

Resilience Perceived by Korean International Student/ Scholar Families in the United States: Family Demands, Capabilities, and Adaptation

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Abstract

Although Korean international students/scholars are among the largest groups of international students/scholars on most campuses in the United States, little is known about what types of demands their families face and how they adapt successfully in the face of demands. The purpose of this study was to explore family resilience, which consists of family demands, capabilities, and adaptation, perceived by Korean international student/scholar families, being theoretically guided by the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) model. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with couple informants. Following procedures of theory-based content analysis, data were analyzed using key FAAR concepts. Findings showed that most informants reported normative types of family demands such as hardships due to childcare; primary family capabilities were "maintaining social integration," "affective and instrumental communication," and "family cohesiveness," and "nurturance, education, and socialization" was the primary family adaptation mode. New categories under family capabilities, "religious commitment" and "transnational family support" were developed. The results suggest that there is a unique set of family capabilities that contribute to the successful adaptation of Korean international student/scholar families. Implications and limitations are discussed.

Keywords

family resilience, Korean international students, Korean families, FAAR model, content analysis, family adaptation, U.S.

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, the number of international students enrolled in institutions of higher education outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.3 million in 2011, a more than fivefold increase (OECD, 2013; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). Korean international students are among the largest groups of international students enrolled worldwide, and the most popular destination country for Korean international students' higher education is the United States (Chun & Poole, 2009; Seo, 2005, 2010; OECD, 2013). The Korean international students affiliated with U.S. institutions of higher education are termed "short-term resident nonimmigrants" in the legal documents because they are considered temporary residents studying in the United States (Kim, 2010). This legal status as short-term resident nonimmigrants is

also applicable to Korean international scholars (e.g., post-doc researchers) who are considered temporary residents working at U.S. institutions of higher education. Previous literature has paid attention to these Korean international students/scholars' successful adaptation processes to demands, which constitute *resilience*, because they have strong potential to be a great asset to Korea if they return after successfully achieving their career goals in terms of the development in the of field of study in Korea along with a considerable economic impact (Kim, 2010; OECD, 2013). For example, Korean international students/scholars, who are subject to strict regulations on the movement and occupation in the United States, are often confronted with many demands in their daily lives such as language barriers, social isolation, racial discrimination, and academic problems (Chun & Poole, 2009; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lin & Yi, 1997; Seo, 2005, 2010). They attempt to cope with these demands by adopting diverse coping behaviors and resources such as understanding American culture, making friends, engaging in socialization, and improving English proficiency (Chun & Poole, 2009; Tseng & Newton, 2002) to successfully adapt to a new culture and achieve their career goals.

However, little empirical research has been done on the successful adaptation processes to family demands, which constitute *family resilience*, experienced by Korean international student/scholar families. These families are formed when married Korean international students/scholars move to the United States with their spouses and children (Kim, 2010). Compared with individual Korean international students/scholars, these families may face extra demands such as marital conflicts or concerns about children's education due to their responsibilities as spouses or parents. Their coping behaviors and resources can be also more diversified than those adopted by individual international students/scholars because they may attempt to cope with their family demands as a family unit as well as an individual. As a result, the successful adaptation processes to family demands experienced by Korean international student/scholar families may have unique characteristics that differ from the processes experienced by individual students/scholars. However, little is known about what types of demands these families face and how they adapt successfully in the face of demands as a family unit. To assist Korean international student/scholars in successfully

achieving their career goals, it is important to understand their family demands and explore their coping behaviors and resources that lead to their successful adaptation.

Korean international student/scholar families have often been excluded from the research literature (Kim, 2010) although there have been scholarly endeavors to understand other similar groups such as Korean international students (Chun & Poole, 2009; Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011; Seo, 2005, 2010) and married Korean immigrant women (Kim & Kim, 1995; Yoon, Lee, Koo, & Yoo, 2010). This study's population is unique from those groups in that the unit of focus is a family, and its legal status is short-term resident nonimmigrants, not settled immigrant families (Kim, 2010). In the current study, family resilience is defined as dynamic processes by which families adapt successfully and function competently in the face of demands through adopting capable coping behaviors and resources (Conger & Conger, 2002; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). To investigate the family resilience experienced by Korean international student/scholar families, we attempted to respond to the following three research questions: (a) What demands do Korean international student/scholar families experience in their acculturation process? (b) What types of coping behaviors and resources help them successfully cope with the demands? (c) What does their successful adaptation as an outcome look like? Based on these research questions, the purpose of this study is to explore the family resilience, which consists of family demands, capabilities, and adaptation, perceived by Korean international student/scholar families.

We focus on the family resilience *perceived* by couples within Korean international student/scholar families. Families' subjective perceptions are important in exploring family resilience because, for any given family demands, families implicitly evaluate how difficult it is and how capable they are in coping with the demands; their level of experienced stresses and capabilities is related to their perceived appraisal (Patterson, 2002a). Their perceptions, thus, shape the nature and extent of demands as well as the protective capacity of the family (Patterson, 2002a). Because of this importance of a family's perception in the resilience process, the current study focuses on the family resilience process perceived by the target population. This exploratory study applies the conceptual underpinnings of a particular family resilience conceptual model,

the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) model (Patterson, 2002a), which emphasizes families' perceptions.

Literature Review

Korean International Student/Scholar Families

Korean international student/scholar families who are affiliated with U.S. institutions of higher education often include a male international student/scholar and his wife and perhaps their children while, in some families, both husband and wife are international students/scholars (Kim, 2010). International students/scholars seek for the higher education or professional employment in the U.S. institutions of higher education to become more competitive job candidates in the job market when they return to Korea or to secure employment in the U.S. (Kim, 2010; OECD, 2013). As F (student) and H (work) visa holders in the U.S. who are subject to strict regulations regarding their movement and occupation (Kim, 2010), Korean international students/scholars are not allowed to get jobs outside the institutions, and their spouses are not permitted to hold paid jobs or enroll in school as students themselves without changing their visa status. Due to their legal status as temporary nonimmigrants, Korean international student/scholar families have often been excluded from scholarly inquiry on migration that focuses on settled immigrant families (Kim, 2010; Yoon *et al.*, 2010). These families' higher education and professional employment also provide them with higher socioeconomic status than labor migrants, which tends to exclude them from research on labor migrants (Kim, 2010). Korean international student/scholar families also maintain the citizenships from South Korea, to which they have been socialized (Seo, 2010). Accordingly, they tend to maintain a strong sense of identification with Korean culture and cultural values, even if they undergo the adaptation processes to U.S. cultural norms (Seo, 2005, 2010).

Family demands, coping behaviors, and resources

Going through various stages of family life in the U.S., Korean international student/scholar families are exposed to considerable demands including language barriers, racial discrimination, homesickness, isolation, marital stress, and burdens of caring for children in a new culture (Myers-Walls *et al.*, 2011; Seo, 2005,

2010). In a study of single and married Korean international students, Chun and Poole (2009) revealed five major demands: academic problems, financial difficulties, cultural barriers, psychological problems (e.g., feelings of loneliness), and family concerns. Family concerns included stresses associated with burdens of delivering babies and caring for children in the U.S. (Chun & Poole, 2009). Myers-Walls *et al.* (2011) explored the acculturative demands experienced by married Asian international graduate students, including Korean students, as parents and spouses. They reported six categories of stressors: (a) adjustment to living in two cultures, (b) feeling overwhelmed, (c) language difficulty, (d) feelings of isolation, (e) financial stress, and (f) marital stress (Myers-Walls *et al.*, 2011). Full-time housewives of international students/scholars also face a lot of demands because they had to learn many new ways for household chores such as banking and contacting utility companies. Although some wives in Korean international student/scholar families get new opportunities to study in the U.S. institutions, they usually face a lot of demands related to both studying abroad and household chores (Kim, 2010; Seo, 2005, 2010). The language barrier presents a significant demand in their daily practices of household chores (Kim, 2010; Yoon *et al.*, 2010). Wives may have some marital conflicts because of their disagreements with husbands on ways to address the huge changes to their everyday life and have stressors such as lack of a sense of belonging within the mainstream society and concerns about gossip in their ethnic community (Yoon *et al.*, 2010).

When Korean international student/scholar families move away from their kinship networks that typically provided them with supports in Korea, these families enter local ethnic communities in the U.S. (Kim, 2010). The local ethnic communities such as Korean churches or temples provide the families in the U.S. with highly important social supports for them to successfully cope with diverse demands (Yoon *et al.*, 2010). In addition to social supports from ethnic communities, these families may adopt a variety of coping behaviors and resources to successfully address their demands. According to Chun and Poole (2009), the single and married Korean international students coped with their stressors by adopting five major coping strategies including physical coping (e.g., swimming, walking), problem solving (e.g., finding resources to solve a problem), psychological coping (e.g., praying

or meditation), social support (e.g., social gatherings with other Koreans in local community), and entertainment.

Although Korean international student/scholar families who are exposed to diverse demands and adopt a variety of coping behaviors provide a rich context for exploring their resilience (Luthar *et al.*, 2000; Patterson, 2002a), there is no empirical literature that explored their demands, coping behaviors, resources, and adaptation that constitute their *family resilience*. Whereas the previous studies mainly explored demands and coping behaviors reported by individuals within a conceptual framework of stress and coping, this study explores their resilience perceived by the unit of couple in Korean international student/scholar families within a family resilience framework.

Conceptual Model

This study is theoretically guided by the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) model (Patterson, 2002a). Although family scholars have developed various family stress theories to conceptualize how families react to stressor events since Reuben Hill (1949) had proposed a family stress model, not many family stress theories integrated the family resilience perspective (McKenry & Price, 1994). The FAAR model is a family stress theory integrating the family resilience perspective used to conceptualize the processes by which families adapt successfully and function competently in the face of demands (Patterson, 2002a). This model was selected as the conceptual framework of this study because the main focus of this study is on the family resilience process (i.e., how Korean international student/scholar families adapt successfully in the face of demands) (McKenry & Price, 1994; Luthar *et al.*, 2000). The other reason is that the FAAR model presents greater conceptual precision necessary for empirical testing of the resilience. Three central constructs of the FAAR model are: (a) family demands, (b) family capabilities (i.e., resources and coping behaviors), and (c) family adaptation (Patterson, 2002a).

Family demands consist of normative and non-normative stressors that emerge from three different levels of the ecosystem: (a) individual family members, (b) a family unit, and (c) various community contexts (Patterson, 2002a). While normative family

demands refer to expected family life cycle changes (e.g., getting married or having a child), non-normative family demands are caused by unexpected events such as the premature death of a child (Patterson, 2002a). *Family capabilities* (i.e., protective factors) are factors that moderate the relationship between a family's exposure to demands and their ability to show competence in accomplishing family functions. *Family capabilities* include (a) *resources* (what the family "has") and (b) *coping behaviors* (what the family "does") (Patterson, 2002a). Resources have three subcategories of family cohesiveness, flexibility, and communication. "Family cohesiveness" is defined as balance between family closeness and distance, including emotional connection among family members and capacity to function as separate individuals (Patterson, 2002a). "Family flexibility" refers to a family's capacity to develop new family patterns for accomplishing routine family activities that incorporate the special needs of family demands; "Family communication" consists of affective communication which shows love and support between family members and instrumental communication in which families let each other know how tasks will be performed (Patterson, 2002a).

Coping behaviors are defined as specific efforts by which a family attempts to manage a demand (Patterson, 2002a). *Coping behaviors* have eight subcategories of (1) attributing positive meanings to the situation, (2) engaging in active coping efforts to discover solutions and new resources, (3) maintaining clear family boundaries, (4) maintaining social integration defined as a reciprocal process between a local community that encourages involvement by family members and family initiative to help reduce physical and psychological barriers that can isolate them, (5) developing collaborative relationships with professionals, (6) developing communication competence among family members, (7) maintaining family flexibility which refers to what the family does to maintain balance between stability and change, and (8) maintaining a commitment to the family as a unit (Patterson, 1991, 2002a).

Family adaptation (i.e., outcome factors) can be assessed by the degree to which a family functions competently in the face of demands in one or more of the following functions: (a) family formation function that provides family members with a sense of belonging, identity, and meaning for life (e.g., desired addition of children) (b) economic support function, (c) nurturance, education,

and socialization that provide for the physical, psychological, and social development of family members, and (d) protection function that provides protective care for vulnerable members (Patterson, 2002a).

Empirical studies using the FAAR model have focused primarily on White families, especially families having children with disabilities, a particular non-normative type of family demand (e.g., physical illness of a child), and a specific dimension of the family resilience process (e.g., *coping behaviors*) (Miedema *et al.*, 2010; Patterson, Leonard, & Titus, 1992). Those empirical studies have not paid attention to how diversity in ethnicity and family demands produce a range of family resilience processes. The current study begins filling this gap in the literature by focusing on different types of ethnicity and family demands represented by Korean international student/scholar families in the U.S. The target population of this study provides a useful context for exploring the universality of the FAAR model in that it tends to be exposed to a unique type of demands and maintains a strong sense of identification with a different cultural value from White families.

Methods

Target Sample and Recruitment of Informants

The target sample was Korean international student/scholar families who are affiliated with U.S. institutions of higher education. The criteria for inclusion was couples who were married in South Korea and then moved to the U.S. for either or both partners to further develop their careers by studying or working as a student/scholar at the U.S. institutions of higher education. Based on this criteria for inclusion, individual international students, visiting scholars, or immigrant couples from Korea were excluded. The target sample was recruited through snowball sampling (Marshall, 1996). Initial informants recommended other potential candidates for the researcher to interview. New informants were contacted via e-mail by the researcher. The e-mail message for recruitment contained brief information about the study, how long it would take for the interview, the voluntary nature of participation, and contact information. The informed consent for research participation was obtained by each participant. A \$10 gift card was given to couple participants after interviews. Because

direct access to the couple participants was allowed to undertake interviews by each couple, there was no gatekeeping issue. The recruitment of participants was stopped at eight couples ($n=8$) by applying the following principle of data saturation in theory-based content analysis. Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles, and Grimshaw (2009) defined data saturation as “no new themes, findings, concepts or problems were evident in the data” (Francis *et al.*, 2009: 2). According to Francis *et al.* (2009), data saturation can be decided in theory-based interview studies by following two steps: first, a researcher must specify a minimum sample size for initial analysis. Francis *et al.* (2009) indicated that, in their studies using theory-based content analysis, a similarity among the studies was that, despite contrasting types of behavior and people sampled, the number of new themes elicited started to “plateau after around six interviews” (Francis *et al.*, 2009: 14). This number of cases (6) was, thus, adopted by this study as the minimum sample size for initial analysis. Second, the researcher should specify how many more interviews will be conducted without new themes, concepts, or ideas emerging (stopping criterion). Based on the decision criteria and steps for data saturation, we decided on a minimum sample size of six cases and the stopping criterion as two cases.

Sample Description

A total of eight Korean international student/scholar couples affiliated with U.S. institutions of higher education were recruited. Husbands' ages varied from 34 to 39 years, with a mean age of 36 years; wives' ages varied from 29 to 36 years, with a mean age of 32 years. Six of the eight husbands were full-time graduate students and two of them were postdoctoral researchers. Six of the eight wives were full-time housewives and two of them were full-time graduate international students. One of the six wives had applied to be admitted to study at an institution for higher education. On average, the eight couples were married 4.6 years, with a range of 1 to 8 years. Eight couples came to the U.S. after being married in South Korea. Length of U.S. residence varied from 1 to 6 years, with an average length of 3 years. All couples had at least one child, except for a couple where the wife was pregnant with their first child. The average age of children was 3.3 years with a range of 8 months to 8 years.

Interview Procedures

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. Interviews were conducted in Korean by the researcher and the data were transcribed in Korean in order to exactly reflect and understand perceived meanings. The interviews lasted between 90 and 150 minutes, with the average interview lasting 117 minutes. The main reason for interviewing husbands and wives together was that the researcher could collect data on family meanings or perceptions that were collectively constructed (Patterson & Garwick, 1994). The couple data provides information reflecting interactional patterns and dynamics between a husband and a wife. An interview guide was used including demographics and open-ended interview questions, developed based on the predetermined themes from the FAAR model: *family demands* (i.e., since you and your partner have been in the U.S. as a couple, what do you think were the most stressful demands that your family coped with successfully as a result?), *family capabilities* (i.e., how did you deal with the demands? what protective behaviors or resources do you think helped you successfully cope with the demands?), and *family adaptation* (i.e., in what aspects do you think that you coped with the most stressful demands successfully as a result?). Although a structured interview guide was used, open-ended questioning allowed couples to reflect upon and discuss what they perceived. After getting a response to an interview question from either a husband or a wife, the interviewer asked his or her spouse how he or she thought about the spouse's perspective and vice versa.

Analytic Strategies and Procedures

The analytic strategy used was theory-based content analysis. In theory-based content analysis, data are used to populate pre-specified theoretical constructs with contextually relevant content (Francis *et al.*, 2009). Existing theory is used to develop the initial coding scheme. Some scholars call this type of analysis deductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) or directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Theoretical concepts, categories, and hypotheses are tested through coding the data in a new context (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). This study's initial coding scheme was developed using key concepts from FAAR model. The predetermined coding categories and codes were created under the three key elements of the

theory: *family demands*, *family capabilities*, and *family adaptation* with each coding category being conceptually defined based on literature (Patterson, 2002a; Patterson & Garwick, 1994). This initial coding scheme consisted of a total of 18 codes. To develop a valid coding scheme that is faithful to the theory and ensure trustworthiness of the study, an external audit process was used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schwandt, 2007). An external auditor, who is an expert in family studies and familiar with the FAAR model, reviewed the coding scheme to examine how well concepts were operationalized in the coding scheme and how accurately coding categories reflected the FAAR model before the study. To address another trustworthiness challenge, participants in this study were not given any cues about the theory, concepts, and coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Informants were given only the open-ended questions using everyday language.

Data coding procedures

Two coders including the author independently coded the transcripts using the same coding scheme to ensure the reliability of analysis results (Schwandt, 2007). After completing independent coding, codes with disagreements between author and coder were reviewed together and discussed to see if it was possible to negotiate an agreed-upon coding schema. Intercoder reliability was calculated using a formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994): the average intercoder reliability across eight cases was 90.55%. The basic unit of coding was meaning passages. A unit of meaning can be a sentence, more than one sentence, or a portion of pages (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Every time a meaning unit appeared to indicate a category in the initial coding scheme, the category's occurrence was marked on the left margins of the text using the codes (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). As coding proceeded, ideas and reactions to the meaning units were recorded in the right margins of the text. This way of marking passages in the margins was adopted to examine if meaning passages suggested revisions in the coding scheme or the development of new categories. Text that could not be coded into one of the initial coding categories was coded with another new coding label that captured the essence of the meaning passages (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Four levels of data analysis were performed with the interview data. The initial coding provided evidence for FAAR's conceptual

categories that were reflected in the informant interviews. Further analysis provided an indication of the prevalence of FAAR concepts across cases. Performing this analysis provided stronger evidence for the universality of the FAAR concepts when the incidence percentage across cases was higher. In the third level of analysis, we investigated the distribution of the case numbers across FAAR concepts. This analysis allowed us to investigate patterns of informant characteristics within and across FAAR concepts. The fourth level of analysis concentrated on data that was not able to be coded within FAAR concepts. New codes were developed through this analysis.

Results

Table 1 indicates the FAAR conceptual categories derived from the coding, incidence of codes across cases, and the distribution of the cases within the FAAR conceptual codes. For example, Table 1 indicates that the category of “Normative Family Demands” with the code name, FD-a, occurred across seven cases (87.5%) that have case numbers #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #7, and #8. Data is organized by the three main conceptual categories of family resilience derived from the FAAR model: *family demands*, *family capabilities*, and *family adaptation*.

Family Demands

What demands do Korean international student/scholar families experience in their acculturation process? This study’s results showed that most Korean international student/scholar families (7 out of 8 couples) reported normative types of family demands. Normative types of family demands reported by informants included family changes such as conflicts with other Korean families, conflicts with in-laws, marital conflicts, a decision process to change schools for a husband, the process of adapting to the U.S., and hardships due to childbirth and childcare. For example, a couple (case #1) reported conflicts with other Korean families in the community. This couple believed that they were psychologically hurt by some Korean families in a church community through exposing their vulnerabilities to people.

Husband: Conflict with other Korean families in the community was most stressful to us. It seems that we were so stressed out at

that time.

Wife: I was the most proud that we could successfully cope with the conflicts with other Korean families. It is because we could not totally expect that such problems would occur to us.

Two other couples (case #3 and #4) reported marital conflicts as normative family demands. A husband described conflicts he had with his wife:

In our case, we had marital quarrels a lot of times and sometimes severely partly because of different personalities between her and me. Especially, since we’ve arrived in the U.S. after our marriage, we had a lot of arguments for about 2 or 3 months, using abusive words to each other.

Although marital conflicts could be considered as a normative type of demands, such demand could pose significant risk depending on an informant’s meanings of the normative demand. There could be also an individual variation between a wife and a husband within a family unit in terms of meanings of the demand. In a couple (case #2) who had marital conflicts due to a stressful incident with in-laws, the husband did not recognize the amount of stress experienced by his wife.

Wife: I tried to commit suicide at that time when we had severe marital conflicts because of the stressful incident with in-laws.

Husband: I didn’t recognize how much stress our decision at that time caused my wife.

Only one couple (case #6) reported a non-normative type of family demand of grieving due to a stillbirth. The husband described his suffering as a result of the stillbirth:

The most stressful family demand to us was that our unborn baby was stillborn in wife’s womb suddenly one day. It was one of the most stressful events to us. We were so shocked at the event and our sense of loss due to the stillbirth had been tremendous.

Family Capabilities

What types of *family capabilities* that consist of *coping behaviors* and *resources* help them successfully cope with the demands? This research found that the primary family capabilities were “affective and instrumental communication,” “maintaining

Table 1. FAAR Codes and Incidence across Cases

FAAR Concept	Code Incidence	Case Number Distribution
<i>FD: Family Demands</i>		
(a) Normative family demands	7 (87.5%)	#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #7, #8
(b) Non-normative family demands	1 (12.5%)	#6
<i>FC: Family Capabilities</i>		
(a) Resources		
1) Family cohesiveness	4 (50%)	#1, #2, #3, #5
2) Family flexibility	4 (50%)	#3, #5, #7, #8
3) Family communication		
i) Affective communication	5 (62.5%)	#1, #2, #3, #5, #6
ii) Instrumental communication	5 (62.5%)	#1, #2, #3, #4, #5
4) Transnational family support*		
i) Instrumental support*	3 (37.5%)	#5, #7, #8
ii) Emotional support*	1 (12.5%)	#6
(b) Coping behaviors		
1) Attributing positive meanings to the situation	2 (25%)	#1, #8
2) Engaging in active coping efforts	2 (25%)	#1, #7
3) Maintaining clear family boundaries	2 (25%)	#1, #2
4) Maintaining social integration	6 (75%)	#2, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8
5) Developing collaborative relationships with professionals	0 (0%)	
6) Developing communication competence	0 (0%)	
7) Maintaining family flexibility	3 (37.5%)	#1, #7, #8
8) Maintaining a commitment to the family as a unit	1 (12.5%)	#1
9) Religious commitment*	5 (62.5%)	#1, #2, #3, #6, #8
<i>FA: Family Adaptation</i>		
(a) Family formation	4 (50%)	#1, #2, #7, #8
(b) Economic support	0 (0%)	
(c) Nurturance, education, and socialization	8 (100%)	#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8
(d) Protection of vulnerable members	0 (0%)	

Note. * New categories developed from data that could not be coded into any category within the initial coding scheme

social integration,” and “family cohesiveness.” First of all, the results showed that the affective communication subcategory under the *resources* category had an incidence rate of five cases. A wife who experienced sharp criticism from her in-laws (case #2) expressed these words about the support she received from her spouse.

It played a great role in the strong relations between us for my husband to express love to me every day, although it seemed he did so in small ways. During most of the hardships, he often hugged me and used to tell me that he was sorry his in-laws had hurt me.

The instrumental communication subcategory under the *resources* category also had an incidence rate of five cases. A wife who had marital conflicts (case #4) reported that they successfully addressed their conflicts by the way in which the couple let each other know how conflict resolution can be achieved.

We’ve attempted to find out a point for compromise between us through communication. It was a good way for us to talk about what we wanted from each other. For example, I used to call his first name at the beginning of our marriage, but I could find that he really didn’t like it through such communication. So I have been referring to him with a title of respect since then.

“Family cohesiveness” had an incidence rate of four cases. A wife, whose perspective on educating her child differed from her in-laws’ perspective (case #5), reported two aspects of family cohesiveness (i.e., emotional closeness and distance as a separate individual) with a sense of balance:

I had a firm belief in my husband that he would not misunderstand whatever I did. My trust in him was the most powerful encouragement for me to address the issue. Although my husband might not have exactly the same thoughts and intentions as mine because he is an independent individual, I believed that he would understand my intentions and my ways to deal with the issue.

This quote exemplifies “family cohesiveness” in that the wife showed the emotional closeness with her husband, who understood and encouraged her way of educating her child.

“Family flexibility” also had an incidence rate of four cases. For example, a wife who struggled for childcare in the U.S. (case #8) reported her family’s capacity to develop a new family pattern that incorporates their family demands:

It was so hard for me to always take care of two children. I often lost my temper many times. Fortunately, my husband tended to embrace my response to any stress and to adjust to my temper without losing his temper. This adjustment helped such stressful events being overcome.

This quote exemplifies “family flexibility” as resources of family capabilities; this family has the capacity of flexibility to develop a new family pattern through four procedures of (a) wife’s hardships due to childcare in the U.S., (b) husband’s acceptance of wife’s stress, (c) wife being empowered by husband’s attitudes, and (d) wife’s accomplishing routine activities for childcare without further difficulties.

This study’s results also showed that among the eight subcategories under *coping behaviors*, the subcategory with the most frequent incidence rate was “maintaining social integration” (six cases). For example, a husband (case #6) considered the emotional encouragement from a Korean minister in his community as the most helpful process in addressing family demands.

One day, a minister visited my home and sang a famous hymn

with us. Afterwards, without speaking any words to console us, he simply cried with us. It was the most helpful to us in that he had really participated in our grieving and felt together as we did.

“Maintaining family flexibility” had an incidence rate of three cases. A wife who had hardships due to childcare in the U.S. (case #8) reported her spouse’s regular attempts as coping behaviors for maintaining family flexibility:

Because of my stresses caused by my childcare, it used to be so hard that I wanted to get out of my home. At the time, my husband attempted to make some time for me, regularly asking me to go out for my relaxation while he took care of the kids.

This quote exemplifies “maintaining family flexibility” as coping behaviors that develop a new family pattern through the following procedures of (a) wife’s hardships due to childcare, (b) husband’s behaviors to cope with wife’s hardships, and (c) wife being refreshed by her relaxation, and (d) wife’s accomplishing routine activities for childcare without further difficulties. Through coping behaviors that develop this new family pattern, this family maintains balance between stability and change.

Family Adaptation

What does Korean international student/scholar families’ successful adaptation as an outcome look like? This research found that, among the four categories of family adaptation (Patterson, 2002a), “nurturance, education, and socialization” was the primary family adaptation mode. All eight couples in the study reported this category as an indicator of their successful family adaptation. For instance, a wife who had concerns about her child’s depressed mood and conflicts within her family (case #5) considered her child’s psychologically healthy development as an indicator of successful family adaptation.

My child’s healthy development itself is a result of my family’s hard efforts. A close friend of my husband had visited my home and seen her one day. I was really pleased to hear from him that he couldn’t recognize my child who he’d already known when he’d seen her because she looked much happier and more cheerful than before.

“Family formation” showed the second-highest incidence rate. For instance, a couple who had frequent marital conflicts and did not have a clear identity as a family unit (case #7) reported that they began forming an identity as a family and a sense of cohesion when their first child was born:

Wife: There had been a lot of marital conflicts between us since our marriage before having a baby. But, since we had a baby, I noticed that my husband began keeping his temper with me.

Husband: After our baby was born, a sense of cohesion among family members became stronger than before, and the identity as a family also stemmed from the baby’s birth for the first time.

Newly Developed Codes

When data could not be coded into any FAAR conceptual category, new codes that represented the data passage were developed. Two new categories under *family capabilities* were developed: “religious commitment” and “transnational family support.” For example, although some data passages showed that informants turned to religious behaviors in the face of demands, the coding scheme did not have any category that represented such behaviors. Five couple informants reported that their religious commitment helped them successfully address their family demands. A husband who had struggled over conflicts with other Korean families in the community (case #1) reported that religious commitments he shared with his wife were the most helpful in addressing the demands:

Our religious sharing seems to have an important role in solving such a conflict because we could understand each other as Christians by reading the Bible and listening to the preacher’s sermons.

A wife who attended Buddhism temple (case #8) reported that her husband’s religious practices were helpful in successfully adapting to the totally new culture in the U.S.:

Religious practices also played an important role in successfully overcoming the stressors. Attending a Buddhism temple, my husband strongly committed religious practices such as deep bows and Zen meditation when we had a hard time.

The researcher and coder agreed to create a new subcategory,

“religious commitment,” and classified the new code under “coping behavior” of *family capabilities*.

Another new category was developed for four couple informants who reported that support from their extended families in Korea was very helpful in the face of demands. The author and the coder agreed to name such data passages as “transnational family support” under the *resources* category. This newly developed subcategory had two dimensions: (a) instrumental support that refers to assistance in problem solving by tangible help or information and (b) emotional support that refers to support provided by expressing empathy and caring (Semmer *et al.*, 2008). Data represented these two dimensions of the new category of “transnational family support.” For example, a couple who had hardships due to childbirth and a burden of childcare in the U.S. (case #7) reported that instrumental support from their extended families in Korea, through tangible help in childcare, helped address their demands.

Wife: My mother came from Korea and took care of my baby for the first 6 months, and then my mother-in-law did that for 6 months. So they took care of her for a total of 1 year. (Husband: It’s 3 months for each, not 6 months.) Oh, that’s right! 3 months for each...

Another couple grieving from the stillbirth of their baby (case #6) reported the emotional support from their families in Korea (i.e., consolation, empathy) was helpful in overcoming deep grief.

Husband: It was the most impressive to me that the grief of only me and wife became the grief of all people around us. My wife and I could be consoled by people around us who shared burdens from our painful experience. At that time, families in Korea shared such painful burdens.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate family resilience, which consists of family demands, family capabilities, and family adaptation perceived by Korean international student/scholar families in the United States, being theoretically guided by the FAAR model (Patterson, 2002a). We analyzed data from couple informants using a theory-based content analysis based on

the key FAAR concepts.

Most informants reported normative types of *family demands*, while only one couple reported a non-normative type of *family demands* of grieving due to a stillbirth. Korean international student/scholar families faced *family demands* from three different levels of the ecosystem. The struggle of changing schools was an example of an individual level demand, conflicts with a spouse and hardships due to childbirth and childcare were examples of a family-level demand, and conflicts with other Korean families were a community-level demand. Based on the types of demands, it is likely that Korean international student/scholar families in the United States are exposed to diverse types of demands due to their unstable socioeconomic status as international students/workers and their needs of adjustment and survival as a married couple in a foreign country.

A type of demand (i.e., conflicts with other Korean families) reported by the study sample appears not to be mentioned in any literature except for a similar stressor reported by married Korean immigrant women: concerns about gossip in their ethnic community (Yoon *et al.*, 2010). In both Yoon's research and the current study, the Korean community in the United States was considered an important source to cope with their demands. However, due to the strong importance of the local co-ethnic community that replaces the extended kinship network in Korea, these families may need to depend on one another and have over-emotional attachment to other co-ethnics, creating the porous and permeable boundaries within their community (Seo, 2010). These permeable boundaries among co-ethnics within the community are accepted and maintained by Koreans' collectivistic cultural values in which group membership is a central aspect of their identity (Hofstede, 1980; Seo, 2010). As a result, it is possible that they may intrude upon other co-ethnics' privacy or personal boundaries resulting in undesirable gossip that may lead to conflicts among Korean families in the local community (Yoon *et al.*, 2010).

This study's findings also showed that *family capabilities* could be derived from the individual (e.g., engaging in active coping efforts), family (e.g., family cohesiveness, family communication), and community (e.g., maintaining social integration) as emphasized by the FAAR model. Korean international student/scholar families appeared to perceive "maintaining social integration" as the most

important family capability contributing to their successful coping. These families reported that the social support sources, including Koreans in the U.S. ethnic community and religious organizations, provided them with important emotional and instrumental support to successfully cope with their demands. Other groups of Korean international students and Korean immigrants in previous literature also commonly reported social or community support systems as one of the most important stress-coping sources (Chun & Poole, 2009; Lee, 2012). "Maintaining social integration" was also identified in the previous studies guided by the FAAR model within the different context of white families with physically ill children (Miedema *et al.*, 2010; Patterson *et al.*, 1992). "Maintaining social integration" appears to be an important family capability commonly identified across different types of ethnicities and demands.

Korean international student/scholar families also perceived affective and instrumental communication among family members as an important resource for successfully coping. This finding appears to partly reflect values in modern Korean families that the patriarchal system has weakened, gender relationships have become more equal, and awareness about the importance of couple relationships and family communication has increased (Yoo, 2006). Furthermore, given the families' unique context in which there is no kinship network, it seems natural that family relationships and communication for mutual understanding are perceived by them as much more important than any other relationships. The findings also showed that Korean international student/scholar families placed more weight on family functions of child nurturance and education than any other family functions. This result reflects the value of Korean parents to make substantial sacrifices for their children's education and invest as much time, money, and emotional support as possible in high-quality education (Yoo, 2006).

A new category under family capabilities, "religious commitment," was developed as Chatters and Taylor (2005) indicated that religious coping behaviors, such as prayer or meditation, function through anxiety reduction and a search for meaning. Another new category, "transnational family support" reflects that the families have limited ethnic and cultural resources in the United States because they left their plentiful cultural

resources back home in Korea. Their extended families in Korea (who provided Korean international student/scholar families with transnational family support) played an important role in connecting resources to the needs for their successful adaptation. They also provided affective support that other co-ethnic groups could not provide. These instrumental and affective supports from extended families in Korea contributed to the successful adaptation of these families. Meanwhile, their extended families, especially in-laws, tended to be one of the critical stressors to some Korean international student/scholar families. For example, in one couple, sharp criticism at a wife from her in-laws caused severe marital conflicts. In another couple, a wife had conflicts with her in-laws who wanted her to follow their own ways to educate her child that differed from her ways. Although these families lived far away, their extended families in Korea still influenced them as both their resources and stressors. Based on this study's findings, it is likely that there is a unique set of family capabilities that contribute to successful family adaptation within a given context. Miedema *et al.* (2010) also showed that there was a unique set of capabilities of families who care for a child with cancer. Identifying the unique capability sets of families within a particular context may help family practitioners develop interventions and programs designed to further strengthen the particular types of family capabilities.

This study's findings also showed that Korean international student/scholar families reported "nurturance, education, and socialization" as a primary indicator of their successful *family adaptation*. In other words, Korean international student/scholar families tended to perceive that they function competently and successfully in the face of demands when their children are well-nurtured and well-developed physically, psychologically, and socially. Their perception seems to reflect the common values of Korean parents who tend to make substantial sacrifices for the nurturance and education of their children. As Yoo (2006) pointed out, most Korean parents invest as much time, money, and emotional support as possible into high-quality education for their children, and their children's educational achievement is considered an efficient investment for higher socioeconomic status in the future. It is likely that, although this study's participants are relatively young and highly educated within a unique context, their strong responsibility as parents reflect their sense of identification

with Korean parents' common values.

A limitation of this study may stem from the method to collect data through interviewing a couple together instead of interviewing each spouse of a couple separately. Although we could collect family-level data that was constructed by both husband and wife, this method may cause a condition that a spouse's response to interview questions could have been influenced by his or her spouse. In future research, researchers might consider interviewing each individual separately after interviewing a couple together to address the validity issue. Doing so would allow for confirmation or refutation of what was stated when both were present.

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