

# **A Cross-Cultural Study of the Concerns of Western and Korean Postnatal mothers**

By

**Sung H. Gwak, RN,BC, MSN, CCRN**

Associate Professor  
Department of Nursing  
Borough of Manhattan Community College  
The City University of New York  
199 Chambers Street  
New York, N.Y. 10007

This research study was funded by PSC-CUNY Research Grant  
for 2001-2002.



# Abstract

This cross-cultural descriptive study compared the childbearing concerns and experiences of Korean and Western postnatal mothers in three areas: physiological, psychosocial and infant care. In order to ascertain whether there were cultural differences in these three areas, a survey was conducted. Fifty Western postnatal mothers who were born in America, or who came from European countries, and fifty eight Korean postnatal mothers who came from Korea were surveyed. The t-test for independent samples were computed on the scores obtained for concerns related to three areas. Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher in concerns of physiological needs ( $t = -3.158$ ,  $p < 0.002$   $F = .993$ ). Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher in psychosocial concerns ( $t = -2.038$   $p < 0.045$   $F = 12.6$ ). Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher in concerns of infant care ( $t = -2.914$ ,  $p < 0.005$   $F = 14.27$ )

# Purpose and Significance of the study

The United States is a multicultural society in which many peoples have retained their cultural heritage and values concerning health care approach. In particular the childbearing process poses many challenges for nurses in caring for patients from different cultural backgrounds. The trend toward a shorter length of hospital stay for postnatal women and newborns is due in part to efforts to reduce health care costs (Nichols, 2000). There is a need to make maximum use of postnatal teaching in a minimal amount of time. To provide optimum health care for the postnatal mother, nurses must know which content is most needed by mothers to care for themselves and their newborns, as well as the priority of their desires for learning and concerns according to cultural differences. The health care providers often observe behavior in patients from other cultures that is incomprehensible and the perceptions received from different cultures have frequently been misinterpreted by health care providers. To provide optimum health care for the postnatal mothers, the health care providers need to understand further postnatal mothers' cultural and personal values. Few research study have been developed and conducted.

# American Society is like a Salad

All immigrants who have different values and cultures came together and function in a unique way in American society.

Every culture contains an important meaning, value and should be recognized.



# Reviews of the Literature

According to Horn(1981), Western new mothers are expected to become as physically active as possible, shortly after delivery. Asians mothers (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, South-Eastern Asians) avoided cold foods during the postpartum recovery period and preferred bed rest for more than couple weeks. The Korean postnatal mother is encouraged to take seaweed soup with rice as a main meal for about one week. Seaweed soup contains iodine and is considered to speed up recovery and to replace the blood which they lost during childbearing.

According to Gruis'(1977) survey, the most common concern of American postnatal mothers is their desire to return to their body shape. Harrison's (1983) study showed that seventy percent of Canadian mothers demonstrated a similar concern to return their body to their pre-pregnant state. Martell et al (1989)'s study showed that the two highest ranked postpartum information needed for the postnatal women were "warning signs for health threats" and "infant care". Ruchala (2000) compared the priorities of teaching content of new mothers by nurses and the priorities of learning content by new mothers. Findings revealed that nurses gave priority to teaching about infant care, whereas new mothers gave priority to their own care. Through literature reviews, this investigator found quite a number of postnatal research studies in the United States, but discovered only a few research studies of the Postnatal mothers who came from different cultures and socioeconomic levels, particularly cross-cultural studies.

**The United States is a multicultural society.**





**Culture is**

learned, varied and  
constantly  
changing.

**Culture contains its'**  
own values  
and  
attitude.

# Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework used to guide the current research study is the assessment model for transcultural health care developed by Giger and Davidhizar (1999), Leininger's Sunrise Model designed for Nursing (Leininger, 1988) and the cognitive field theory of learning derived from Gestalt Psychology (Babcock & Miller, 1994).

The cognitive field theory of learning is that the individuals' perceptions are dissimilar and sometimes it is difficult for a person to have other perceptions of the same event. An individual tends to assume that others perceive events as he or she does and may not be aware that others have different perceptions. The post-partum mother's perception may be affected by her ability to learn, given biologic, psychologic, sociologic, and cultural factors (Ruchala, 2000).

Culture is learned, varied, and constantly changing. Culture has a powerful influence on one's interpretation of and responses to health care. Clients and health providers have the right to be understood, respected, and treated as individuals despite their differences in their beliefs, values and attitudes.

Transcultural nursing is focused on client centered health care. Therefore it is very important for nurses to keep in mind that culture does influence how clients are viewed and the care they are given (Potter & Perry, 2001).

# Research questions or hypotheses

This study addresses three research questions.

1. Are there differences in the physiological concerns/interests of Korean and Western postnatal mothers ?
2. Are there differences in the psychosocial concerns/interests of Korean and Western postnatal mothers ?
3. Are there differences in the infant care of Korean and Western postnatal mothers ?

## For this research study, terms are defined as follows:

### Physiological concerns/interests:

Concerns or interests about altered physical or health status due to childbirth, which postnatal mothers may or may not have until restored to non-pregnant normal health conditions.

### Psychosocial concerns/interests:

Concerns about fulfilling roles of mother and wife and about maternal self-image and personal esteem.

### Infant care concerns/interests:

Concerns about the new born baby's well-being.

### Postpartum (Postnatal):

From the day after childbirth to the end of the second week.

Continued-

#### NO concerns:

The areas in which the postnatal mothers already have sufficient knowledge, which require no help from professional health care providers or in which mothers are not interested in obtaining any knowledge.

#### Minor concerns:

Concerns in areas about which the postnatal mothers already have some knowledge, which only rarely require help from professional health care providers or which mothers are not interested in knowing any more about.

#### Moderate concerns:

Concerns in areas about which postnatal mothers know something related to concern areas, but are willing to learn again if the opportunity is given, in addition they think it is still a problem but are not seriously concerned about it, or are interested in it to some extent, but not greatly.

#### Major concerns:

Concerns in area about which postnatal mothers have no knowledge, need help from professional health providers, are very interested in, or feel very serious about the concern.

# Design and Methodology

The data on the physiological, psychosocial, and infant care concerns of Korean and Western postnatal mothers were obtained in order of their priority, and compared to determine if a difference existed between the two groups.

The first group consisted of Western postnatal mothers who were born in America or came from European countries. The second group consisted of Korean postnatal mothers who were born in Korea and resided in the United States. These subjects were selected from the Obstetrical floor of Flushing Hospital Medical Center, Flushing, New York.

Whenever the investigator arrived in Flushing Hospital Medical Center to collect data, the charge nurse on the postnatal unit was consulted to determine which postnatal mothers were considered to be at low risk and select qualified subjects for Western postnatal mothers.

Upon the approval, the investigator approached prospective participants to explain the purpose of the study and the method of participation. Upon their approval by oral consent, they signed the consent form and filled out a demographic and questionnaire. Assurance of confidentiality to all subjects were given.

# Instruments

Using an interval scale, each specific concern in each area was scored as follows:

a no concern is scored 0.

a minor concern is scored 1

a moderate concern is 2

a major concern is 3.

Each group score was obtained by adding all scores marked on all concern areas. Statistical analysis were done by computing the means of scores and compared two groups by utilizing t-tests. Levels of significance were set as  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The questionnaire was modified on the questionnaire developed by Gruis' (1977) postpartum concerns of mothers.

To determine the content validity of the postnatal questionnaire, six nurses with clinical expertise in maternity nursing reviewed all versions: Child-bearing nursing instructors (native Korean and American), O.B./GYN nurse practitioners and staff nurses.

Each participant completed a data form that contained demographic information and questionnaire. Completion time for the demographic information and the questionnaire was approximately 5-10 minutes.

**“ Patients have a right to care that protects their personal dignity and respects their cultural, psychosocial, and spiritual values.”**

by JCAHO ( The Joint commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organization,  
1996



## **According to the JCAHO,**

Assessment of patient educational needs should consider the patient's cultural and religious practices, ability to learn and language barriers, among other factors.

To work effectively in **multicultural society**, nurses must be able to provide efficient care to persons from different cultural backgrounds.

# **Physiological concerns**

- **1. Return of body figure to normal**
- **2. Lochia**
- **3. Afterpain**
- **4. Postpartum exercise**
- **5. Breast Care**
- **6. Diet**
- **7. Discomfort of Episiotomy/C-section**
- **8. Constipation**
- **9. Hemorrhoids**
- **10. Return of Menses/  
Ovulation**
- **11. Fatigue**



# **Psychosocial concerns**

- **1. Family adjustment**
- **2. Father's interest in baby**
- **3. Family planning**
- **4. Sexual relations**
- **5. Finding time for self**
- **6. Sex preference of infant**
- **7. Postpartum blue**
- **8. Fear for labor pain**
- **9. Financial cost**
- **10. Reactions of siblings**
- **11. Emotional tension**









# **Concerns for Infant Care**

- **1. Infant safety**
- **2. Immunization**
- **3. Growth and development**
- **4. Umbilical cord care**
- **5. Behavior**
- **6. Feeding**
- **7. Clothing for baby**
- **8. Crying**
- **9. Diapering**
- **10. Sleep and Activity**
- **11. Bathing the infant**



## Research Consent Form

Study Title:

**PARTICIPATION OF POSTNATAL MOTHERS IN "A Cross-Cultural Study of The Concerns of Western and Korean Postnatal Mothers"**

1. I agree to participate in this clinical research study conducted under the supervision of Prof. Sung Hi Gwak, MSN, CCRN, RN.C., Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, Borough of Manhattan Community College consisting of a comparison of the concerns of Western and Korean postnatal mothers.
2. I understand that participation in this research study is strictly voluntary and participation for this research study involves no known risks and my confidentiality will be protected.
3. I also acknowledge that this investigator has fully explained to me the nature and purposes of such investigation and the investigation has the potential of improving postnatal nursing care.
4. I understand that participation in this research does not benefit directly me, but upon the completion of this research, the finding may bring benefits to postnatal mothers in relation to cultural aspects of postnatal care.
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw this consent and to discontinue my participation in such studies at any time and my refusal to participate will not effect or prejudice my treatment at Flushing Hospital Medical Center.
6. I confirm that I have read and fully understand this consent, that all statements made herein are true and that all blanks or statements requiring completion were properly completed before I signed.
7. If I have any pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights, I am informed that I am free to contact this research investigator, Prof. Sung Gwak (212-346-8706) or the IRB Office/Risk Management Department at Flushing Medical Center at 718-670-5991.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
The Participant (Print)

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dear Participant:**

In an effort to better serve postnatal mothers who have different cultural backgrounds, I am conducting a survey regarding postnatal mothers' concerns. The information you provide will help me to evaluate in some aspects of cultural study and improve postnatal health care in the future. Your participation in this survey is extremely important. Your name is optional. Responses will only be used to help health care providers better serve future postnatal mothers who have different cultural backgrounds.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Race: \_\_\_\_\_

If an immigrant, how long have you been in U.S. ? \_\_\_\_\_ years.

**Education:**

Not complete high school : \_\_\_\_\_

High school: \_\_\_\_\_

Some College: \_\_\_\_\_

College: \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate: \_\_\_\_\_

Numbers of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

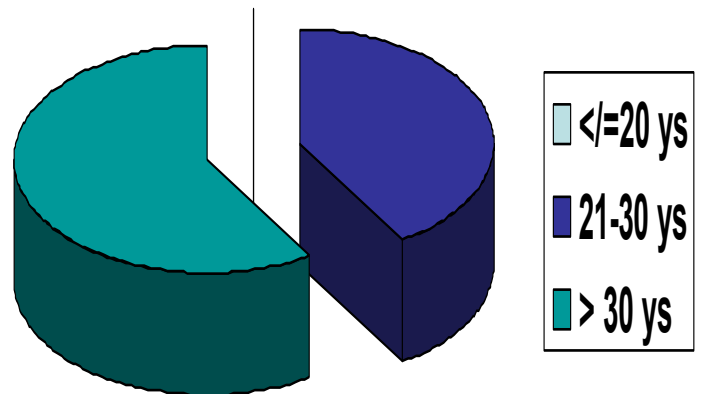
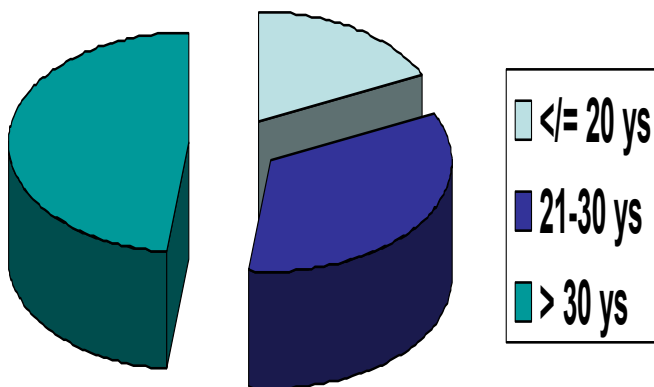
Any complications after birth(s) of children ? ( Yes No ) (circle)

If yes, please describe in detail.

# The ages of Postnatal Mothers

- Western mothers

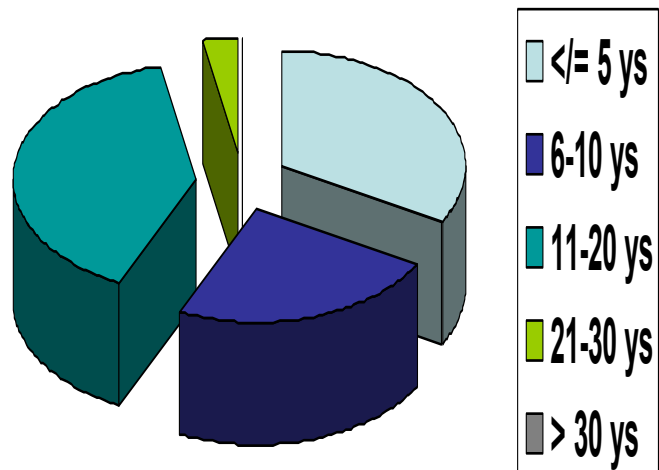
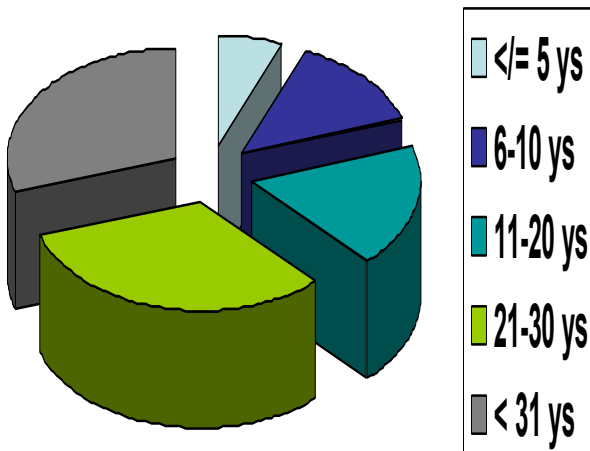
- Korean mothers



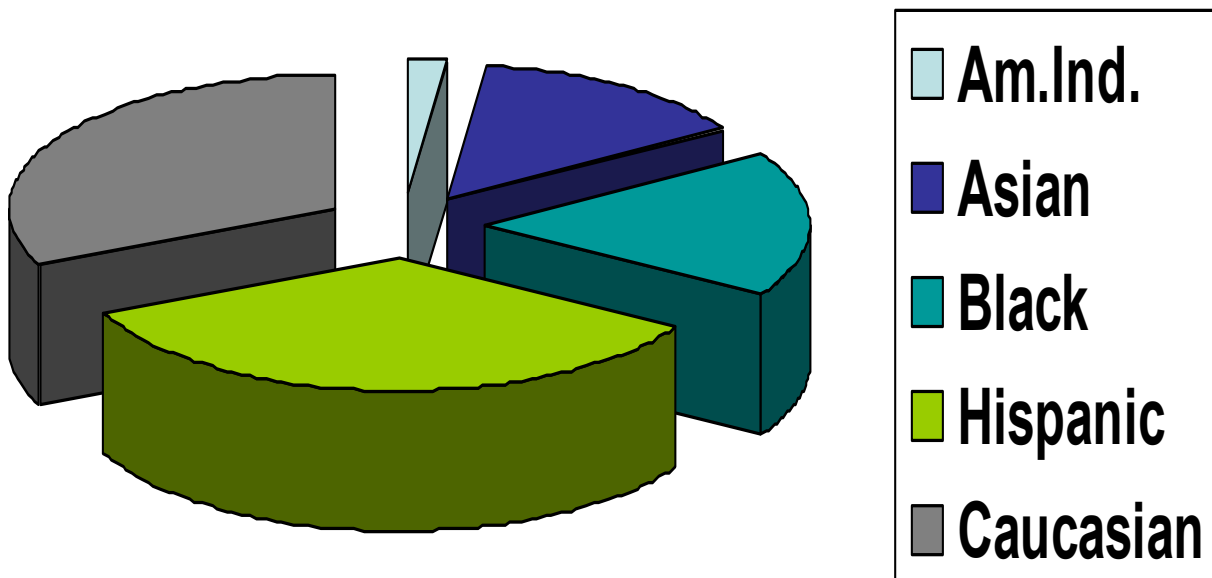
# Years in staying in U.S.

- Western mothers

- Korean mothers



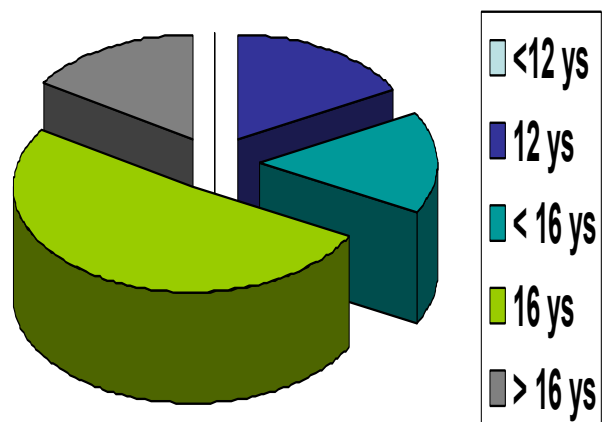
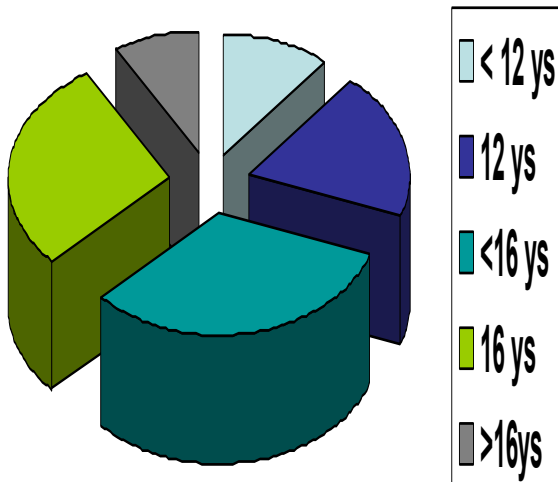
# Ethnics in Western Mothers



# Education by the Groups

- Western mothers

- Korean mothers

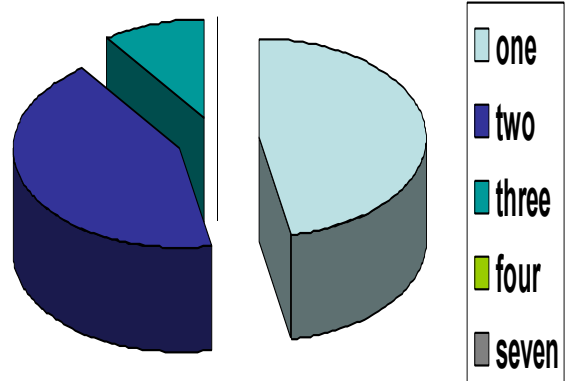
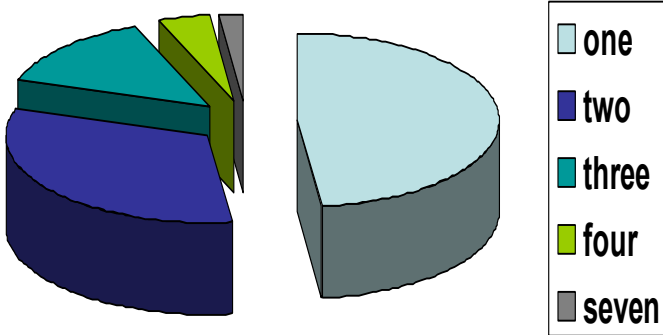




# The numbers of children

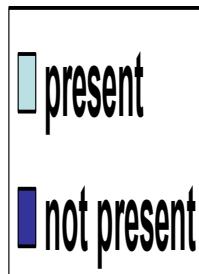
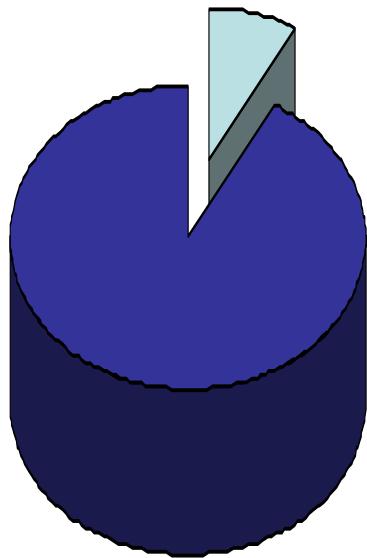
- Western mothers

- Korean mothers

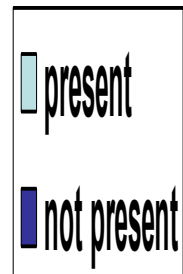
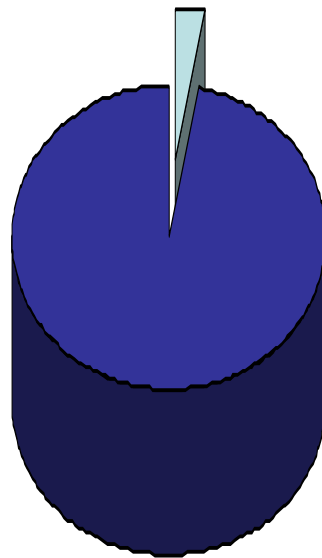


# Complications of Postpartum

- Western mothers



- Korean mothers



# Results: **Physiological Concerns**

- Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher in concerns of physiological needs
- Korean  $X = 23.5$   $SD = 5.7$ ) (Western  $X = 19.5$   $SD = 6.8$ ,
- **( $t = -3.158$   $p < 0.002$   $F = .993$ ).**
- Among concerns: Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher on **return of body figure to normal, lochia, postpartum exercise and breast care.**

# Results: **Psychosocial concerns**

- Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher in psychosocial concerns.
- (Western  $X = 16.7$   $SD = 8.0$ ) (Korean  $X = 19.6$   $SD = 5.4$ )
- ( **$t = -2.038$   $p < 0.045$   $F = 12.6$** )
- Among concerns, Korean mothers rates significantly higher on **father's interest in baby, postnatal sexual relations, finding time for self, and sex preference of infant.**

## Results: **Infant care**

- Korean postnatal mothers rated significantly higher in concerns of infant care.
- (Western  $X=22.9$   $SD= 8.3$ , Korean  $X=26.8$   $SD = 4.6$ )
- ( **$t = - 2.914$   $p < 0.005$   $F = 14.27$** )
- Among concerns, Korean mothers rated significantly higher about **infant safety, behaviors, clothing for baby, crying, diapering and sleep/activity.**

# Ranking Among physiological concerns (11 concerns):

- **Western mothers ranked ;**
  - 1. (the highest), after pain
  - 2. (the second highest),  
discomfort of stitches.
  - 3.(the third highest), Breast care.
- **Korean mothers ranked;**
  - 1. Return of body figure
  - 2. Breast care
  - 3. After pain.

# Ranking among psycho-social concerns (11 concerns):

- **Western mothers ranked;**
  - 1. Family adjustment
  - 2. Father's interest in baby
  - 3. Family planning.
  
- **Korean mothers ranked;**
  - 1. Father's interest in baby
  - 2. Family adjustment
  - 3. Family planning

# Ranking among Infant Care (11 concerns)

- **Western Mothers:**
  - 1. Growth and Development
  - 2. Infant Safety
  - 3. Immunization
  
- **Korean Mothers:**
  - 1. Growth and Development
  - 2. Infant Safety
  - 3. Immunization



# Recommendations

- Excerpt from this research study,
  - To provide culturally competent health care, postpartum unit needs to utilize a variety of teaching tools written in Korean to promote physiological recovery.
  - For infant care, Western and Korean mothers ranked equally same in priority among concerns of infant care.
  - Psychosocial and infant care, percentages of explained variances are low ((Psychosocial aspect,  $F = 12.6$ , Infant care,  $F = 14.27$  ). Therefore further research study will be recommended.

## References

- Gruis, M. (1977). Beyond maternity: Postpartum concerns of mothers. Maternal Child Nursing, 6, 182-188.
- Harrison, M.J. & Hicks, S.A. (1983). Postpartum concerns of mothers and their sources of help. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 74, 325-328.
- Horn, B.M. (1981). Cultural concepts and postpartal care. Nursing and Health Care, 30, 516-527.
- Martell, I.K. Imle, M., Horwitz, s., & Wheeler, I. (1989). Information priorities of new mothers in a short stay program. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 11, 320-327.
- Ruchala, P. (2000). Teaching New Mothers: Priorities of nurses and postpartum women. JOGNN, May/June, 265-273.