements

Most Korean divorced mothers emphasized that they preferred voluntary involvement in parenting from the fathers instead of forcing them to participate by developing parenting agreements. The mothers acknowledged the necessity of having parenting agreements but they were concerned about its effectiveness. These mothers believed that the parenting agreements required by the modified law were important, but they doubted its effectiveness since it is not enforceable by law. Nevertheless, the mothers often said, "It would be better with it than without it." One mother said:

Well, it would be helpful from the custodial parents' perspective.... But it isn't enforceable.... But there would be a difference between having the documentation and not having

it.... If there is a document, one out of ten fathers who didn't pay child support without it, will pay it after the change. More fathers will pay it if they write it. It will be helpful but it won't be harmful (ID 6).

Some mothers, however, did not think that the required parenting agreements will be helpful if the fathers do not care about their children by themselves. One mother said, "It depends on his free will, since it is not enforceable. If he doesn't want to visit, he won't. Since he doesn't pay child support, he won't keep a visitation schedule" (ID 4). Another mother also had a similar negative perception because she felt the parenting agreements were unenforceable. This mother placed more importance on the father's sincere interest in his children. She believed that the father's attitude could not be regulated by the legal document. She said:

It is just paperwork.... when people agree verbally, yet they don't keep the agreements. It would be better to make this clear by having a document, but I think it is just a piece of paper. If fathers really mean to do it, they will do it whether there is a legal agreement or not.... Even if he doesn't keep the agreement, it isn't enforceable by law. I don't think that it is important (ID 12).

In this aspect, most Korean divorced mothers highlighted the importance of the fathers' voluntary participation in parenting. They wanted the fathers to pay child support voluntarily instead of developing a legal document of parenting agreement, arguing with the fathers to receive child support, or taking any legal action. One mother explained why she did not ask the father to pay child support or not take any legal action to receive it:

It would be good if the father paid child support because he sincerely wants to pay it. If he signs an agreement, it is [only based on] responsibility to fulfill it. Fathers also have a responsibility to take care of their children. But if it doesn't come from their heart as a parent, I don't think it is meaningful.... Is it too much for me to ask that the emotional aspect should be considered?.... I really hate to ask him for money. If he took care of it by himself, it would be great (ID 13).

The current policy leaves divorced parents with the responsibility for involvement and voluntarily paying or collecting child support with a lack of resources to support divorced parents. Thus, many of the divorced mothers did not see the parenting

agreements as effective documents when it came to involvement or child support payments. Most of the Korean divorced mothers wanted voluntary involvement in parenting from the fathers even though they acknowledged the importance of the legal system to help divorced parents.

Discussion

The study provides a better understanding of how Korean divorced mothers decided on child support at the time of divorce and what they experienced in dealing with child support after the divorce. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 divorced mothers who were divorced between the years of 2004 and 2009 and were raising at least one minor child. An inductive analysis method was used for data analysis. Most mothers in this study did not receive child support from the noncustodial fathers at the time of the interview even though they agreed on receiving child support at the time of divorce. This finding is consistent with previous research on child support (Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations, 2008; Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, 2013). The mothers determined child support payments in four ways including reflecting on the parents' financial or parenting situation, agreeing to the father's arbitrary decision, agreeing to the usual amount of child support set by the court, or not receiving child support. However, the economic well-being of the children of divorce was less likely to be considered when the parents determined child support. Most child support guidelines in the U.S. are implemented based on the principle that both parents are expected to provide the same level of income to their children that they would have if they were living together (Bartfeld, 2000). These guidelines are also enforced so children are assured of their rights. However, the economic well-being of many of the Korean children of divorce has declined compared to when they lived with both parents since a considerable number of children of divorce do not receive any support from their noncustodial fathers. Many of the Korean divorced mothers in this study experienced financial troubles after the divorce. As they reported, five mothers who were on welfare were not on welfare before the divorce, but ended up relying on welfare after the divorce.

The findings of this study also reveal that within the Korean

social context Korean divorced parents may not think that child support is for their children's financial well-being instead of being related to the parents' personal relationship. The mothers' well-being as opposed to the children's well-being seemed to be the main issue, even though many of these mothers were willing to sacrifice their own well-being to maintain the well-being of their children. Some mothers decided not to receive child support since they did not want to associate with the fathers after their divorce or they interpreted either asking for money or receiving money from the fathers as demeaning for themselves. In addition, many of the fathers did not seem to care about their children's economic well-being. For some of the fathers, when they provided child support for their children, they provided it to control the relationship with their ex-spouses but not for the sake of their children.

The 2007 modification of the civil law requires divorcing parents to develop parenting agreements prior to divorce in which they should clearly outline child support and visitation. It is an important move to require official agreements on parenting after divorce. However, the findings of this study suggest that these parenting agreements have not become a formal structure to help divorcing parents think through their parenting issues and the well-being of their children in advance. For many parents in the present study, these agreements seem like just paperwork to be completed to finalize their divorce because this policy was introduced without social consensus on parenting responsibilities after divorce and legal restrictions. Most of all, even though the child support policy indicates that child support is a shared responsibility between both parents, some divorced parents did not reflect this idea in their decision making. If noncustodial fathers do not fulfill their responsibilities, some mothers cannot rely on the child support policy but have to deal with the fathers personally to receive child support. As a result, some of the mothers in this study often deemphasized their parenting agreements. Several mothers also expressed their personal feelings such as feeling demeaned or, in contrast, feeling grateful for the fathers' meeting their parental responsibilities. These personal feelings would not be necessary if the policy enforced the fathers' responsibility to pay child support. Researchers have claimed that a stronger child support policy would improve the level of living of children and their custodial mothers (Cha, 2006; Lee, 2009). Bartfeld (2000)

also claimed that the divorce policy needs to help divorced parents clearly understand their responsibilities and rights and emphasize the definition of child support as the primary means to share child-related costs after divorce. Therefore, it is important to have strong child support guidelines and effective child support collection systems in Korea. Fortunately, the Korean government introduced a new law concerning child support enforcement in March 2014 and this law will be effective in March 2015 (Ministry of Government Legislation, 2014). This collection method for child support payments will be important to secure the economic well-being of children, so it will benefit children of divorce and their custodial parents. Further research on the effect of the child support enforcement policy on custodial parents' experiences with child support should be investigated.

It is necessary to expand parenting education for divorcing parents to increase their knowledge and responsibilities of parenting after divorce. As the findings of this study indicate, the divorced mothers preferred to have noncustodial fathers' voluntary child support payments instead of enforcing it by law. Previous research has reported positive effects of parenting education on divorced parents' parenting roles and responsibilities including increased awareness of the children's needs as separate from the parents' needs, increased parenting skills, and a greater willingness to establish a healthier coparenting relationship (Cookston, Braver, Griffin, Delusé, & Miles, 2007; Kelly, 2006; Markham & Coleman, 2012). The findings of this research could be useful for developing education curriculum for divorcing parents in Korea.

It is important to comment on the limitations of this study. This study was conducted shortly after the law modification and included only four mothers who developed official parenting agreements based on the modified civil law. The influence of policy changes on family life could be different over time. Thus, this limitation might imply that it is difficult to reveal experiences of divorced mothers under the new child support policy context. More research needs to be conducted with more participants over time. Another limitation of this study is that it does not include the experiences of noncustodial fathers who could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of divorced parents. Divorced fathers might have different experiences and perspectives from the mothers, so the divorced fathers' experiences

of child support need to be investigated in future research to have a better understanding of divorced families in Korea.

This study provides further explanations of how Korean divorced mothers decided and experienced child support after divorce by listening to the mothers' voices. This study also contributes to expanding our understanding of how the Korean divorce policy is related to divorced mothers' experiences of child support by comparing mothers who experienced divorce before and after the law modification. The findings and implications of the present study will be useful for further improvement of the current divorce policy and research in Korea.

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