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# Korean American Women's Community Activism and Their Response to Domestic Violence in Philadelphia

## **Abstract**

Existing standard supportive services for domestic violence in the United States do not adequately address the cultural context for abused Korean immigrant women, and hence, results in further marginalization for this vulnerable population. For decades, Korean American women activists have been constructing support networks in their communities in response to this need. Nonetheless, scholarly literature has failed to capture the work and experiences of Korean American women activists who respond to and address domestic violence in their local community. Therefore, this study aims to give voice to one group of Korean American women activists and illuminate their experiences regarding domestic violence cases. In collaboration with a local Korean American women's community activists association in one Northeastern U.S. city, this study explores their experiences with two data sources: (1) Korean counseling records of abused Korean immigrant women between 1986-2012, and (2) semi-structured interviews with the activists. Findings presented explicate the experiences of Korean American women activists focused on their response to domestic abuse within their community. This research can be used to guide the development of a model to provide contextually competent support for abused Korean American women in the U.S. and highlights the importance of collaboration between health care providers and ethnic minority community supportive services.

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Anne M. Teitelman

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**KOREAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND THEIR  
RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA**

Su Kyung Kim

A DISSERTATION

in

Nursing

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

Supervisor of Dissertation

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**KOREAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND THEIR  
RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA**

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**2015**

**Su Kyung Kim**

DEDICATION

For the Korean American Women's Association in Philadelphia  
and Kwangup So

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## ABSTRACT

**KOREAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND THEIR  
RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA****Su Kyung Kim****Anne Teitelman**

Existing standard supportive services for domestic violence in the United States do not adequately address the cultural context for abused Korean immigrant women, and hence, results in further marginalization for this vulnerable population. For decades, Korean American women activists have been constructing support networks in their communities in response to this need. Nonetheless, scholarly literature has failed to capture the work and experiences of Korean American women activists who respond to and address domestic violence in their local community. Therefore, this study aims to give voice to one group of Korean American women activists and illuminate their experiences regarding domestic violence cases. In collaboration with a local Korean American women's community activists association in one Northeastern U.S. city, this study explores their experiences with two data sources: (1) Korean counseling records of abused Korean immigrant women between 1986-2012, and (2) semi-structured interviews with the activists. Findings presented explicate the experiences of Korean American women activists focused on their response to domestic abuse within their community. This research can be used to guide the development of a model to provide contextually



competent support for abused Korean American women in the U.S. and highlights the importance of collaboration between health care providers and ethnic minority community supportive services.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In the United States, Korean Americans have one of the highest rates of domestic violence, with consequences linked to increasing rates of psychological disorders and lethal violence, including partner homicide (Leung & Cheung, 2008; M.Choi & Harwood, 2004; B.Kim & Titterington, 2009; Rhee, 1997). Due to lack of culture-specific social resources, Korean American women who are abused by their partners face significant barriers to seeking help and getting support from general supportive services in the United States. A growing body of literature has revealed the negative physical and mental health consequences for Korean American women experiencing domestic violence due to their limited access to appropriate sources of support (Han, Kim & Tyson, 2010; I.J. Kim & Zane, 2004; E.Lee, 2005; M.Y. Lee, 2000). Nonetheless , a gap in the literature prevails as there is limited information regarding how best to respond to and address domestic violence among this marginalized population.

To address this gap, this study was conducted in collaboration with a group of Korean American women's community activists in Philadelphia. It explores their local response toward domestic violence. Employing a community-based approach, I argue for the importance of a critical feminist approach in conceptualizing domestic violence in the Korean American population and discuss the implications for the development of best practices for providing culturally competent health services.

Evidenced by the lack of existing literature, feminist activism among Korean American women has remained largely unexplored by scholars. In collaboration with a



local, Philadelphia based Korean women's group, this study aims to highlight the voices of community-based activists as these women of color explore their own experiences and positionality in their work. Rather than imposing a monolithic framework to Korean American women activists, this study explores the influence of their positionality and agency on the diversity and complexity of the phenomena. Focusing on the needs of marginalized Korean American women who experience racism, sexism, imperialism, class exploitation, and language discrimination in the United States, Korean American women activists have taken action to support and advocate for Korean American women in need. Facing the simultaneous operations of disempowering and empowering forces, Korean American women activists manifested resilience or vulnerability to negotiate and adjust depending on each individual's context. Focusing on the survival needs and the empowerment of Korean American women who face overlapping layers of marginalization, this particular Philadelphia based Korean American women's grassroots community has worked to promote resilience among the Korean American community through community action over several decades (from 1989 to 2014). This study is a dialogue with Korean American's community activists overlapping multiple constructs of immigration, gender, ethnicity, community and violence. Through this dialogue, this study aims to chronicle women's endeavor to empower other women in their local community.

In this study, I examine the perceptions and responses of Korean American women activists toward domestic violence cases. I first describe their experiences working with abused Korean American women. . I then use a critical feminist perspective

to identify ways in which their perceptions of their own social location regarding domestic violence affect their ability to work with abused Korean American women. I present this information with the intention of identifying and investigating challenges faced in providing support to abused Korean American as members of a community grassroots organization. The purpose of this study is to examine stories from local Korean women community activists about their work supporting abused Korean American women in order to inform culturally competent services for abused Korean American women from the perspective of the Korean immigrant community. I explore these issues through the use of interviews with one group of Korean American women's community activists supplemented by an analysis of their organization's community counseling documents. In the following sections of this chapter, I first describe the theoretical perspectives used to guide this study. This section is followed by an overview of the significance of this study.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

In the first section of this chapter, this study draws from a critical feminist perspective to focus on Korean women community activists' support of abused Korean American women. This discussion not only provides important background for the assumptions of this study, but also provides the rationale for the importance of illustrating violence through the voices of community women. The presentation of this material is followed by a discussion of intersectionality that explains the multi-layered context for this study of community activism and domestic violence. This chapter concludes with the assumptions of this study and the standpoint of the researcher.

### **Critical postmodern feminist approach**

Critical postmodern feminists have argued the concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity that is composed of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, ethnicity, and class (Collins, 2000; de Lauretis, 1986; Harding, 2004; Hooks, 1990; Qin, 2004). Committed to plurality and tolerance of difference, critical feminists see the diversity of women's lives and create inclusive feminist agenda (Allen & Baber, 1992). A critical feminist approach offers practical guidelines for identifying the experiences of a wide variety of women by deconstructing and reconstructing commonly assumed aspects of social life for women (Allen & Baber, 1992).

Critical feminist perspectives emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a form of postmodern feminism. Compared to the early feminist scholars (empirical feminists and standpoint feminists), critical postmodern feminists are characterized by committing to pluralism and diversity (Allen & Baber, 1992). According to Qin (2004, p. 306), "from a critical feminist perspective, self is essentially constructed by power relations of groups of individuals within particular sociocultural and historical contexts". Therefore, critical feminists query social structures that result in class oppression and saw historical and contextual influences on gender relations as important components. They understand that personal meanings are shaped by societal structures and communication processes involve ideological, historically bounded, and contextualized views (Campbell & Bunting, 1991). Because individual perceptions are shaped by ideology, critical feminists seek

emancipation of women from conscious and unconscious constraints that interfere with full participation in social interaction (Campbell & Bunting, 1991).

While critical feminists recognize the idea of the solidity of women's oppression, they acknowledge the diversity and differences among women. Women's power and social status varies within complex intersections of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mothering, homosociality, occupation and education (Allen and Baber, 1992). By rejecting one homogenized standpoint of all women, critical feminists embrace the heterogeneity of women's experience based on the diverse context (Allen and Baber, 1992). To incorporate the experience of a wide variety of women, bell Hooks (1990) argues for the importance of providing time and space so that underprivileged women can speak. Closely aligned the perspective of these scholars, this study creates a space to share the story of Korean American women activists in the North East area of the United States. Focusing on their experiences supporting abused Korean American women in their community, this study chronicles their response toward domestic violence while revealing the unspoken stories of underprivileged women. According to the critical feminist perspectives, domestic violence is both a consequence and a cause of gender inequality (García-Moreno et al. 2005). This critical feminist approach, is based on the following assumptions: (a) gender relations are at the center of the analysis, (b) in general, gendered social norms and structures reinforce inequalities such that women have fewer resources and less power than men, and (c) women have been overwhelmingly the targets of violence (Kurz, 1989). The uniqueness of the critical feminist approach is that the examination of inequitable gender relations is a central aspect of an analysis of domestic

violence (Kurz, 1989). This perspective locates domestic violence as not limited to the interaction of intimate partners, but involves multiple factors affecting gender relations interacting in a sociopolitical context from particular, historically specific social locations.

Coinciding with this approach, I argue that domestic violence arises from a combination of interactions between individuals, family, the community, institutions, and government. It happens in a local social context; the way a group of people in that community define gender, race, class, and ethnicity shapes domestic violence in that community. Therefore, it must be considered in conjunction with the intersections of gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Based on critical feminist perspectives, this inquiry pays particular attention to social structures resulting in oppression and domestic violence against Korean American women. This is a story of a local Korean women's community organization that recognized these intersecting forms of oppression and took action in support of community women suffering and surviving domestic violence.

According to Allen and Barber (1992), critical postmodern feminists challenge the inequality of power relations between the researchers and the "subjects". To equalize the power balance and empower women through the research process, critical postmodern feminists try to make collaborators with those who are the "subjects" of their research (Allen and Barber, 1992). Since feminist scholars aim to do research that is *for* women rather than *about* women, critical postmodern feminist researchers prioritize research that will provide information that women want and need in order to change the conditions of their lives (Allen and Barber, 1992). Building upon this critical feminist approach I collaborated with a group of Korean American women activists using a

community-based research approach. This approach enables this inquiry to foreground the perspective of Korean American women activists. This community-based participatory research centers the voices of Korean American women activists and focuses on what they want and need to change about the conditions of their work to support abused Korean American women.

Considering the critical feminist perspective, stories from local Korean women community activists about their work supporting abused Korean American women will be explored to better understand how they perceived the inequity of access to social resources of abused Korean American women in their destination society. This study draws upon intersectionality that illuminates a complex interaction between gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class regarding community activism and domestic violence. What follows is a discussion of intersectionality analysis to understand individuals' multiple social identities and interaction between multilevel social categories.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is the perspective that moves beyond single/typically framed categories of analysis to consider simultaneous interaction between different aspects of social identity as well as the impact of systems and processes of oppression and identification (Hankivisky, Cormier, and Merich, 2009). Echoing critical feminist approaches, intersectionality recognizes the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formation (McCall, 2005). Drawing on this tradition, intersectionality is the primary theoretical lens of this study.

According to bell Hooks (1990), intersectionality reveals relational dynamics of social class based on the way gender, race/ethnicity, regionality/nationality interact with. This recognition of multiple axes of analytical categories in feminist research addressed the limitations of early feminist research, which used gender as a single analytic category (McCall, 2005). Embracing multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations, feminist researchers could account for the complexity and diversity of female experiences. According to this approach, women experience oppression through the construction and representation of complex identities, behaviors and social relations. In other words, Korean American women are oppressed not just because we are women, but because they are ethnic minority women who are un-educated, un-employed, un-wealthy and other multiple subordinate locations. Therefore, I seek to mirror the complexity of lived experience through the voices of Korean American women who have experienced sexism, racism, ageism, and classism in the United States. In this study, intersectionality will be applied as the philosophical underpinning of methods to produce knowledge that can illustrate complexity.

Considering different methodologies used in intersectionality studies, McCall (2005) describes three approaches of intersectionality in terms of their stance toward categorical complexity: anticategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity. According to McCall (2005), anticategorical complexity research deconstructs analytical categories and the normative assumptions of these categories, which contributes to the possibility of social change. On the other hand, the intercategorical complexity approach adopts existing analytical categories to reveal

inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality within complex contexts (McCall, 2005).

The middle stance point between anticategorical and intercategorical approaches, the intracategorical approach adopts existing analytical categories to explore relationships of inequality among social group, though it also maintains a distance towards categories questioning the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself (McCall, 2005). This approach focuses on particular social groups of people whose identity crosses the boundaries of a traditionally constructed group in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups (McCall, 2005). The author further overviews the three approaches of intersectionality regarding their approaches toward categorical complexity in detail (see, McCall (2005)). Drawing specifically on her discussion of the intracategorical complexity approach, I will next discuss the rationalization for and application of categorical complexity in the context of this study.

The intracategorical complexity approach acknowledges the stable relationships of existing social categories and also maintains a critical stance toward those categories (McCall, 2005). This approach guides the framework of this study as I identify an obscured group (in this research project, Korean American women community activists) and proceeds to uncover the complexities of embodied experience. This study involves three different categories of Korean American women: a researcher, a group of community activists, and abused women. There are shared experiences among these three groups of Korean American women because they have experienced inequality stemming from racial, national, class, and gender structures in the United States. At the same time,



there is diversity, variation, and heterogeneity of day-to-day experience of Korean American women across and within the groups. While traditional categories are used name previously unstudied groups, I am also interested in revealing the range of diversity and difference within the group. Therefore, I will avoid seeing Korean American women as a single, monolithic and homogeneous group while still acknowledging shared experiences of oppression, which originate from social categorization as ethnic minority women.

While skeptical of the homogenizing generalizations of Korean American women, I do not avoid the fully deconstructive rejection of categorization. I contend that there are still definable and indeed observable inequalities regarding race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class among social groups. Acknowledging the meaningful and yet observable inequalities among social groups, this study focuses on the relational dynamics of Korean American women's community activists with abused Korean American women.

Through the lens of intersectionality, I seek to understand the complexity of the intersections of domestic violence, community, and health care providers through the voices of Korean American women's community activists.

### **Researcher's Standpoint**

As this inquiry acknowledges women's multiple identities, I recognize my own multiple identities in this study as well. I identify myself as a researcher in the Nursing discipline who studies violence against women, a community volunteer who supports abused Korean American women, and as a survivor who wants to advocate for abused

women and their children. My consideration of the phenomenon of domestic violence is shaped by these three different identities. Working from the standpoints of these identities meant I had to balance various roles and desires. This story is not only the story of the Korean American Women's Association in Greater Philadelphia (KAWAP) women, but is also the story of how I navigate different conceptions of self around the phenomenon of domestic violence.

As a researcher in the Nursing discipline and in Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, I am interested in exploring women's experiences related to health and wellbeing. While researching the phenomena of domestic violence, I focused on the Nursing discipline's practical questions about how best to respond to and address domestic violence in healthcare and community settings. Through this dissertation, I describe how Korean American women's unique sociocultural contexts influenced their experiences of violence against women. I assume that violence is shaped by experiences of race/ethnicity, gender, and class. I also assume that Korean American women in the United States have less access to resources than the general population due to racism, classism, and linguistic/cultural issues connected with ethnicity and gender.

As a Korean American community volunteer, I engaged in the activities of the KAWAP association as an insider and outsider over the last three years. For one year, in 2012, I worked as an active inside volunteer. After this year, I continued as a peripheral member researcher who did not participate in the core activities of the association (Adler and Adler, 1987). Due to my insider position and to our shared identity, language and experiential base, in some ways, I could have benefited by integrating myself more fully

with the women volunteers (Asselin, 2003). However, as Thorne (2008) and Dwyer (2009) point out, when participants see the researcher as an insider, they might be less inclined to go into depth about key elements they assume the researcher already understands. It is also possible that my perception as a researcher might have been clouded by my personal experiences as a member of the group and I might have had difficulty separating my experiences from those of the participants (Dwyer, 2009). To prevent the loss of sensitivity as an insider, I focused on learning from “their” experiences and keeping my own experience separate (Thorne, 2008). I also worked closely with my committee members and colleagues to check my assumptions and keep my analytic framework uncompromised.

As a survivor, I was exposed to the culture of domestic violence and had my own worldview from my previous life experiences. I confess that I struggled during the process of navigating between identities as a survivor and a researcher. Although being personally engaged with the phenomenon of one’s study does not make me a better or worse researcher (Dwyer, 2001), I believe it made me a different type of researcher who felt different emotions. For example, when the KAWAP volunteers told me the stories of abused Korean American women who ran away from home without wearing shoes in a cold winter, I felt deeply sympathetic knowing how hard it is to live under those circumstances. I was also concerned that my heightened level of sensitivity might be detrimental to data collection and analysis, so to address this issue, I continuously worked with my chair, committee members, and other qualitative research fellows to reduce possible research risks associated with insider membership. These strategies included

disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the research process with acknowledging my own personal biases and perspectives (Dwyer, 2009).

Thus, this work is a chronicle of cross dialogues. It is animated and enabled by my own subjective position. But most centrally, it is motivated by my own desire to understand how we, as Korean Americans with transnational identities, navigate and make sense of ourselves and the domestic violence we encounter in our communities. In this work, I document the experiences of Korean American women community activists working with abused women. I embraced the intimacy of qualitative inquiry. I could neither remain a true outsider to KAWAP nor qualify as complete insider because of my position as researcher (Dwyer, 2009). Hence, I had to negotiate my multiple and complex positionality. For example, as an insider, my personal emotions often interfered with my critique of the KAWAP association as a researcher. My hesitancy of not wanting to criticize them often resulted with the usage of vague and/or neutral expression in my interpretation. Regarding this, I brought the draft to my chair and/or colleagues to check my compromised interpretation and revised the analysis accordingly. Navigating my own complex positionality, I strived to listen to the stories of Korean American women community volunteers and to chronicle their experiences with abused Korean American women as would any open, authentic, and honest researcher.

### **Assumptions**

This inquiry draws from a synthesis of ideas from critical postmodern feminist approaches and makes several assumptions to guide the study of community volunteer counselor's support for abused Korean American women. The assumptions for this study

include (a) multiple truths; (b) sociopolitical contextuality; (c) the influence of multiple social interactions on individual health; (d) health equity and; (e) nurses as primary health care providers.

This approach focused on the following assumptions:

- With acknowledgement of philosophical, theoretical, and methodological pluralism, the researcher respects the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon. This theoretical explanation is derived from multiple philosophical paradigms rooted in constructivism, empiricism, post-positivism, feminism and critical realism. The researcher believes that there is no absolute truth about the real world due to human interaction and interpretation. Yet, there are patterns in perceived realities. Therefore, researchers could describe the patterns of realities and theorize it to demonstrate the utility of one's epistemology.
- Individual perception, interpretation, and response are framed from the intersection of sociopolitical context. Based on the sociopolitical context, individual conceptualization of community activists and domestic violence differs across people, context, and times.
- Individual health and well-being are influenced by the interactions of many causes, located within and outside of body. These interactions include individual physical and psychological factors, interpersonal relations, socioeconopolitical environment, cultural and religious values, regional environment and chronological changes over time.

- Women's community activism is one of the various forms in which women's agency can be presented. The researcher identifies the KAWAP volunteers as women's community activists considering their role in pursuing collective action to challenge the underprivileged status of women in their community.
- Nurses need to form partnerships with the community and have strong community core-oriented skills such as the ability to develop, implement, and assess culturally relevant intervention

### **Research Aims**

Employing a community-based approach, this study highlights Korean women's community activism in Philadelphia. It chronicles the work of a group of ethnic minority female activists and their response to domestic violence, promoting resilience and providing support services over the past few decades. By collaborating with this organization, this study uplifts the voices of these women. Furthermore, this study is interdisciplinary in nature because it effectively links concepts and skills from historical, sociological, cultural, political and nursing perspectives. It is through dialogue with Korean American women's community activists that this study will chronicle and reveal their perceptions of their endeavor to empower other women in their local community.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the community-based activism from the perspectives of a local Korean American woman's community activists in Philadelphia over the last three decades. The specific aims are listed below.

- 1) To explore how these activists identify themselves when they work in the KAWAP community organization

- 2) To describe how these activists become motivated to work voluntarily for their community
- 3) To reveal the way in which these activists engage in local women's community activism through their everyday lives

The secondary purpose of this study is to understand the impact of and the local response to domestic violence in a Korean American women's community in order to inform the development of best practices for providing culturally competent health services. The specific aims are listed below.

- 1) To explore how these activists documented domestic violence cases in their community
- 2) To describe how these activists responded to the abused Korean American women
- 3) To chronicle the activists' decades-long effort to address domestic violence in their community

### **Research Questions**

This study will analyze the following questions by listening to the voices of Korean community activists who supported abused Korean American women. The research questions follow:

- Central question: What are the experiences of the Korean American women's community activists working with abused Korean American women in the North East over the last three decades?
- Sub questions about Korean American women community activists:

- How has Korean American women's activism developed and for what purpose?
- How do these women identify themselves when they are working in the organization?
- What is the meaning of working as a member of the organization?
- How do they engage in community activism in their day-to-day lives and what are the raced, gendered, classed experiences faced by a community activist?
- How have their experiences with domestic violence cases changed over the last three decades?
- What were the perceptions and responses of these women regarding domestic violence cases?
- How do their gendered, raced, classed experiences influence their definition/perception/response of domestic violence?
- What were the challenging experiences of these women in working with domestic violence cases?
- What are the implications for health care providers?

### **Significance of the Problem**

The USPSTF (U.S. Preventive Services Task Force) and Affordable Care Act recommend that health care providers screen women of childbearing age for domestic violence and provide or refer women who screen positive to intervention services (Moyer, 2013; USPSTF, 2013). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reiterated the importance of screening for domestic violence among ethnic minority women. The CDC recognizes that the effects and impact of partner violence are likely to



be greater for persons in racial and ethnic minority groups considering the significant economic and health disparities suffered by these groups (Whitaker & Reese, 2007). In practice, however, health care professionals, lacking training in supporting ethnic minority patients who are experiencing domestic violence, struggle with helping abused Korean American women experiencing domestic violence (Chung, Oswald, & Hardesty, 2009). Without adequate access to support, Korean American women become more vulnerable to negative physical and psychological health consequences than the general population (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This is a health inequity issue that arises systematically as a consequence of individuals' socially underprivileged positions.

In response to this health inequity issue, this study narrows its focus to the experiences of Korean American women activists working on domestic violence cases for a number of reasons. First, Korean American community researchers have denoted domestic violence as the most serious of all problems within Korean American families (Chung et al., 2009; Song, 1996). Second, Koreans reportedly have one of the highest rates of domestic violence, according to data from multinational and U.S. studies (Krug et al., 2002; Leung & Cheung, 2008). Third, consequences of domestic violence have been linked with an increasing divorce rate and increasing lethal violence such as partner homicide in the Korean population living in the United States and South Korea (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004; B. Kim & Titterington, 2009; Rhee, 1997). Fourth, there is an increasing tendency to commit domestic violence in Korean American communities after immigration, due to the stressors associated with immigration and subsequent family conflict (H. Choi & Dancy, 2009; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; S. B. Lee, 2003). Fifth,

Korean American women often have limited access to social support due to language barriers, lack of knowledge about service availability, lack of transportation, lack of health insurance, lack of financial independence, and social isolation (Han, Kim, & Tyson, 2010; I. J. Kim & Zane, 2004; E. Lee, 2005; M. Y. Lee, 2000). As a result, Korean American women's associations acknowledged these unmet needs of abused Korean American women and provided support for these women in their local community (Park, 2005).

Regarding domestic violence among the Korean American population, previous scholars have been occupied with issues of contextual specificity to explain the vulnerability of Korean American women to domestic violence. While this question has led to serious attempts to investigate issues of immigration, gender, ethnicity and class, what is missing is a clear understanding of how the community has responded to abused women in their community in their day-to-day lives. This study tries to fill this gap by closely exploring how a group of local women's community activists have worked with abused women in their community.

Scholars have pointed to the importance of women's community based activism in providing social support, information, and culturally competent assistance for abused ethnic minority women (Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Park, 2005). As ethnic minority women, Korean American women often have limited access to social resources and support due to language, sociocultural, economic, and political barriers (Ahmed et al., 2009; Han et al., 2010; I. J. Kim & Zane, 2004; E. Lee, 2005; M. Y. Lee, 2000). Facing

numerous challenges, women often seek help in their community to get linguistically and culturally competent assistance (Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005).

Acknowledging such needs of Korean Americans in the United States, Korean community-based organizations have offered counseling, legal aid, and educational support for people in need (Myers, 1995; Park, 2005). More specifically, Korean women's community organizations have focused on the particular needs of women in their community and offered a broad range of services including community education, leadership development, counseling, crisis intervention, referrals, translation, and legal advocacy (Park, 2005). Many of these Korean women's community organizations also provided services for abused Korean American women. Because ethnic communities often share historical, sociocultural, and political contexts, abused women can get the support that is specific to their situation (Kanuha, 1996; Kelly & Humphreys, 2001). Additionally, Korean American women often experience racism, sexism, imperialism, class exploitation, and language discrimination in their daily lives in the United States. Therefore, community resources are often the first place abused Korean American women seek help. Korean American feminist activists noticed the marginalization experienced by Korean American women and took action to support other Korean American women in need. This study explores the efforts of one local group of Korean American women's activists who worked to address the unmet needs of their peers who were experiencing abuse and situates this work in a larger social and cultural context in order to understand the factors that guided their response.

To the author's knowledge, there was only one community case study investigating the politics of a Korean Women's Hotline community toward the Anti-Immigrant Wave of the 1996 Immigration Bill H.R. 2002 in California (Park, 2005). Park (2005) described the politics of gender and culture experienced by a Korean women's hotline to break the silences that protect abusers in Korean immigrant communities. Because of socially bred fear, embarrassment and shame in speaking about domestic violence within Korean community, abused Korean American women suffered in silence (Park, 2005; Song, 1996). Park (2005) argued that Korean women's community organizations have served as a last resort for Korean American women who have endured years of abuse and risked family shame by seeking help outside of the family.

Considering the significance of community-based support for abused Korean American women, understanding the experiences of members of the Korean immigrant community working with abused Korean American women is crucial. To this end, this study addresses a gap in existing literature, exploring the responses of Korean community-center activists and ways in which they have served abused Korean American women. To understand interactions in the local context of the Korean immigrant community, this inquiry will also illustrate historical, sociocultural, and political contexts of the Korean American community in Philadelphia.

For this study, I collaborated with local Korean American women community activists group in Philadelphia. I obtained data from these activists and explored their perceptions, responses, and needs in supporting Korean American women who

experienced domestic violence. In doing so, I described supportive services available to abused Korean American women from this Korean American counseling community between 1986 and 2012. In support of this study, the activists agreed to provide counseling records and to serve as intermediary between the researcher and the women by contacting activists who have volunteered on the organization to facilitate this study. Findings from this study will be shared with the Korean community-center staff to better support Korean American women experiencing domestic violence in the future. All findings will be shared, but individual participants' confidentiality will be maintained.

Finally, based on counseling records and interviews with counselors, findings from this study provide implications for providers to learn from the Korean immigrant community regarding how to provide culturally competent services for abused Korean American women. Also, the effectiveness of screening for abuse in healthcare settings could be enhanced by integration of screening with ethnic-specific services such as an ethnic-specific community counseling program.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Built upon the efforts of a group of Korean American activists who have worked on behalf of the needs of their community women, this study is an attempt to engage in dialogue regarding their experiences working with domestic violence cases. In collaboration with one Korean American women's community organization, this study delivers the voices of Korean American women activists who have worked to build resiliency through community action for decades. These Korean American women activists have devoted a great deal of time and energy to improve the disadvantaged status of other women in their community.

In this chapter the existing body of literature on women's community activism and domestic violence is analyzed. In the first section of this chapter, the concept of community activism and women's community activism is discussed. The next section continues with brief histories of Korean American women's community activism and local Korean American women's activism in Philadelphia. The third section of this chapter starts with a review of the intersection of women's community activism and domestic violence. It continues with terminology and definitions of domestic violence according to two different conceptualizations, one by the United States Department of Justice and the other by the Statutes of the Republic of Korea. In the fourth section of this chapter, domestic violence in immigrant ethnic minority populations is reviewed. Finally, the fifth section of this chapter is a discussion of domestic violence in Korean American

communities. Through this literature review chapter, background knowledge and an evaluation of current literature related to women's community activism and domestic violence in Korean American community is provided.

## **Women's Community Activism**

### **Community Activism**

Activism is defined as the behavior of advocating some political cause via any of a large array of possible means, ranging, for example, from institutionalized acts such as starting a petition to unconventional acts (Klar & Kasser, 2009). The core elements of activism consist of: (a) an activist behavior pursues collective, as opposed to individual, interests; (b) the behavior intends to address some perceived problem, injustice, or disadvantage affecting the collective; (c) the behaviors are oriented toward change- either producing change or preventing change that is advocated by a different collective (Klar & Kasser, 2009).

Historically, community activists have tried to fill the demands for social resources inadequately provided by the market or the government (Minkoff, 1995). Regarding conditions as unjust and subject to change, community activists have mobilized their resources to supplement or advocate for people in need (Minkoff, 1995). They promote community action taken by individuals or groups within a community, to bring about social change (Wilson, 2000). Often these actions are also referred to as "grassroots actions", "volunteering", "social activism" and "social movement" (Wilson, 2000). Community activism involves a wide range of social movements promoting social changes (Wilson, 2000).

Most research on community activism has been conducted as focused upon political participation, economic resource mobilization and social change by politics and social science researchers. Recently, public health researchers have started to focus on community activism to engage community residents in terms of improving health at the local level. Public health researchers point out health disparities in populations and argue for the capacity of community activism to address health and social inequality issues more efficiently (Israel et al, 1994; Laverack and Wallerstein, 2001; Lerner & Craig, 2005; Zoller, 2005). In terms of community empowerment and health promotion, they noted how community activists confront the issue of power in building the capacity of both individuals and communities through community actions (Rifkin, 2003). In harmony with the approach of community empowerment, nursing scholars also started to promote intersectoral collaboration with community activists to empower community health resilience (Meleis et al, 1995). This intersectoral collaboration addresses the needs of community people in a manner that is congruent with the cultural beliefs of, and is sustainable by, the community (Meleis et al, 1995). To inform these nursing scholars, an intention of this study is to know more about how women community activists build community resilience so the scholarship can empower them to move forward.

### **Women's Community Activism**

Feminist scholars and activists have chronicled women's community-based political struggles and recognized the significance of women's social networks for community empowerment. Narratives of the women's community-based activism appear in interdisciplinary scholarship that draws from Sociology, History, Anthropology,



Theology, and Women Studies. Attempting to present an array of women's community activism, this scholarship shows various directions of perspectives reflecting an array of women's community activism. This scholarship has accumulated invaluable dialogue about women's community activism that many activists rarely have the luxury of learning from and then applying into their practice. Here I, as a researcher and an activist, try to learn from the existing scholarship and hope to inform practice with this scholarship. I also offer a brief analysis of the scholarship about women's community activism that has contributed to the construction of this study. This literature analysis addresses the following questions. What is women's community activism? Who are women's community activists? Why do they do it? How do they do it? To begin to answer these questions, in the following section I present an overview of the literature regarding women's community activism and points out the existing gaps in the literature in order to contextualize the research structure and questions to be addressed by this dissertation.

*Women's community activism* is defined as women's groups organized for change whose agenda and/or action challenge women's subordinate/disadvantaged status in society-at-large (external) and in their own community (internal) (Feminist Oral History Collective, 1991-1995; Gluck, 1998, p. 34). According to this definition, *women's community activists* refers to women who pursue collective action to challenge women's subordinate/disadvantaged status in society. Women's community activists have recognized concerns of minorities and women who are relatively disadvantaged in access to social resources (Naples, 1998). Women's community activism specifically exists to respond to the demands of women, which originate from the unequal distribution of

social resources toward women in various social settings. Women's community activists challenge deeply rooted patriarchal and heterosexist traditions and confront the issue of gender inequalities (Napels, 1998). However, their struggles are not limited to gender inequalities but incorporate race, gender, and class inequalities as well.

In the leading book on women's activism, "Women and the Politics of Empowerment", edited by Bookman and Morgan (1988), the authors document working-class women's political consciousness and action as women, as minorities and as members of the working class during the period of the 1970s and early 1980s. The authors and contributors to "Women and the Politics of Empowerment" were actively engaging with and in the women's organizations and coalitions they describe (Bookman and Morgan, 1988). The authors shared the political goals of the women they studied and recognized that engagement was essential to their study of political action, thus becoming involved in the women's action (Bookman and Morgan, 1988). As part of ongoing efforts to support the working class women's struggles, they let those women speak in their own voices about their political experiences. Their work displays various arrays of women activists who engaged in campaigns and coalitions for social justice, access to women's health care, improvement of working place condition, quality education for their children, better neighborhood services, economic security, and against violence against women (Morgan, 1988; Costello, 1988; Luttrell, 1988; Bookman, 1988; Nicola-McLanghlin and Chandler, 1988; and Zavella, 1988). This work of women's activism prompted a discourse about women's organized response to social disparities. Although this book did not identify day-to-day experiences and concerns of a specific ethnic minority group

relating to their cultural background, the authors situate their activism in the complex issues involved in politics of gender, race/ethnicity, and class.

Scholars investigated the ways various women activists self-identified and found that women's community activism was intertwined with their identities as mothers and wives (Ramirez-Vellez, 1999; Naples, 1992; Pardo, 1990). Although there were some exceptions (Ramirez-Vellez, 1990), Pardo (1990) suggested that activism was informed by women's social location within their families, communities, and neighborhood; thus, women's activism was often related to their role as mothers. Due to the interwoven nature of community activism with their day-to-day role, rather than asking about their self-identification as women activists, the scholars captured the inseparability of the spheres of social life such as activism from mothering (Naples, 1992; Pardo, 1990). Not only was activism informed by women's social location, Abrahams (1996) and Ramirez-Vellez (1990) pointed out that their roles were negotiated by that activism. This confluence of identity, gender roles and activism is never static but rather affected by the interaction of religions, politics, and gender (Klapper, 2013). When women's activism is intertwined with their other identities, their collective actions may or may not be enacted under the activist placard. To this end, this dissertation does not ask whether activists interviewed in this dissertation identify themselves as women activists. The better question to ask is, how do they do activism? In other words, with respect to the identities of women community activists, this dissertation investigates the ways in which they pursue collective action to empower other women in their community.

Motives for women's community activism are "giving back" to the community, gaining personal reward and creating social change (Abrahams, 1996; Gordon, 1991; Morgan and Bookman, 1988;). In this case of activism, community is interdependent with one's identity (Abrahams, 1996). Activists are involved in a community where their own identity is linked such as gender, ethnicity, geography, profession, religion, class, and/or politic. For example, Abrahams (1996) finds out through her interviews with women activists that they target a community related with their social locations such as feminists and/or Latinas and/or mother and/or Christians and /or political activists. By empowering the community on behalf of their own identities, they achieve and strengthen their identity through their community work (Abrahams, 1996).

Activists reflect their collective identity in movement's emergence, trajectories, and outcomes (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Since, activism is closely related with the identity of activists, motivation for the activism also ranges varies based on diverse background of their collective identities. Regarding the variation, Gordon (1991) points out there is major difference between black and white women activists in terms of their attitudes and approaches to community issues. She argues that those differences were rooted in their historical collective experiences such as racism, provision of public services, and compulsory education (Gordon, 1991). She asserts that "the personal is political": political views and activities are related not only to social, economic, and political conditions but also to individual circumstances such as personal experiences (Gordon, 1991). Accordingly, motivation for community activism is dependent on the shared experiences of the community members and activists to promote their collective

interest against social inequalities. Klar and Kasser (2009) suggest that this coincides with that of Aristotle's famous description of humans as political animals by nature. The authors further suggest that the extent to which people engage in political activism might be positively associated with their well-being (Klar and Kasser, 2009). On that account, motivation for women's community activism stems from their shared desire for well-being in terms of both the individual and community in response to shared experiences of social injustice and inequality.

While the motives of women's community activism vary in relation to women's identities, there is also considerable diversity in terms of their community organization. Women's community activism has existed in various forms including political participation, labor organizing, education, and community empowerment (Naples, 1998). Women's community activism may entail informal networks of similarly thinking individuals who plan actions and may never evolve into a formal organization such as a campaign (Vellochi, 2010). However, formal organizations exist as a major form for activism such as coalitions, unions, associations or organizations (Vellochi, 2010). In any forms of activism, activists use a variety of resources including money and steady resource streams, influential allies or supporters who lend both their money and political capital to the cause, and infrastructure in the form of meeting places, technology, office space, etc (Vellochi, 2010, p.87). In women's community activism, women's social networks, in particular, are powerful resources to mobilize other resources (Naples, 1998). Women community activists build social capital by developing community networks and civic action (Gittell, 2000). Based on her women's community organization analysis, she

found that women activists facilitate community participation and design their program based on community needs (Gittell, 2000). Through the community participation, they gather together and discuss previously thought of as private issues into public spheres. To address the identified community needs, they participate in community networks and support each other by bridging social capital. By creating social capital and fostering participation in organization, women community activists often enable social change by building networks and civic action (Gittell, 2000). Hence, women's social networks and their construction of community for their political work are central to the process of women's community activism.

Thus far, this section has identified and described the definition, agents, motives, and process of women's community activism. In what follows, the section evaluates research on women's community activism by exploring how activist researchers deliver the voices of women activists to the scholarship. Research on women's community activism has contributed distinctly to gender, sexuality, and women's studies by pushing the boundaries of academia in several ways.

Most scholars are advised to distance themselves from the phenomena of their study to retain analytic stance. According to positivistic epistemology, researchers need to be detached, objective and keep the analytic perspective necessary in science (*Cone and Foster, 1993*). Even from a naturalistic epistemology, scholars have concerns about the borderline self-indulgence of conducting personally charged research (Napels, 1998). However, feminist activist scholars were able to find the balance between the passion they are engaged in as community activists and the detachment needed to present their

analysis as scholars (Napels, 1998). Overcoming the binary of scholar and activist, they not only present their account of community action in which they participated, but also expand their analysis of community action by making visible their own activist experience (Napels, 1998).

As community activists confront wide ranges of issues related to the issue of inequalities, community activist scholars could consistently focus on the complex ways race, ethnicity, class, and gender shaped experiences (Napels, 1998). Because ethnic minority women experience interlocking oppressions, they are especially well positioned to investigate intersections of gender, ethnic/race, and class relations (bell hooks, 1990; Collins, 2000). Their narratives were able to expand feminist scholarship to embrace broad dimensions and complexities of structural inequalities including racism, sexism, nationalism, classism and homophobia. Regarding the interconnected structural sources of power, feminist activist scholars listen to the voices of their community and see their issues in terms of these dimensions.

Feminist activist scholars also challenge conceptualizations of social categories- especially “politics” and “feminism”- and expand them by listening to community women activist’s voices. Many of these activists distance themselves from the label of “politicians” and “feminist”, even if their practices are reflections of this commitment. For example, in her analysis of women community activists, Naples (1998) found that women activists did not view their work as political because their experiences with politics and politicians had been largely negative. They did not see politics and/or politicians as being concerned with their needs. As such, even though they are carrying

out political projects, they recognized their work not as political but as addressing community needs (Naples, 1998). However, when we take politics at its root to mean the social relations between people, their activities of creating social capital and fostering participation to bring social change are identified as political in nature (Gittell, 2000).

Similarly, feminist researchers have also struggled with the gap between *doing feminism* and *being a self-labeled feminist* in their works (bell hooks, 2000; Burn et al, 2000; Liss et al, 2001; and Evans & Bobel, 2007). Bell hooks (2000) suggested to using the phrase “I advocate feminism” rather than “I am a feminist” because the former allows for choice and free will whereas the latter often insinuate absolutism and dualistic thinking. In an anthology study of analyzing the voices of numerous feminist activists, Evans and Bobel (2007) also suggested similar possible explanation for the resistance to self-labeling as feminist. Their analysis of contemporary feminism yielded key themes of inclusion, multiplicity, contradiction, and everyday feminism (Evans and Bobel, 2007). As their analysis provided the vision of an inclusive, interconnected, and contradictory feminist movement, they concluded contemporary feminism as redefining itself and challenging the boundaries of itself (Evans and Bobel, 2007). They further argued that the resistance toward the feminist identity represents a deeper understanding of systems of oppression by contemporary feminist activist because these activists recognize the nature of this oppression that breed in the presence of divisiveness and dualism (Evans and Bobel, 2007).

Resistance to feminist identity is also present in women’s community activism that practices feminist ideology but may or may not be enacted under the feminist banner.



For example, although Abraham (1996) argued that women's participation in rape crisis work reinforced their feminist identity, Gittel (2000) reported that most women activists did not self-identify as feminist in her interviews with 150 women leaders of women's community organizations. This ambivalence about feminist self-identification provides an opportunity for feminist scholars to redefine contemporary feminism in a shifting sociopolitical landscape (bell hooks, 2000; Evans & Bobel, 2007; Herrup, 1995). This contradiction of Third Wave feminism- doing feminism without being a feminist- shows the dynamic, resourceful and creative nature of the current women's movement. Evans & Bobel (2007) further suggest listening carefully to the voices of the Third Wave- diverse, inclusive, contradictory and everyday- emerging from the real women's lives in their current social context.

Women activist researchers have challenged the boundaries of academia by disputing the binary of activist and scholar, expanding their view of gender relations incorporating social contexts, and redefining their conceptualization of the social categories of politics and feminism. Their attempt to understand women's community activism in terms of the experiences of community women yields varying definitions, agents, motives, and processes. This literature review provides a "macro picture" and a conceptual vocabulary to describe women's community activism, while less present in the literature, is the "micro picture" of how women activists develop collective agency to devise ways to challenge the social injustice in their day-to-day lives. There is a gap of knowledge regarding how women activists address the immediate needs of their community and navigate their social, economic, cultural, and political realities. This gap

is even more substantial with respect to ethnic minority activists. Therefore, this study opens up an important dialogues with ethnic minority women's community activists by exploring one group of Korean American women's community activists working toward social justice for Korean American women in the United States.

### **Korean American Women's Community Activism**

Korean American women's activism has a long history in the United States, in fact as long as their immigration history. As their history has been linked with the political context, their activisms shaped and were affected by the political context of both their country of origin and their new country. Throughout their immigration history, Korean American women's activism has existed in various subjects, issues, and contexts. This long history starts with their first migration wave as sugar cane workers in 1903. Following the period of Japanese colonization of Korea (1905-1945), the Korean War and nation building period (1948-1960), military dictatorships (1960-1993), and democratization (1993-2000), the Korean American women's movement has undergone profound expansion and development.

### **History of Korean American Women's Activism**

The first wave of Korean migration started between 1903-1910 due to widespread famine in Korea, and resulted in the emigration of approximately 7,000 Koreans (6049 men and 637 women) as sugar plantation workers (Murray, 1997). Between 1910 and 1924, during the Japanese colonization period, more than a thousand Korean women came to America as picture brides to escape political and religious oppression by Japanese imperialists (Murray, 1997). Although early Korean immigrants encountered

poverty and discrimination, these women created networks and supported each other emotionally and financially by forming women's organizations (Murray, 1997). The first Korean American women's organization, *Hankuk Puin Hoe* (한국 부인회, the Korean Women's Association) was founded in 1908 in San Francisco to promote Korean language programs, support church activities, and encourage community solidarity (Murray, 1997). In Hawaii, *Taehanin Puin Hoe* (대한 부인회, the Korean women's society) was established as the second Korean American women's organization with similar goals (Murray, 1997).

Although the early activities of Korean American women activists were derived from the needs of their local community, they expanded their work to support the national liberation movement against Japanese colonization between 1910 and 1945. During this period, Korean American women's activism integrated the national liberation movement into their social movement. They challenged traditional Korean conceptions of the women's role being confined to the domestic area as they actively participated in public political issues. On March 15, 1919, 41 representatives of Korean Hawaiian women's societies met in Honolulu and founded *Taehan Puin Kujehoe* (대한 부인교제회: Korean women's relief society) to support the liberation of Korea (Lyu, 1977). Through this organization, women supported the national liberation campaign by training emergency nurses for anti-Japanese actions and by raising funds (Lyu, 1977). Women in California also established *Taehan Yoja Aikukdan* (대한 여자 애국회: Korean women's patriotic society) to boycott Japanese goods and to raise necessary funds for need in America and Korea (Yang, 1987, p. 177). Their support activities for Korea residents

continued even after Korean independence including sending 800 tons of relief goods to Korea in 1946 (Kim, 1971).

Following the period of democratization of Korea (1960-1993), Korean American women's activism reflected the *Minjung* (민정) movement<sup>1</sup>(mass or common people's social movement) and *Minjung* women's groups focused on human rights issues and women's labor (Louie, 2001). In her pioneering book on ethnic minority women's activism, Louie (2001) opened up a new dialogue regarding working class Korean American women's activism and underscored the significant influence of the *Minjung* social movement on their activism. She delivered the voices of women leaders of the *Korean Women Workers Association* in Los Angeles's Korean town and described how their experiences of the *Minjung* social movement in Korea were reflected in their resistance toward discrimination and injustice in the United States.

As ethnic minority women, Korean American women workers experienced low-wages, discrimination, sexual harassment, insults and increased threat of firing (Louie, 2001). As they fought for women's labor and human rights issues in South Korea, Korean American women similarly founded women worker's organization to weigh against oppressive working conditions in the United States (Louie, 2001). Their collective activism helped women to negotiate agreements for wage scales, meal times, and the conditions for discharge (Louie, 2001). Additionally, the workers association helped the

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<sup>1</sup> The *Minjung* (*The people*) social movement is a civic movement for democratization against military authoritarian dictatorship in South Korea. *Minjung* movement rejected the political, economic, and cultural repression of the authoritarian state by demonstrating democratization and by using of civil power (Hur, 2011). Within the *Minjung* social movement in South Korea, *Minjung* women's groups emerged and raised consciousness of unequal class/gender stratification and repressive social structure of 1980s (Hur, 2011). Louie (2001) noted that the Korean American women activists she interviewed had previously participated in the *Minjung* movement in Korea and reflected their perception of the repressive social structure in the United States.

women who were fired and blacklisted due to their participation in the activist activities, the workers association helped them to file lawsuits (Louie, 2001). Through their collective activism, these women began could begin to change the discriminatory working climate and discriminatory atmosphere within the community, gaining winning respect and human rights for women worker's human rights. While Although their activism discovered the collective voices of oppressed working class women, their activism could be recognized as a part of the Minjung social movement from South Korea because they focused more on human rights issues rather than on gender issues. Also, their activism represented women as a homogeneous working-class group rather than incorporating many other women's identities and needs.

After the democratization of South Korea (1993-2000), the third wave of Korean women's activism started to focus on women's issues and needs. During this period, Korean women activists actively participated in legislative reformist activities by creating women's political spaces within democratic government. They advocated for women's issues related to employment, maternity leave and protection, sexual and domestic violence, and affirmative action. This trend was similarly observed in Korean American women's activism as their activism started to reflect a broader spectrum of issues related to gender inequity.

Lisa Sun-Hee Park (1998) examined how Korean American women activists organized *Korean Women's Hotline* (한국 여성 핫라인), a community-based organization for battered women in Los Angeles, California. She described how these activists struggled to survive against the resistance of the larger Korean American

community and navigated during the Anti-immigrant sentiment in 1994. After these activists organized *Korean Women's Hotline*, they encountered the hostility of the larger Korean American community because their activities were recognized as challenging the traditional Korean model of family unity (Park, 1998). Since their activities were not limited to domestic violence issues but included challenging traditional gender roles, the male oriented larger Korean American community perceived them as a threat to maintaining traditional Korean family systems in the United States (Park, 1998). This hostility changed only after the passage of anti-immigrant legislation when the entire Korean American community needed to collaborate to fight against xenophobic legislation (Park, 1998). Her analysis illustrates how these women activists challenged domestic violence and gender role issues in their community and navigated through the anti-immigrant policies during this period. The third wave of Korean American women's activism incorporated broader women's issues such as domestic violence, gender role inequalities, and immigration policies.

So far, this section has reviewed how Korean American women's activism has undergone profound progress during the long history of immigration in the United States. Before the democratization of South Korea, Korean American women's movements were partnered with other social movements such as the national liberation movement during the Japanese colonization and the *Minjung* social movement during the military dictatorships. During this period, the first and second wave of Korean American women's activism represented women as a member of their country of origin and/or working class women in which Korean women's issues were a part of a nation and/or class. However,

after the democratization of Korea, the third wave of Korean American women's community activists begin to discuss broader women's issues including violence against women and gender role inequalities.

### **Korean American Women's Association of Greater Philadelphia**

In this study, I expand on the story of the third wave of Korean American women's activism. By collaborating with a group of Korean American women activists in Korean American Women's Association of Greater Philadelphia (KAWAP: 필라여성회), this study looks at the intersection between women's activism and domestic violence. In what follows, this chapter further describes the historical background, activities, and maintenance of this organization to provide background information regarding this local organization.

**Historical Background.** Korean immigration to Philadelphia has a long history (Myers, 1995). In 1885, Jaisohn (Suh Jai-pil) migrated to Philadelphia for political reasons and became the first Korean American citizen. However, sizable immigration to Philadelphia began after 1965 (Lee, 1998). Experiencing rapid population growth associated with industrialization, Philadelphia received an influx of Korean Americans from New York City who hoped to develop and expand their retail stores (Lee, 1998). Supplied by Korean importers located in New York City, these new entrepreneurs set up retail shops and began to hire Philadelphia Koreans who saw employment in a Korean-owned business as an avenue to advancement (Myers, 1995). These Korean employees gained experience in all aspects of small business and sought to purchase businesses of their own (Myers, 1995). By the late 1970s, hundreds of Korean-owned small businesses

were operating successfully throughout Philadelphia (Myers, 1995). They included corner grocery markets, dry-cleaning shops, restaurants, clothing and accessories shops, and street-vendor stands (Myers, 1995). Korean Americans in Philadelphia created their ethnic enclave in areas such as Upper Darby and 52nd Street in West Philadelphia and in Cheltenham near North Philadelphia (Lee, 1998). These Korean enclaves create the physical working and living environment for Koreans to conduct business and access services using the Korean language and social customs (Park & Hurh, 1998).

Since the 1970s, the expansion of the Korean immigrant population in Philadelphia has led to the formation of various Korean professional organizations, political associations, and religious groups (Myers, 1995). Some of those community groups provide medical, social, educational, and cultural services to the Korean population in the area (Myers, 1995). For Korean American women, the Korean American Women's Association of Greater Philadelphia (KAWAP) was established in 1986 to provide counseling and education services (Myers, 1995).

Led by the first Korean woman activist lawyer, Tae Young Lee, KAWAP was founded on April 26, 1986 with 18 Korean women members (KAWAP, 2011). Tae Yong Lee is one of the renowned Korean women feminist leaders who established the *Korean Legal Aid Center for Family Relations* (한국 가정 법률상담소) in 1956 to help poor and uneducated in need (*Korean Legal Aid Center for Family Relations, 2014*). While she visited the United States, she witnessed a significant number of Korean American women suffering from family issues. Acknowledging the profound needs of Korean American women, Dr. Lee encouraged Korean American women leaders to establish



several U.S. branches of Korean legal aid centers in major Korean enclaves including Los Angeles, Virginia, Seattle, New Jersey, and Philadelphia (Korean Legal Aid Center for Family Relations, 2014). Since the late 1970s, these Korean American women's community activists' organizations have offered counseling, legal, and education support for their community women in need (Park, 2005; Myers, 1995)

KAWAP membership is open to all Korean American men and women in Philadelphia and currently, KAWAP has 112 members. Many are either referred by existing members or learn of the organization through the free public open lecture series or yearly published report "Phila Yeoseung". KAWAP is supported through membership fees, including Board membership fees of \$20/month, and General membership fees of \$5/month (KAWAP, 2011).

**Activities.** KAWAP (2011) offers free counseling including general information, counseling, crisis intervention, translation, legal advocacy, and referrals to other resources such as lawyers, psychologists, and support groups for Korean Americans. Counseling covers a broad range of issues involving family, children, and the elderly (KAWAP, 2011). Free community counseling is available by phone or in-person interview. In addition to counseling, KAWAP offers translation and general information services to the public and provides a free public open lecture series. Additionally, they publish an annual publication titled "Phila Yoesung (Philadelphia Women)," containing status reports, articles, monthly lectures, and essays from members and specialists (KAWAP, 2011).

**Maintenance.** Since 1986, KAWAP has offered free counseling and support to Korean Americans in need and documented some of their counseling reports. The activists had conducted 4,901 cases of counseling by 2014. A major issue that presented among Korean American women during counseling services was severe psychological distress due to difficulties in the family while adjusting to life in the United States. In particular, many women reported severe family conflict, including domestic violence. By 2014, 90 domestic-violence-related counseling-case documents were collected based on their classification as domestic violence. Activists assisted abused Korean American women based on their needs and offered the counseling program, which provided women with the opportunity to share their experiences with Korean counselors confidentially (KAWAP, 2011).

Thus far, this second section reviewed the history of Korean American women's community activism and introduced the historical background, activities, and maintenance of KAWAP with whom I collaborated throughout this dissertation. In the next section I will briefly analyze the role of women's community activism in domestic violence and continue to illustrate the definition of domestic violence and domestic violence among ethnic minority communities and the Korean American community.

### **Domestic Violence**

Most women's community activists focused on domestic violence within the context of women's oppression and racism while offering social resources in the U.S. (Gittell, 2000). Acknowledging the marginalization of abused women in the society, they organized women's groups and became politically active to change laws to protect

abused women (Gittell, 2000). Additionally, they recognized the limited social resources of abused women and provided shelters, transitional housing, psychological services, and financial assistance (Gittell, 2000). Women's community activism provided some of the key resources for women experiencing domestic violence. However, there is a paucity of knowledge regarding the intersection of domestic violence and women's community activism.

While women activists organized women's community groups statewide for decades in the United States, little has been known about how these organizations were developed and provided social services for abused ethnic minority women. Domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women worldwide (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). Occurring in all ages and racial/ethnicities around the world, women's experience of this phenomenon differs significantly based on their social, economic, and political contexts. Due to the contextual variations of each woman, domestic violence is manifested and perceived in distinctly different ways. Therefore, this section will introduce the terminology, define domestic violence and describe domestic violence among immigrant ethnic minorities and Korean American communities.

### **Terminology of Domestic Violence**

To describe the phenomena of domestic violence, various other terms have been used in academia. From the feminist theorist perspective, the terms *domestic violence*, *battered women*, *gender-based violence*, and *violence against women* have been used to emphasize the perspective of gender inequity (Bograd, 2005; Kurz, 1989; Yick &

Oomen-Early, 2008). In contrast, from the sociological perspective, the terms *family violence*, *spouse abuse/violence*, *marital violence*, *conjugal violence*, *intimate partner violence*, and *wife abuse/assault/battering* (Kurz, 1989; Yick & Oomen-Early, 2008) have been used to focus on the aspect of dysfunctional family dynamics.

In this paper, I use the term domestic violence for several reasons. First, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this study draws from critical feminist theory perspectives to approach domestic violence as a product of women's oppression and to discern every aspects of natural and social orders regarding it. Second, domestic violence is the most common terminology used by Koreans to describe the phenomenon of partner abuse in Korea. In Korea, the concept of domestic violence was introduced and issued publicly in the 1990s as part of the feminist movement (Min & Song, 1998). Even though there have been social initiatives to publicize this phenomenon and protect abused women under the Korean Violence Law in 1998, many Korean women still tolerate abuse silently, due to the social stigma of experiencing domestic violence toward women (H. K. Chang & Moon, 1998; J. H. Kim, 1998; Kim-Goh, 2008). Due to the limited discussion of domestic violence in Korean society, the term "domestic violence (가정 폭력)" has existed as the only commonly circulated term in public discourse to describe this social phenomenon. As this study will collaborate with volunteer counselors from a local Korean community who use this Korean term [가정폭력(domestic violence)] to describe this phenomena, I will also use it throughout the inquiry.

**Definition**

Domestic violence can be defined, differently based on social and, cultural contexts. Therefore, this study will present two different conceptualizations of domestic violence, those of the United States Department of Justice and the Statutes of The Republic of Korea, to explore how domestic violence is defined at the national level. Both of the governmental definitions of domestic violence have direct or indirect influences on the Korean American population in terms of their perception, interpretation and response toward domestic violence.

According to the United States Department of Justice (US DOJ), domestic violence refers to a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner (US DOJ, 2013). The same body defines domestic violence as physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threat of actions including any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone and also suggested an operational definition of domestic violence (see Table 1; US DOJ, 2013).

Echoing global and national concerns regarding domestic violence, the government of the Republic of Korea enacted an act on domestic violence aiming to restore the peace and stability of families destroyed by violence; to maintain a healthy family environment and protect the human rights of victims and their family members; to provide special provisions and procedures for the criminal punishment of crimes of domestic violence; to take a protective disposition to change the environment for persons

who committed crimes of domestic violence; and to correct offenders' personality and behaviors (Act on Special Cases, 2012). The "family member" means a spouse (person in a de facto marital relationship or former spouse), parents, stepparents, parents of one's spouse, children, father's legal wife, the child of a mistress, and relatives living together (Act on Special Cases, 2012).

Table 1. *Operational Definitions of domestic violence*

Physical abuse	Hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, hair pulling, etc are types of physical abuse. This type of abuse also includes denying a partner medical care or forcing alcohol and /or drug use upon him or her.
Sexual abuse	Coercing or attempting of coerce any sexual contact of behavior without consent. Sexual abuse includes, but is certainly not limited to, marital rape, attacks on sexual parts of the body, forcing sex after physical violence has occurred, or treating one in a sexually demeaning manner.
Emotional abuse	Undermining as individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem is abusive. This may include, but is not limited to constant criticism, diminishing one's abilities, name-calling, or damaging one's relationship with his or her children.
Economic abuse	Making or attempting to make an individual financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding one's access to money, or forbidding one's attendance at school or employment.
Psychological abuse	Elements of psychological abuse include- but are not limited to- causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, partner, children, or partner's family or friends; destruction of pets and property; and forcing isolation from family, friends, or school and/or work.

Source: *Domestic violence*, by The US DOJ, 2013.

According to the Statutes of The Republic of Korea (Act on Special Cases, 2012), the term domestic violence means activities involving physical or psychological harm or damage to property among family members. *Physical harm* includes inflicting bodily injury, aggravated bodily injury, threat of collective force of by carrying a dangerous weapon, assault, habitual crimes of bodily injury and threats, rape, and coercion.

*Psychological harm* includes intimidation, defamation, and insult. *Damage to property*

includes destroying, damaging, or concealing another's property documents or special media records, or by any other means, reducing their utility (Act on Special Cases, 2012).

There are a few differences in definitions of domestic violence between the legitimate definition of domestic violence in South Korea and the operational definition of domestic violence from the United States Department of Justice. First, the US DOJ defined domestic violence as occurring in an *intimate relationship*. In contrast, South Korea defined domestic violence as occurring in *family members* and in a *marital relationship*. Second, sexual violence by an intimate partner was detailed and recognized as an independent subcategory of domestic violence in the US DOJ definition. In South Korea, sexual violence (rape or coercion) was included as part of physical violence. Although marital rape has been criminalized in the United States, like many other Asian countries, Korea has granted marital exemptions (Ser, 2013). In May 2013, sexual violence in marital relationship was recognized as a crime by the Supreme Court of South Korea in the country's first marital-rape conviction (Ser, 2013). Third, the legitimate definition of domestic violence in South Korea did not include emotional abuse as a subgroup of domestic violence. The operational definition of the US DOJ acknowledged emotional abuse as domestic violence and broadened the definition of domestic violence to include causing "emotional distress". Finally, while the US DOJ recognized controlling behaviors as domestic violence, controlling behavior was not noted as domestic violence in the statutes of South Korea. These differences highlight the lack of agreement and variation on defining domestic violence across sociocultural settings. Considering the legitimate definition of domestic violence in South Korea, controlling

behaviors would not be recognized as domestic violence. This in turn supports the perpetuation of male authority to have control over women. Based on sociocultural factors of society, definition, perception and response toward domestic violence is diverse.

These varying definitions of domestic violence bring up the possibility of variations in perception and response toward domestic violence among Korean Americans in the United States. Korean Americans bring their cultural norms and beliefs from Korea as their ethnic heritage. It is possible that domestic violence cases of Korean Americans may be under the jurisdiction of Korea based on their immigration status. With sociocultural identities tied between two different countries, the way in which Korean Americans define domestic violence is remains unclear. Therefore, in this study with Korean American women community activists, I will consider both the legitimate definition of domestic violence in South Korea and the operational definition of domestic violence from the US DOJ. Recognizing the agreement and variation in defining domestic violence in two different settings, this study will explore how Korean American community activists define domestic violence in their contexts. Rather than providing an existing definition from institutions or governments, this study will ask Korean American-community activists how they define domestic violence.

### **Domestic Violence in Ethnic Minority Immigrant Populations**

Domestic violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women experienced by ethnic minority immigrant women (Davis & Erez, 1998; Raj & Silverman, 2002). As a sensitive and private social issue, domestic violence has remained silent in



ethnic minority immigrant groups and growing number of studies have focused on this populations in the United States (Abraham, 2006; Ahn, 2003; Akinsulure-Smith, Chu, Keatley, & Rasmussen, 2013; Bauer, Rodríguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Bui & Morash, 1999; Bhuyan & Senturia, 2005; Bui, 2003; Davis & Erez, 1998; Dasgupta, 2000; D. F. Chang, Shen, & Takeuchi, 2009; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Erez, Adelman, & Gregory, 2009; Erez, 2009; Hicks, 2006; Huisman, 1996; Hurwitz, Gupta, Liu, Silverman, & Raj, 2006; Kelly, 2009; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; Kulwicki & Miller, 1999; E. Lee, 2007; Leung & Cheung, 2008; Morash, Bui, & Santiago, 2000; Moynihan, Gaboury, & Onken; 2008; Moreno, 2007; Muftic & Bouffard, 2008; Perry, Shams, & DeLeon, 1998; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rhee, 1997; Rianon & Shelton, 2003; Salcido & Adelman, 2004; H. L. Shin, 1995; Sorenson, 2006; Song, 1996; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2009; Tran, 1997; Tran & Des Jardin, 2000; Wachholz & Meidema, 2000; Weil & Lee, 2004; Yick, 2000; Yoshihama, 1999; Yoshihama & Horrocks, 2003; Yoshioka, DiNoia, & Ullah, 2001). Recent studies with Latina, South Asian, and East Asian Americans demonstrated that 30 to 70% of these women have been sexually or physically abused (Ahn, 2003; D. F. Chang, Shen, & Takeuchi, 2009; Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Hicks, 2006; Hurwitz, Gupta, Liu, Silverman, & Raj, 2006; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; E. Lee, 2007; Leung & Cheung, 2008; Morash, Bui, Zhang, & Holtfreter, 2007; Murdaugh, Hunt, Sowell, and Santana, 2004; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rennison, 2003; Rianon & Shelton, 2003; H. L. Shin, 1995; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yick, 2000; Yoshihama & Horrocks, 2003; Yoshioka, DiNoia, & Ullah, 2001) Yet, the actual magnitude of domestic violence is suspected to be far greater than the number of reported

cases (Weil & Lee; 2004; Yoshihama, 1999). A growing body of literature has discussed the similar vulnerability of immigrant women in the United States toward domestic violence and pointed out legal, economic, and social challenges to the safety of abused immigrant women (see Table 2; Davis & Erez, 1998; Dutton et al., 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Song, 1996; Weil & Lee, 2004).

### **Commonalities of Domestic Violence in Immigrant Ethnic Minority populations**

Table 2  
*Listed Common Vulnerabilities of Immigrant Women toward Domestic Violence*

Factors that trigger domestic violence	Factors that aggravate consequences of domestic violence
Traditional gender norms of their countries of origin	Legal challenges of abused immigrant women
Stress from downward social mobility	Economic challenges of abused immigrant women
Social isolation	Social challenges of abused immigrant women
Limited social and health-system access	

Immigration is a stressful life event and a transition that results in drastic life changes. Scholars have pointed out that immigration could increase vulnerability toward domestic violence and have suggested several immigration-related factors that might trigger domestic violence (Abraham, 2006; Erez, Adelman, & Gregory, 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002). These factors include (a) traditional gender norms from their countries of origin, (b) stress from downward social mobility, (c) social isolation, and (d) limited social and health-system access (Table 2; Raj & Silverman; 2002).

Scholars have noted that immigrant men who adhere to traditional gender roles in their originating country are more likely to abuse their intimate partner (Bui & Morash, 1999; Morash, Bui, & Santiago, 2000; Perry, Shams, & DeLeon, 1998; Tran & Des Jardin, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002). In particular, immigrant men still prefer to

maintain power and rule over the family, maintaining traditional gender roles. To exert their power and control over their wives, previous scholars suggested that these immigrant men disciplined their wives using physical abuse (Huisman, 1996; Kulwicksi & Miller, 1999; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997).

Most immigrants also experience socioeconomic downward mobility due to language, sociocultural, and political barriers. This leads immigrant men to experience psychological stress and difficulty in adjusting to their new society. Researchers pointed out that immigrant men might express their distress as abuse toward their wives (Morash et al., 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rhee, 1997).

Additionally, immigrant women are socially isolated from their friends and family in their country of origin due to migration. Without the close social support they had before emigration, vulnerability to marital conflict and domestic violence increases (Erez et al., 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Considering that most abusive partners try to control women by social isolation, vulnerability toward domestic violence escalates in immigrant women.

Finally, immigrant women have limited access to knowledge of the social system and resources in their new countries. Without knowledge regarding supportive social resources for abused women, immigrant women are more likely to suffer negative consequences from domestic violence and stay in their relationships (Bui, 2003; Dasgupta, 2000; Wachholz & Meidema, 2000).

Due to the factors described above, there is a tendency for domestic violence to increase after immigration (Erez et al., 2009; Song, 1996). Furthermore, abused

immigrant women face multiple challenges in seeking safety and protection including legal, economic, and social challenges.

**Legal challenges of abused immigrant women.** Immigration policy influences women's experiences of domestic violence as it affects their immigration status and the perception of the individual regarding the uncertainty of their visa status and fear of deportation (Erez et al., 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2003). Women who migrate as wives of U.S. citizens, or legal permanent/temporary residents are legally dependent on their sponsor for their visa status (Erez et al., 2009). Because their immigration statuses are dependent on their partner, these women face the possibility of deportation if they decide to leave their partners (Erez et al., 2009). This legal dependency creates new ways for men to potentially abuse and control their intimate partners and entraps battered women (Erez et al., 2009; Salcido & Adelman, 2004). The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) legal reforms allow abused women to apply for a green card, cancel deportation requests or apply for the U-visa. However, most immigrant women lack information about legal resources and the complex processes of legal qualification (Moynihan, Gaboury, & Onken; 2008; Raj & Silverman, 2002).

**Economic challenges of abused immigrant women.** Immigrant women arrive with disadvantaged social status and limited access to social resources compared to immigrant men (Bui & Morash, 1999). Immigrant women's limited educational opportunities and insufficient English-language skills are serious barriers to gaining economic independence from their husband (Bui & Morash, 1999; Erez et al., 2009). Additionally, immigrant women's lack of economic autonomy is another factor

impacting their vulnerability toward domestic violence (Erez et al., 2009). Immigrant battered women also report that their communities' economic marginalization stems from the continued responsibility of sending money to families in their home countries (Erez, 2002). This continued responsibility often leads immigrant women to stay with their abusive partner who were the primary income source of their household (Erez, 2002).

**Social challenges of abused immigrant women.** The general social-support system for abused women often does not include appropriate translation services or knowledge of immigration law (Erez, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Ethnic minority immigrant women face a number of external barriers to support including language and cultural differences. Even for women who can speak English, the general social-support systems for abused women may not be able to address abused ethnic minority immigrant women's issues if they do not account for experiences within their cultural contexts. Ethnic minority immigrant women also face a number of internal barriers to support, such as anxieties to loose social status and the support of their immigrant communities; often the only communities they could rely on (Erez, 2002). Considering that domestic violence is highly stigmatized in many cultures, it would be hard for those women to overcome the stigma and seek help from their own community. Without shared acceptance of domestic violence as a communities issue rather than a private issue, community organization leaders may also feel reluctant to support these women.

Facing the legal, economic, and social challenges described above, abused immigrant women become challenged in trying to find safety in the United States. Across diverse ethnicities or countries of origins, these challenges were reported as

commonalities experienced by abused immigrant women in the literature (Abraham, 2006; Erez, 2002; Morash et al., 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Rhee, 1997).

### **Domestic Violence in the Korean American Community**

#### ***Background of Korean American Communities in the United States***

The number of Korean Americans has increased more than tenfold since 1960. In the early 1960s to 1970s, occupational immigrants, mostly professionals such as nurses and physicians, university students, and wives of American servicemen, constituted the majority of Korean Americans (Myers, 1995). The major reasons for Korean migration included the desire for increased freedom from political insecurity and the hope for better economic opportunities (Min, 2006). This Korean migration flow decreased in the early 1990s with a great improvement in economic and security conditions in South Korea (Min, 2006). However, in the late 1990s, as South Korea underwent an economic crisis, the majority of Korean immigrants came to the United States seeking better economic opportunities and better opportunities for their children's education (Min, 2006). The number of Korean Americans has increased rapidly in the past few decades, from 69,130 in 1970 to 1.7 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Prior to this study, most studies related to domestic violence in the Korean community have been conducted in major Korean enclave areas such as Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Texas (E. Lee, 2007; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; Liles et al., 2012; Song, 1996; Yim, 1978). For instance, one study investigating Korean community support for abused Korean American women was conducted in a long-established ethnic enclave in Los Angeles (Park, 2005). Currently, 30% of Korean Americans live in

California, followed by New York (9%), New Jersey (5.9%), and Texas (5%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), 40,505 (3%) of Korean Americans live in Pennsylvania, and 44.2% men and 55.8% women of Korean American residents are first-generation immigrants.

***Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Korean Americans in the United States***

Studies on domestic violence among Korean American women demonstrated that 1.8% to 72.8% of these women have been sexually, psychologically, or physically abused (Ahn, 2003; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; E. Lee, 2007; Liles et al., 2012; H. L. Shin, 1995). The prevalence rate of physical violence, the most commonly measured and reported form of domestic violence, also ranges widely from 1.8% to 60% (Liles et al., 2012; Song, 1996). This wide range is due to differences in study setting, sampling, and methods used to assess different types of domestic violence.

Even when domestic violence was assessed by the identical assessment instrument (the Conflict Tactic Scale), the reported prevalence of physical, psychological, and sexual violence varied across studies. The reported prevalence of physical assault of Korean Americans ranged between 18 and 30% (J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; E. Lee, 2007). The prevalence of psychological abuse (emotional abuse, psychological aggression) ranged between 23.9 and 72.8% (E. Lee, 2007; Liles et al., 2012). The reported prevalence of sexual abuse, comparing data from a national representative sampling survey of Asian groups suggested that Korean women may be at higher risk of abuse than other ethnicities (Leung & Cheung, 2008). Because reported domestic-violence rates comparing different races/ethnicities are limited and have often been based on

nonprobability samples, the data on the prevalence of domestic violence among Koreans in comparison to other racial groups is still a subject for debate.

The conflict tactic scale (CTS) has been used extensively in domestic violence studies throughout the USA and internationally (Hammer, 2002). Nonetheless, assessing domestic violence by using a universal scale such as the conflict tactic scale is also problematic because this approach cannot incorporate historical and interactive aspects of domestic violence of that population. While this of scale measures frequency and type of confrontation between intimate partners on a numerical scale, it does not capture the context, intention, size of the perpetrator, or real damage done to the abused women (Johnes, 2000, p.154). On the conflict tactic scale, there is no differentiation of the intensity between types of physical violence. For example, hitting one's partner with a pillow counts the same as hitting him or her with a sledgehammer, and two slaps on the wrist count the same as two knife attacks. (Johnes, 2000, p.154-155). This type of scale cannot estimate the magnitude of family violence in the real world.

Additionally, this type of scale does not account for varying presentations of domestic violence in different cultures. For example in the Asian population, domestic violence often involves the husband's family, particularly the women's mother-in-law. Studies investigating domestic violence among the Asian American population have found that the mother-in-law often plays a role in daughter-in-law's abuse (Raj et al, 2006; Chan et al, 2008; Fernandez, 1997; Counts et al, 1999). Since the CTS does not assess domestic violence by other family members such as mother-in-law, women who



are physically or emotionally abused by other family members are not recognized as experiencing domestic violence with this types of scale.

Criticisms against the extensively used CTS suggest that the prevalence data may not represent the actual rate and magnitude of abused Korean American women. Nonetheless, previous researchers suggest that Koreans showed one of the highest prevalence rates of domestic violence from multinational and U.S. studies (Krug et al., 2002; Leung & Cheung, 2008). Among the wide range of domestic violence rate among Korean Americans, it has been argued that some prevalence data of physical domestic violence in Korean Americans were higher (18-30%) compared to the U.S. general population (4.4%) from National Violence Against Women Survey (Kim and Sung 2000; Lee 2007). Previous researchers have drawn attention to these high rates of reported domestic violence prevalence rate among Koreans and highlighted the significance of studying domestic violence among Korean Americans (E. Lee, 2007; Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; J. Y. Kim & Sung, 2000; Liles et al., 2012; M. Choi & Harwood, 2004; Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009).

### ***Social, Cultural, Legal and Economical Contexts of Abused Korean American Women***

While most current research has focused on descriptive studies of domestic violence experienced by Korean American women, there has been a lack of in-depth analysis of the multiplicity contexts of abused Korean American women. Only a few studies have suggested a theoretical explanation by employing individual, interpersonal, and social-risk factors such as acculturation issues and traditional gender roles. However,

these explanations of risk factors are incomplete because they do not encompass the full range of contextual dimensions of domestic violence among Korean American women. Also, considering that not all Korean American women who have those risk factors experience domestic violence, risk factors alone cannot explain this phenomenon.

Korean American women are active agents of changes in their own life-course plans. Korean American women are actively involved in constructing and reacting to their sociocultural, economic and political contexts, which can lead to various empowering and disempowering realities. One way of getting beyond risk factors is to examine these multiple contexts to understand the particular living contexts of this population. I argue that multiple contexts come together and contribute to both the vulnerability and resilience of Korean American women experiencing domestic violence.

The listed multiple contexts of abused Korean American women from the current literature may not be equally applicable to all Korean American women in the United States. This study acknowledges that the social, economic, and political contexts of abused women are not a monolithic reality; rather, different multiple realities exist based on each woman's own standpoint. Facing simultaneous operation of disempowering and empowering social determinants, Korean American women can develop their own vulnerability and resilience toward various empowering and disempowering realities. By exploring the lived realities of Korean American activists who have supported abused Korean American women in their community, this dissertation enhances understanding of the contexts of this community including their vulnerabilities and resiliencies.

**Social context of Abused Korean American women.** Korean American women are physically separated from their family and friends due to their migration (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; S. Moon, 2003). In Korea, support from family plays a critical role in marriage for women. Under values of strong kinship, extended families offer continuous emotional and material support to family members (Ho, 1990). Due to the private social atmosphere, older family members such as parents or siblings are the main resources of support when women need to ask counsel for family problems (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009). In marital conflict, older family members often mediate conflict, preventing the development of aggression in the situation. Also, E. Lee (2005) argued that family member's positive support could reduce life stress and distress symptoms, and hence, spousal violence against Korean women. However, due to immigration, Korean American women lose those supports from their family of origin (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; S. Moon, 2003). Without the positive social support they had before emigration, vulnerability to marital conflict and domestic violence increases for Korean American women (E. Lee, 2005). Considering that most abusive partners try to control women by social isolation, vulnerability toward domestic violence escalates among Korean American women, resulting in feelings of helplessness and despair.

First-generation Korean American women have difficulty speaking and understanding English, which impedes communication and access to social support from general domestic violence support services in the United States (Chung et al., 2009). According to E. Kim and Wolpin (2008), Korean immigrant couples in the Midwest reported that only 21% of wives and 40% of husbands reported speaking English fairly

well. Considering that abused women often seek help from a wide range of professionals in healthcare and social-care settings (Tower, 2007), this language difficulty has a critical impact on Korean American women's access to social support. Furthermore, this discrepancy in language fluency also results in inequality of social mobility and social access for Korean American women (Min & Song, 1998).

**Cultural context of abused Korean American women.** Even after immigration, the traditions of their originating country comprise a significant social determinant of the identities of immigrants. Their frame of interpretation in relation to society is also influenced by the values of traditional Korean society (Min & Song, 1998). Despite acculturation during the immigration process, a large segment of Korean American society still holds traditional sex-role attitudes (Ahn, 2003; Song, 1996). The following section examines how the contexts of traditional Korean culture influence perceptions of domestic violence against Korean American women.

Like many other Asian countries, Confucianism and collectivism form the major philosophies of Korean society (Chung, 2006; Kim & Lee, 2011; Yick, Shibusawa, & Agbayani-Siewert, 2003). Confucianism is deeply perfused in Korean society and has influenced social relations including marriage, family structure, and gender role (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). Based on principles comprising politics, society, and culture, this philosophy emphasizes the importance of hierarchy, patriarchy, and family ties over the individual (Han et al., 2010). Centered on patriarchy, Confucianism emphasizes male dominance, and thus has negatively impacted Korean women by increasing tendencies toward patriarchy and domestic violence. Traditionally, Korean Confucianism educates

Korean women to practice four representative principles: *Hyunmo Yangcho* (현모양처: *a wise mother and good wife*), *Namjon Yubi* (남존여비: *predominance of men over women*), *Samjong Jido* (삼종지도: *women obeying three masters—father, husband, and son*), and *Chilgo Jiak* (칠거지악: *seven listed evils as suitable causes of repudiation of women including improper attitude toward one's husband's parents, failure to give birth to a son, lack of chastity, jealousy, inherited diseases, talkativeness, and stealing*; M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). The four principles emphasize the submissive role of women to serve one's husband, one's husband's family, and one's children. Under the principles, Korean women are responsible for family harmony and advised to obey and endure their husbands. If they cannot fulfill these submissive roles, they can be expelled from the family with social approval. These principles often are used by Korean American men to justify abusive behavior that would be acceptable in traditional Korean society (Moon & Song, 1998). Ingrained with these principles, Korean women tend to accept their partner's abusive behavior and blame themselves for evoking those behaviors by failing to fulfill their responsibilities (Min & Song, 1998). This submissive female image shapes Korean women and contributes to their vulnerability to domestic violence due to the justification of domestic violence in society.

As a historically agricultural society, Korean culture emphasizes collectivism over individualism (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). Under collectivism, the family as a whole is prioritized more highly than individuals and family members are counseled to keep problems within the family unit to maintain family esteem (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). This is closely related to the concept of shame and “saving face” in Korean culture

(Chung, 2006). The concept of “saving face,” *Chaemyun* (체면) in the Korean language, has a central role in social interaction. Under this concept of collectivism, Korean women are reluctant to talk about family problems such as domestic violence to someone outside the family, fearing to lose face and bring shame to their family. This coincides with recent research that Korean American women showed the highest rate of disapproval of disclosing domestic violence among all Asian racial/ethnic groups (Yoshioka et al., 2001). Also, the concept of “saving face” is sometimes used by husbands to justify their abusive behavior. Previous literature pointed out that men become more physically violent when their sense of *Chaemyun* (saving face) is damaged or not supported by their wives (Han et al., 2010; S. B. Lee, 2003). Under the perspective of collectivism, a husband’s abusive behavior could be justified by society if their *Chaemyun* is not well supported by their wives. Korean American women tend not to discuss their family problems with strangers due to the stigma of bringing shame to their family (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). Therefore they feel reluctant to talk about the domestic violence issue with others, including their healthcare provider (Chung et al., 2009). Consequently, those two main cultural values of traditional Korean philosophy, Confucianism and collectivism, contribute to inducing vulnerability to domestic violence in Korean American women.

Coinciding with the grounded philosophies of traditional Korean society, customary traditional gender ideology also influences the experience of domestic violence for Korean American women. Traditional Korean gender ideology is still maintained to a high degree in the Korean American family (H. Y. Lee & Eaton, 2009). Studies reported a strong association between domestic violence and traditional gender

ideology (E. Lee, 2007; Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Song, 1996). In particular, most Korean American husbands still prefer to maintain traditional gender roles in their family (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009). Korean males, having the dominant power, are expected to have authority over women which allows them to control their wives by any means including violent punishment (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009). This traditional value is represented in a traditional Korean proverb that “the real taste of dried fish and tame women can only be derived from beating them once every three days” (Min & Song, 1998). In this way, the traditional Korean value system has tolerated and legitimized domestic violence against women (Min & Song, 1998).

Song’s study (1996) also supported the concept that Korean American women who held more traditional gender attitudes suffered from domestic violence at higher rates than those who held less traditional beliefs. Scholars pointed out that gender roles could act as one of the risk factors for domestic violence in Korean American women (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Min & Song, 1998; Rhee, 1997). Traditional Korean gender ideology contributes to contradicting and challenging realities that may lead to more marital conflict and domestic violence. In addition, various complicated contexts of traditional and contemporary gender ideology are based on individual social, political, and historical contexts. In this dissertation, I go beyond looking at traditional Korean gender ideology as a risk factor for domestic violence. Because traditional gender role analysis sweeps across the complexities of different Korean women, it is necessary to discern how each woman perceives the influence of gender role on her interactions with her partner.

Ascribing domestic violence to the traditional gender ideology of Korean Americans is subject to controversy, due to the variety and fluidity of gender role. Contemporary Korean gender ideology is not a monolithic theme but a marked diversity of belief and practice, based on a multifaceted context. Also, contemporary gender ideology might only provide a basis for gender discourse. In here, discourse refers to a socio-historically 'meaning potential' that both enables and constrains possible ways of knowing about the world (Lazar, 2000). Individuals develop their own gender discourse based on their own context as active agents. During the development process, individuals may manifest resilience or vulnerability to empowering/disempowering realities. Therefore, rather than imposing a monolithic framework to Korean traditional gender ideology, this study will contemplate the influence of Korean traditional gender role based on the diversity and complexity of the phenomena.

Declaring traditional gender ideologies as a risk factor for domestic violence is a monolithic interpretation that fails to identify women's continuous construction and reconstruction of their own gender ideology. Korean American women are active agents of change in their own life-course plans. They construct and react to Korean gender ideologies, which lead to various empowering and disempowering realities. Facing the simultaneous operations of disempowering and empowering forces, Korean American women develop individualized gender-role ideologies that may differ from traditional Korean gender ideology. Furthermore, Korean American women develop their own interpretations and meanings of their own experiences. In their realities, these women may or may not practice the perceived gender ideology based on their context. While



these women are expected to perform under traditional patriarchal gender ideology, they could potentially opt out to follow it and decide to negotiate with their partner regarding contradictions and challenges in their realities. In this case, contemporary gender ideology only provides a basis for gender discourse to negotiate and adjust depending on individual's context.

**Legal context of abused Korean American women.** Immigration policies have a significant impact on the daily lives of documented and undocumented Korean Americans. Immigration policy changes are directly related to immigrants' access to all federal programs including school lunches, immunizations, battered women's shelters, and hospitals (Park, 2005). Particularly after anti-immigrant policies, abused Korean American women were more fearful to leave their abusive partners as their access to legal, medical, and social services was threatened (Park, 2005). Even in cases of documented Korean American women, women who immigrated as wives of U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, diplomats, students, or workers, women are legally dependent on others to sponsor, pursue, and complete their visa petitions (Erez et al., 2009). Abused Korean American women who are dependent on their partner for their immigration status have to deal with deportation issues when they decide to leave their partner. Consequently, this legally dependent status aggravates gender inequality by providing another means to control women (Erez et al., 2009).

In 1994, Title IV of Violence Against Women Act was instituted to relieve some of the legal and economic dependencies of battered immigrant women to allow spouses, children of spouses, and children of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents who have

been “battered or subject to extreme cruelty” to self-petition for permanent-resident status and work permits without help from their abuser and without the abuser’s knowledge (Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, 1994). VAWA was reauthorized with improved lifesaving services for abused women in 2013 by the President Obama.

According to VAWA, abused immigrant women can apply for a green card, self-petition, protection of children by VAWA self-petitioners, and the U-visa (VAWA, 2013).

However, there are still some barriers to these legal reforms for abused Korean American women. Even though they could attempt to get protection under VAWA, most Korean women rarely acknowledge this protection, like other immigrant populations (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Even if the self-petition process is initiated, a qualitative study with immigrant women filing VAWA self-petitions showed that lack of economic stability and access to legal representation were immense barriers for the women undertaking the process (Ingram et al., 2010).

**Economical context of abused Korean American women.** One of the key debates on economic context of Korean American women is the interpretation of women’s work and the impact of their changed role and status on domestic violence. Particularly in relation to epidemic domestic violence in this population, the existing scholarship had been seemingly polarized between studies emphasizing women’s increased power as a result of income production and studies focusing on immigrant women’s disadvantaged working conditions and housework burden under continuing patriarchal family system. Yet there is no consensus on how contemporary gender ideology and women’s employment are associated with domestic violence.

From the perspective of describing women's work as an empowering experience, working provides not only economic production but also increased power in their marital relations. As Korean American women become involved in paid work and economically independent, they become more influential (Rhee, 1996). This increased power, in turn, could lead more gender egalitarian marital relations by supporting women to negotiate with their partners (Moon, 2003). Also, because this increased power could offer better accessibility to various resources, some scholars have documented labor participation as an empowering factor regarding domestic violence (Bernstein, Park, Shin, Cho, & Park, 2011; Chang, Shen, & Takeuchi, 2009; B. Kim & Titterington, 2009). This perspective recognizes Korean American women's labor participation as a protective factor against domestic violence by establishing an ideology of greater gender equality among Korean American families.

In contrast, from the perspective of describing women's work as a disempowering experience, some women, under the influence of the Korean traditional family system, are not only required to be responsible for child nurturing and housework, but are also expected to directly contribute to the family's financial income and economic status (Han et al., 2010; Min, 2001). For those women, employment may not be a means of liberation from male domination, but a double-burden to accomplish in addition to housework. This perspective explains that Korean American women's economic role does not coincide with their family's gender-role attitudes (Min, 2001). Because immigrant husbands maintain the traditional patriarchal gender role, they are not ready to increase their share of housework and child nurturing. Without challenging traditional patriarchal gender

roles, these women are forced to fulfill the double burden of outside work and housework. This double burden could lead to marital conflicts and tensions (Lim, 1997; Min, 2001; Park & Hurh, 1998). Several studies have indicated that women's economic participation could be disempowering factors associated with domestic violence (Han et al., 2010). Both distinct perspectives regarding women's economic participation and domestic violence show empowering and disempowering realities related to Korean American women's economic context. Economic status of Korean American women does not seem to act in one direction, but acts in various directions, creating either empowering or disempowering experiences related to domestic violence.

This section reviewed multiple contexts of abused Korean American women. As attention to Korean American women's vulnerability to domestic violence grows, there has been some research targeting their unique gender ideology as a risk factor for domestic violence. Social, cultural, legal and economical contexts have contributing to contradicting and challenging realities for Korean American women. These multiple and complex contexts can also create both empowering and disempowering realities. Therefore, rather than imposing a monolithic framework to domestic violence among Korean American community, researchers need to conjoin the diverse and complex contexts of the phenomena.

### **Summary**

This review of the literature regarding Korean women's community activism and domestic violence provided several important points to contemplate. First, social and political inequalities regarding race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class created a

collective of grievances affecting people's lives that remain unmet by current systems. This systemic process of inequalities produced not only private and public issues, but also created groups of people who fought against that systemic oppression. Second, these collective groups of people against systemic oppression have existed throughout a long history of Korean American community in the United States. As their social and political contexts have changed both inside and outside of Korean American enclaves, their activism has also evolved over time. Not only challenging external structural systems, they also challenge their own conceptions of those systems. Although their activism started as a part of social activism in South Korea, they gradually started to recognize their unique issues as Korean American women and began to resist issues of gender inequality including violence against women. Based on changing contexts, their resistance to oppression has expanded by incorporating issues of their country of origin, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Third, women activists began responding to domestic violence in their communities and recognized the marginalization that occurred due to language, social, cultural, economic, and political barriers. Recognizing these challenges of abused women, women's community activism has existed as one of the key resources for abused ethnic minority women whose needs remained unmet by general social services in the United States. For abused Korean American women, Korean American women activists founded organizations to offer culturally competent support for women in their community. Fourth and finally, abused Korean American women experienced paradoxical and varying consequences of their contexts through their daily lives. A better understanding

of how Korean American women adjust their interpretation of gender ideology and negotiate their marginalized contexts may lead to developing contextually competent health care support for this population. The focus of support should not be solely on combating specific risk factors, but should also be focused on combating contradictions and challenges in their unique contexts.

In order to further develop culturally competent services for abused Korean American women, research is needed to understand how Korean American women activists provided support for abused women in their community. There is little known about experiences of these activists regarding the phenomenon of domestic violence. Since domestic violence is constructed based on the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class, understanding domestic violence from the voices of their own community is critical. Understanding the perception, response and challenges of these women activists will enhance our understanding of domestic violence in the Korean American population.

Therefore, the researcher worked with a group of Korean American women community activists and to explore their activism against domestic violence in a Korean community. Closely aligned with the approach of critical postmodern feminists, the researcher aims to elicit the voices of these activists who have worked to build resilience through community action for several decades. Special attention will be paid to chronicling and revealing their perceptions and their endeavor to empower other women in their local community.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study aimed to answer the question: what are the experiences of Korean women community activists working with abused Korean American women in the North East over the last three decades? Findings are intended to inform health care providers regarding regarding the provision of culturally competent services for abused Korean American women. This chapter presents a description of the methodology in the first section. The second section addresses the study methods, including: (a) research design; (b) sample & recruitment; (c) data collection; (d) data analysis; (e) credibility and (e) ethical conduct of research and human subject consideration.

### **Methodology**

#### **Qualitative Research**

While quantitative research focuses on studying causal relationships between variables rather than process, qualitative research attends to the process of how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincon, 1994. p.4). Hence, the qualitative approach fits with inquiry about people's experiences; meaning of their experiences; contexts of their experiences; and research about understudied phenomenon for developing standardized instruments (Patton, 2002. p.33).

Only a small number of scholars have contributed to our knowledge of Korean American women's community activism (Kim, 2013; Park, 2005). Some of the most notable work has included one dissertation about Korean American women's community activism and Christianity (Kim, 2013) and one article about the politics of Korean

American women's activism toward the Anti-immigrant wave (Park, 2005). Due to the dearth of study, there is lack of empirical knowledge regarding Korean American women's community activism and domestic violence. To enhance our understanding about this phenomenon, this study utilizes a qualitative research paradigm, exploring the experiences of activists through dialogue.

I aimed to elicit a dialogue with Korean American women community activists to explore overlapping constructs of immigration, gender, ethnicity, community and violence, and chronicle these women's endeavors to support abused women in their community. Through this dialogue, I intend to inform health care providers and promote the provision of culturally competent services.

### **Interpretive Description**

In order to study the Korean American women activist's experiences of supporting abused women in their community, I draw from multiple philosophical paradigms: constructivism, empiricism, post-positivism, feminist theory, and critical realism. Through these philosophies, I recognize multiple truths based on individual interaction and interpretation; social construction of realities based on collective subjective and inter-subjective experiences; and complexly patterned realities based on social construction.

In qualitative research, nursing scholars primarily use grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology (Sandelowski, 2000; Thorne, 2008). However, I was confronted with some contradictions in using these methodologies in the nursing discipline because this applied professional discipline demand practical knowledge not



merely descriptive and/or theoretical. As Thorne pointed out<sup>2</sup>, these methodologies have been developed from different disciplines that are based on their disciplinary philosophies and intellectual objectives. As a nursing researcher, I started to confront these differences and asked, what do I want to do with this research to inform nursing practice?

Nursing is an applied discipline that is looking at not only "what is" but is also asking "how to" questions regarding the human experience of health and illness (Thorne, 2008). As this nursing philosophy needs to be reflected in nursing research, I wanted not only to describe the phenomena related to health and illness, but also to apply the knowledge that I acquired from studying the phenomena to nursing practice. Therefore I decided to use Thorne's interpretive description that is based on nursing philosophy. To this end, the following section will introduce Thorne's interpretive description and discuss how this methodology will be applied in the research process.

Interpretive description is a methodology developed by Thorne in the mid-1990s to generate knowledge related to human health experience (Thorne, 2008). As an applied professional discipline, nursing has a unique aim to apply knowledge to address human health and illness issues. Further, nursing scholars face imminent need to act on their best

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<sup>2</sup> Thorne (2008) pointed out different disciplinary purposes of grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology as below. Grounded theorists within sociology strive to uncover the implicit basic social processes that drive human action. Ethnographers in the anthropological tradition focus on the variation of human nature. And phenomenologists within psychology and related fields explore perceived reality based on subjective human experiences. She argued "While each of these disciplinary traditions has a role to play within the larger world of ideas, none of these approaches is compatible with the pragmatic demands of the applied disciplines, whose members find themselves incapable of suspending action until they fully understand a problem". These studies aim to know the nature and pattern of phenomena. Contrary to that, the nursing discipline has an aim to know how to apply our knowledge to address immediate health needs of individuals and develop the optimal clinical response. Although nursing scholars can use particular skill set/elements of those other disciplinary traditions, we cannot meet the immediate need of our discipline without being grounded in nursing philosophy. To this end, Thorne developed interpretive description methodology as a qualitative research strategy with the practical aim drawn from nursing philosophy.

understanding without time to suspend their practice until they fully understand a problem. Considering these disciplinary practical demands, Thorne (2008) created a qualitative research approach that extends beyond mere description and into the inquiries of the “so what” that drives this practice discipline. The term “description” is used to explain studies whose purpose is to document what one observed (Sandelowski, 2000) and the descriptor “interpretive” enables the researcher to examine problems by relying upon practical analysis (Thorne, 2008). Based on this definition, interpretive description provides qualitative description as well as analytic explanation of the phenomena. The next section discusses how this methodology was applied throughout the research process.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

I used an interpretive description approach to understand the experiences of Korean women’s activists supporting abused Korean American women. This study uses interpretive description as an inductive analytic approach designed to yield implications for nursing discipline based on the description (Thorne, Kirkham, & OFlynn-Magee, 2004). Guided by the interpretive descriptive method (Thorne et al., 2004), I sought to understand the phenomena through a research question with the intention of informing disciplinary thought in nursing.

Aligned with a community-based approach<sup>3</sup>, I collaborated with the Korean American women activists to challenge the inequality of power relations between the researcher and the subjects. Community-based research is characterized with its emphasis on nonacademic researcher's participation in the process of knowledge creation (Israel et al., 1998). Through this study, I intended to give voice to KAWAP activists who have supported abused Korean American women since 1986 in Philadelphia. I have been involved in the KAWAP community for 3 years as a member of the organization. I also participated in its' board meetings, counseling, and community education. While working with this community of volunteers, I discussed the possible direction and main theme of this study with leaders of the community. During the study design process, I tried to reflect their opinion and gave them a space in which they could create the purpose of this collaboration. The process took 3 months to collect the internal opinions of KAWAP activists about their participation in this study. First, the KAWAP activists collected the opinions of volunteers about this study through internal meetings. After collecting their opinions, KAWAP activists had several meetings with me to gain a mutual understanding of the research direction, design, and method of this research. After the meetings, KAWAP fully endorsed the proposed project and agreed to facilitate this study by

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<sup>3</sup> Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker (1998) noted a critical distinction in community-based research is the extent of community participation: either (a) community-based research which is conducted in a community in which community members are not necessarily participating actively, or (b) community-based participatory research, which involves conducting research in the community with active engagement of community members in all aspects of the research process. The key principles of community-based participatory research follow: (a) recognizes the community as a unit of identity; (b) builds on strengths and resources in the community; (c) facilitates collaborative, equitable involvement of all partners in all phases of the research; (d) integrates knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners; (e) promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities; (f) involves a cyclical and iterative process; (g) addresses health from positive and ecological perspectives; (h) disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners; and (i) involves a long-term commitment by all partners (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 2001). As a dissertation study, I could not demand long-term commitment and participation of all members of this community in all aspects of the research processes; nonetheless, I acknowledging this study as community-based research, involving participation of the community activists in part of this study.

providing counseling records and contacting activists who have volunteered for the community. During the data collection process, KAWAP members engaged in this study through providing counseling records and participating in individual interviews. After initial data analysis, I brought the initial analysis results to the second individual interviews and asked the members' opinions about the results. I also asked them if there is anything that they want to add to the findings. Through this continuous collaboration, KAWAP activists engaged in project planning, data collection and data analysis stages of this project.

According to Thorne et al. (2004), interpretive descriptive research consists of detailed investigation, often involving multiple data-collection strategies to avoid naïve overemphasis on interview data. This interpretive descriptive study was guided by a rigorous analytic process for analyzing multiple data sources. The multiple data sources include counseling-document data collected over time and qualitative interviews of activists in the local Korean immigrant community.

There were two phases of rigorous analytic processes with interconnected data sources that were analyzed through collaboration with members of KAWAP. In Phase 1, a total of 70 counseling records of abused Korean American women who called the center for support between 1986 and 2014 were analyzed. Phase 1 explored the range of responses offered by KAWAP activists and challenges that arose in their interactions (see Appendix A). Early analysis of the counseling records served as a guide to revise the interview questions and interview guideline in Research Phase 2. In Phase 2, I conducted semistructured interviews and participant observation with community activists who

worked in KAWAP between 1986 and 2015. The interviews used a semistructured interview guideline that began with sections exploring the experience of counseling abused Korean American women (see Appendix B). A minimum of two interviews were conducted with each participant to confirm findings from the analysis of the first interview. Prior to data collection, I obtained approval from the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the study protocol.

### **Data**

Qualitative researchers primarily rely on three kinds of data: (1) interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents (Patton, 2002; Thorne, 2008). I used individual interviews and written counseling documents as the data sources for this dissertation. According to Patton (2002), interviews provide direct quotations about experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge. Through interviewing, the researcher can enter into the other person's perspective. Although qualitative researchers obtain subjective data predominantly through interviewing, a notable limitation of interviewing is that the way participants live may not be collected through the interview (Thorne, 2008). During the interview, it is possible that the participants are not telling about their true experience for some reason. It is also possible that the participants are not remembering from their experience correctly or omitting/adding something when they talk about their previous experience. Rather than mistrusting their authenticity, qualitative researchers need to consider the imperfection of individual accounts.

Document analysis involves studying experts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official

publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys (Patton, 2002. P. 4). Document analysis has the advantage of minimizing the researcher's engagement in data construction (Thorne, 2008). Since this type of data offers a range of subjective and objective knowledge, this data source is especially useful for qualitative health researchers (Thorne, 2008). The limitation of documentation is that it tends to have been written in a manner that pays attention to possible readers' responses (Thorne, 2008).

Since each form of data has its strengths and limitations, qualitative researchers promote using the *Triangulation* strategy (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p.22; Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002, p.247; Thorne, 2008). By using multiple forms of data, researchers can have multiple landmarks and these landmarks provide multiple directions to reveal different aspects of empirical reality (Patton, 2002, p.247). Thorne (2008) also suggests using multiple data sources to overcome the epistemological pitfalls that each of these data sources might have. Hence, this study uses counseling documents, and interviews with a group of Korean American women activists.

**Documents.** Since 1986, KAWAP has retained records of counseling cases involving family, child, and elderly issues (KAWAP, 2011). As a grassroots organization, their phone counseling document system has evolved over time. Currently, a small portion of this counseling and support effort has been documented in their counseling reports. One major counseling issue covered in these reports is the severe psychological distress due to difficulties in the family during their settlement and adaptation to the life style of the United States. Moreover in many of these cases, women reported severe

family conflict, including domestic violence. Among those cases, activists identified 70 detailed counseling documents of domestic-violence cases based on their definition of domestic violence. The ways of defining domestic violence of the activists were further explored in in-depth interviews in Phase 2. During the interviews, I inquired about how the activists differentiated cases of domestic violence from other counseling cases based on their definitions.

**Interviews.** Considering the relatively small size of the local Korean women's community, I used purposive sampling to recruit participants who worked as activists to support abused Korean American women. Initially, the purposive sampling was preceded by recruiting participants based on a list provided by an expert or key informant (Polit & Beck, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Thorne, 2008). Key informants are individuals who are highly knowledgeable about the organization and develop special, ongoing relationships with the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Due to the long history of this community, I needed key informer's expertise from this community who have the most accurate and current information about activists who worked in the community between 1986 and 2015. I developed ongoing relationships with the president and director general of the local Korean community as the key informants. They created the list of possible participants by informing their activist members about this study participation opportunity by using a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C). Key informants and activists who participated in the study were supplied with IRB-approved recruitment flyers to provide information about the study and to refer other study participants.

Interviewed participants were recruited from KAWAP, a Korean women activists community organization located in Philadelphia, until the researcher achieved “theoretical saturation of content” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The estimated sample size was approximately five to eight participants. According to Thorne (2008), although the vast majority of interpretive descriptive approaches include between five and 30 participants, interpretive description study can be conducted with any number of participants. The justification for the sample size is based on (a) what is needed to comprehensively explore the study’s underlying subjective experiential nature; and (b) how many instances of a thing to observe and analyze are needed to report thick descriptions that make a meaningful contribution to the field (Thorne, 2008). For a homogenous group, five to eight participants were suggested to be possibly sufficient (Kuzel, 1999). I recruited eight interview participants who were willing to share their experiences with me until there were no new themes or questions to explore (Thorne, 2008), that is, sampling to the point at which no new information is obtained and redundancy is achieved.

*Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of the Korean American women Participants*

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Years of involvement	Profession	Religion	Marital Status	Education	Class
Ami	75	28 years	Teacher	Christian	Legally Married	Graduate school	Upper middle
Bongsun	77	28 years	Physician (retired)	Christian	Legally Married	Graduate school	Upper middle
Chanmi	68	25 years	Housewife	Christian	Legally Married	Bachelors	Upper
Dana	41	3 years	Counselor	Christian	Legally Married	Graduate school	Upper middle
Eunju	64	27 years	Housewife/Counselor	Christian	Legally Married	Graduate school	Upper middle



(previous)							
Gina	52	1 years	Social worker	Christian	Separated	Graduate school	Upper middle
Hana	?	25 years	Teacher	Christian	Legally Married	Graduate school	Middle
Paran	78	28 years	Physician	Christian	Legally Married	Graduate school	Upper middle

I explained the purpose of the study to participants and ascertained their willingness to participate in the study. All participants were compensated for their time and effort with a \$25 gift certificate.

Based on the recruited participants, inclusion criteria were (a) self-identification as a Korean woman; (b) self-identification as having counseled abused Korean American women, and (c) the ability to speak, read, and understand the Korean language. Exclusion criteria for this study are (a) an inability to complete the informed-consent process in either Korean or English; (b) an inability to schedule sufficient time to complete the interview; or (c) reluctance to discuss this topic.

### **Data Collection Process**

**Documents.** A major source of material for this study was hard copies of counseling documents. The original counseling documents were de-identified, photocopied for the research process and returned to the community. Hard copies of photocopied historical counseling documents were carried in a locked briefcase and will be stored in a locked file cabinet (with no identifying information attached) for 5 years, to facilitate future research, and then will be shredded. Hard copies of photocopied historical counseling documents were scanned using a scanner with an electronic encryption. Electronic data including scanned counseling documents files were stored in a secured University of Pennsylvania server to facilitate future research, with a secure

backup. Counseling documents were translated into English by a bilingual member of the research staff and I monitored the accuracy of the translation.

**Interviews.** The interviews were conducted in Korean or English, according to the preference of the participant. I conducted all interviews at a location chosen by the participant that the participant considers to be private and comfortable. I used an in-depth semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). I explained the purpose of the study to the participants and ascertained willingness to participate in the study. This was followed by a series of standardized, open-ended questions that systematically and flexibly explore the participant's perceptions and responses about abused Korean American women during counseling. The next section posed a series of questions regarding challenges and needs of this Korean community to better support abused Korean American women. Finally, participants were asked about the expected roles of healthcare providers to support abused Korean American women. Probing techniques were used to elicit detailed explanations such as "Please tell me more about it." "Can you give an example?" "What does that mean to you?" I used recorded responses along with memorandum notes were used as a data source to describe and gain an understanding of the experience of counseling abused Korean American women.

The main source of material for this study during the interview phase includes recorded voice interview data, and data generated from interview transcripts. Written consent, memoranda, and interview field notes were carried in a locked briefcase and will be stored in a locked file cabinet (with no identifying information attached) for 5 years to facilitate future research, and then will be shredded; electronic data including recorded

voice interviews and transcribed interview files were stored in a secured University of Pennsylvania server to facilitate future research, with a secure backup. Digital data will be stored for 5 years to facilitate future research in University Pennsylvania server and will be destroyed.

For data collection occurring away from the site of the university's secure server, encryption software was installed on my laptop for temporary data storage. I managed study data by using Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) to secure the data-tracking process. REDCap is a secure web application designed to store data for research studies, providing web-based case report forms, real time data entry validation for data types and range, audit trails and de-identified data (Obeid et al., 2013). The system was initiated at Vanderbilt University and developed by a multi-institutional consortium including Pennsylvania University (Harris et al., 2009). All data collected for this project was stored on the School of Nursing Research Server and the REDCap database. By using REDCap, I accurately managed audio recording files of interviews, transcribed interview documents, and translated interview documents on a secured server. Only the research team and I had access to this data. Regular consultation was made with an onsite specialist regarding security of information technology.

### **Data Analysis**

A rigorous analytic process of interpretive descriptive research (Thorne, 2008) was used to analyze counseling-case documents of abused Korean American women between 1986 and 2012 and interview transcripts. Thorne et al. (2004) articulated a "rigorous analytic process in interpretive description" that entails carefully navigating

within and beyond the original theoretical scaffolding to fully engage the process of inductive reasoning. The rigorous analytic process consists of three sequential processes: (a) beginning the analytic process: moving beyond the self-evident; (b) engaging the analytic process: engaging the mechanisms of interpretation; and (c) concluding the analytic process: envisioning the research product (Thorne, 2008; Thorne et al., 2004).

In beginning the analytic process, researchers apply and also challenge the theoretical framework and conceptualization that the inquiry initiated. This process enables the researcher to recognize the preliminary theoretical scaffolding that has been used to establish the study, and gradually depart from it as alternative information arises (Thorne et al., 2004). Distanced from the original lens, the researcher can explore alternative linkages, exceptional instances, and contrary cases as a mechanism of broadening the concept (Thorne et al., 2004). Through this beginning analytic process, I asked myself the way in which I conceptualized women's community activism and domestic violence before and during the construction of the study. After recognizing my initial viewpoint, I set aside my initial conceptualization and described what I saw in the data as it is.

In the interviews conducted in non-English, culturally appropriate analytic skills is required for researchers to capture explicit and implicit expressions of respondents (Suh et al, 2008). During the data analysis, translation and timing of translation can significantly influence study findings (Suh et al, 2008). For bilingual researcher, non-English narrative analysis is recommended to avoid losing contextually or culturally specific meanings and implicit communications (Suh et al, 2008; Temple et al, 2006).

Recognizing the possible limitations of translation, data analysis was performed with both Korean and English language. Initially, I coded Korean counseling documents and transcripts in English. After all Korean counseling documents and transcripts were translated in English, I coded the English documents and transcripts. After coding process, I compared the two coded theme and looked where the translated part in English did not convey the theme in Korean language.

Engaging the analytic process, researchers prepare data with sequential cognitive processes that include (a) comprehending data, (b) synthesizing meanings, (c) theorizing relationships, and (d) recontextualizing data into finding (Morse, 1993). To comprehend and organize the data, I used coding and memoing techniques from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). During the preparation process for the conceptualization, I read the data multiple times and marked what I saw each time by using multiple colors and creating conceptual mappings (Thorne et al., 2004).

After the sequential cognitive process, I created conceptualization through thematic description that displays “how elements within the larger phenomenon can be ordered and organized to reveal aspects that would have been obscured through any other presentation framework” (Thorne, 2008, p. 173). To focus on and engage in this intellectual process, I asked repeatedly, “what is happening here” (Thorne et al., 2004). In this engaging analytic process, I used the assistance of NVivo Software for technological support to code data.

Lastly, in concluding the analytic process, I ordered observed themes into a story (Thorne, 2008). I once again applied my theoretical framework and drew on thematic

patterns characterizing the phenomenon from the complex description of the data (Thorne et al., 2004). This final product illuminated the phenomenon of Korean American community women activist's support for abused Korean American women in a new and meaningful manner (Thorne et al., 2004).

### **Rigor & Credibility**

Thorne (2008) suggests several ways to secure rigor and credibility of interpretive description including *epistemological integrity*, *representative credibility*, *analytic logic*, and *interpretive authority*. In addition to the listed four principles for articulating evaluation standards of interpretive description, she further points out more subtle critiques regarding qualitative research. She claims that rigid adherence to text book approaches can propagate weakness rather than strength in research enterprises (Thorne, 2008). Highlighting the fundamental uniqueness of the health discipline, such as having moral obligation toward individuals and the collective, she proposes additional evaluation criteria including *moral defensibility*, *disciplinary relevance*, *pragmatic obligation* and *contextual awareness*.

**Epistemological integrity.** Thorne (2008) defines *epistemological integrity* as a defensible line of reasoning from the assumptions to the methodological rules by which decisions about the research process are explained. Guided by committee members, I reviewed the logical consistency of my listed philosophical perspectives, research questions, design, data collection and analysis method. For the data analysis and interpretation process, I continued to closely work with the research committee to check

the compatibility of research findings with the assumption implicit in the design or influence of the predisposed knowledge of the researcher (Thorne, 2008).

**Representative credibility.** This refers to whether theoretical claims the researcher purports to make are congruent with the manner in which the studied phenomenon was sampled (Thorne, 2008). Thorne noted that having prolonged engagement with the phenomenon and triangulation of data sources could enhance afforded credibility. Therefore, I addressed *representative credibility* by using multiple data sources and having a prolonged collaborative relationship with the activist group.

**Analytic logic.** Reporting *analytic logic* reveals the reasoning process of the researcher to draw interpretation and knowledge from the data. During the data analysis process, I informed how my inductive analytic logic and process occurred. To present the adequacy of the decision making process, I used reflective journal as an explicit reasoning pathway (Thorne, 2008).

**Interpretive authority.** This offers assurance to readers that a researcher's interpretations are trustworthy by overcoming his or her own biases or experiences. To enhance trustworthiness, I regularly worked with a group of qualitative research scholars to examine my interpretation. Also, I conducted second interviews with the participants to share my preliminary analysis and clarify the evolving interpretation process (Thorne, 2008). Lastly, I shared transcripts and my analytical memos with my research chair and committee.

**Moral defensibility.** Since the nursing discipline aims toward knowledge that would influence its practice, nursing researchers need claims about how the knowledge

will contribute to the humanitarian health care agenda (Thorne, 2008). *Moral defensibility* was reflected in how I generated the research questions. I presented the necessity and purpose of this study in Chapter 1 by arguing the unmet needs of abused Korean American women and lack of knowledge regarding culturally competent care for those women.

**Disciplinary relevance.** Thone (2008) emphasizes that the purpose of interpretive description is to generate knowledge within the applied and practice disciplines. In nursing discipline, scholars endeavor to expand knowledge that has the potential of making a difference in their health care practice (Thorne, 2008). To inform health care providers in the development of culturally pertinent care, this study aimed to explore how Korean American women activists provided support for abused women in their community. I reviewed with my committee members to ensure how *disciplinary relevance* was reflected during the data analysis process.

**Pragmatic obligation.** Researchers should put forth their findings that can be applied in practice rather than remaining at a purely theoretical level. (Thorne, 2008) I acknowledged the impracticality of providing culturally competent services to abused ethnic minority women without knowing what it is. To fill this gap, this analysis illuminated how abused Korean American women can be assisted culturally pertinent ways.

**Contextual awareness.** Thorne's (2008) interpretive description requires epistemological claims that reveal the influence of the researcher's own perspective. I closely consulted with my supervisor regarding the influence of my previous experiences



on this study and followed her guidance. As moving forward, I continuously asked how my perception shapes the analysis process by utilizing research journal.

### **Ethical Conduct of Research and Human-Subject Consideration**

Participant recruitment and interviews were started after receiving IRB approval of this study. Participants were asked to sign a consent form to participate and were informed that this study was approved by the university IRB. A statement regarding the right to withdraw were included in the consent form and participants were verbally informed that they could withdraw at any time (see Appendix D). The informed consent was given at Phase 2 of the study because Phase 2 of the study involved in-depth interviewing, including voice recordings.

To minimize risk related to participant burden, participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time and were free to decline to answer any question. To minimize emotional distress, I appreciated the distress that participants may experience when reflecting on the counseling experiences with abused Korean American women. I continuously assessed for symptoms of severe distress during interviews. A protocol to respond to participants who express severe distress was in place. If any participants experienced severe emotional distress at any time during the participation, I planned to stop the interview and refer to the distress protocol (see Appendix E). I planned to assess participants based on the protocol and report to a consultant for recommendations on appropriate action. I planned to ask for consultation on this study if participants exhibit extreme emotional/psychological distress or if concern arises that a participant is in danger.

The overall project provided better understanding of the context of community support for Korean American women experiencing domestic violence. This study may contribute to identifying the disadvantaged status of abused Korean American women, to point out their limited social support. Abused women's contexts could vary significantly, based on the community response toward each individual. Based on a comprehensive understanding of historical, sociocultural, and political contexts of abused Korean American women, implications could be ascertained that will aid in tackling community challenges to support those women.

### **Summary**

Through this chapter, I described the rationale of using interpretive description as the method of this study and presented how this method guided the construction of research design, sampling and recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedure. This research approach helped me articulate the range of experiences of Korean American women activists working with abused Korean American women in the North East. This analysis also revealed how multiple constructs of immigration, gender, ethnicity and community influence on their experience. Through this analysis, I anticipated informing health care providers regarding how to provide culturally competent services for abused Korean American women.

### **Chapter 4. The Experience of Members of Korean American Women's Association in Philadelphia**

This chapter describes how members of the Korean American Women's Association in Philadelphia (KAWAP) narrate themselves and the history of this

association. The chapter provides background and contexts for the women in KAWAP which will be built on in the next chapter by looking more specifically at how the association supports abused Korean American women. The KAWAP volunteer's experiences, motivations for participation, interactions in this association, and the way they narrate the history of this association are critical for helping readers to understand why KAWAP respond to domestic violence in the way that they do. Hence, the chapter focuses on the experiences and the contexts of women volunteers in KAWAP.

### **Who I am and Who we are: their descriptions of self-identities and group-identity**

KAWAP volunteers repeatedly stated that their self-identity shapes how they understand themselves and their association. These women describe their identities as multiple and complex; further, they use this complex identity to explain their motivation for engagement and actions in the association. Therefore, in order to understand the experiences of the women volunteers of KAWAP, I focus this chapter first on the ways they narrate their own identity.

### **Self-identity as a Korean and Korean woman**

One identity that all women in this association reported was their self-identity as a Korean. According to their recollection, six of them left Korea to come to the United States when they were young adults. While these members spent most of their lives in the United States, they identified their ethnic identity as Korean.

So anyway, I am Korean. I was raised like that too. Of course while I'm in the U.S., I have to act like everyone else, but my root is Korean. Also it's impossible to change what I've learned in the past (Chanmi<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> Keeping research ethics, all names used were pseudonym.

I was born in Korea, and I have many habits of a Korean person. I also have the mindset of a Korean person, and I find Korean the most comfortable to speak (Bongsun).

Yes, I am Korean. Korean, Korean. I came to this country to get my education and married an American, but my identity is Korean (Ami).

Along with their Korean identity, they reported feeling comfortable with speaking Korean and interacting with Korean people. All informants mentioned that they maintain a network with Koreans through their participation in Korean church or Korean community activities. This strong connection to a Korean community in the United States also becomes the basis for their activity in KAWAP, the goal of which is to help Korean American women.

The existence of a Korean American women's association through which Korean American women can help other Korean American women was described as a deeply significant part of their lives. Despite other differences, both the women offering support through KAWAP and the women seeking help shared experiences and common understandings as Korean women living in the United States. Since these members also experienced difficulties related to being ethnic minority women, they saw the necessity for the service, which became part of the motivation for them to engage in this association. This shared subject position also becomes an essential asset in offering counseling and education services tailored to the unique context of women in their community. One woman's account illustrates how their shared experiences as Korean women was reflected in their counseling services:

They can just get something off their chest and get some fresh ideas while doing that. We also lead them to good ideas...I think their suffering can be reduced this way too. Some people seek that, and they're women too. It's easier to talk to

another woman. Both are people who left Korea. I think that allows for the mental barriers to come down to call and share (Hana).

Thus, for most of the informants, their self-identity Korean woman were rooted in their experiences in this association because they were able to sympathize with and recognize the unmet needs of other Korean women through their common linguistic and cultural background. Because the women felt more comfortable being around other Korean women and understanding the experiences of living as a Korean in the United States, they felt the need for a community association to offer broad support to the Korean American women's community. In other words, being Korean American women served as a key role in creating a self-help group. Based on their common self-identity as Korean women, this group of women acknowledged the need to support Korean women in their community and engaged in action through their association.

### **Self-identity as an American & Korean American**

According to several of these women, they had multiple identities including that of being an American. Their prolonged encounters with American society acculturated them with American culture. Particularly women whose professional lives involved working with other Americans recognize themselves as Korean American. For example, one woman described herself as having Korean American identity "Officially, I'm *Korean American*, but truthfully, I'm pretty much *Korean*. *But my citizenship is here*. I had my children here, so *they are American by birth*, but their *ethnicity is Korean*. *I make sure they got their Korean American identity* (Paran)." Another woman preferred to state

her identity as American but also recognized her Korean heritage. In her case, her life experiences of suffering in Korea gave rise to her hesitancy to admit her Korean identity.

*My identity has melted into American society. I'd like to be a citizen of the U.S. My image of Korea is actually not very good. I'd like to be mingled in this society. I'm very happy to be in this society. I'd like to be identified as a good citizen of U.S. and retired professional, physician. Yes. I lived most of my life, 50 years, here. Even my thinking is Americanized. I like to be an American citizen. I'm sorry for Korean government but we've suffered when I was there. I don't have any good image of Korea. First of all, I admired the founder of this country. They followed whatever God leads them. Jefferson they followed whatever God said. So I like this country and I like the founding philosophy of this country. I'm happy being here... And I owed to the U.S. what they treated us. I think I've treated better than I treated in Korea. Korean government wasn't that good. But you know, I still love Koreans. My husband is also Korean. But I still don't like the Korean government (laughing) (Bongsun).*

For half of the informants, they expressed themselves as Korean American. They didn't see Korean and American identities as distinct entities, but rather viewed them as coexisting on a bridge. Regardless of their emotions concerning their home country, they cared about the image of Korean American women in American society. When they saw successful Korean Americans, they felt proud. When other Korean Americans were successful, they felt that it was their success, and they were proud to be Korean Americans living in the United States. One woman described the ways in which Korean Americans achieve success, highlighting the way they overcome hardship as ethnic minorities.

Why we're so successful is not because we're smart, but because we work hard. We have a barrier to overcome. We recognize the barrier and know we should do better, or we won't be chosen. They are successful because of that drive and why there are so many Asian doctors. The GI head in Harvard is also Korean. The concertmaster in the Philadelphia Orchestra is also Korean. He went to Julliard University. What the Jews accomplished, Koreans are doing now. Most violinists and pianists were Jewish before. Now, Koreans are taking those positions. It's

amazing how many. Why? Of course they were talented, but because of their disadvantage, they worked harder for it (Paran).

Recognizing Korean American as their group identity, the members of this association expressed Korean American as “we” during the interviews. Meanwhile, when they saw an unfortunate Korean American, they felt ashamed as a group. Because of this strong group identity as Korean American, KAWAP volunteers did not want women in their community to be labeled as poor, helpless, or unresourceful. Instead, they worked to create a community that could provide support and resources for struggling Korean American women. Rather than ignoring struggling community members, they overcame difficulties by huddling together: leaning on each other to overcome the challenges of living as a doubly marginalized group in the United States. Particularly, this association was started in response to the urging of the first Korean woman lawyer, Dr. Lee, that Korean American women needed to help each other to avoid shame on their group identity. After hearing the stories of Korean American women who had suffered various difficulties in the United States, she visited more established Korean American women living in major Korean enclaves in the United States and told them:

It's good to live in the U.S., but we should have pride for our own country. Korean women shouldn't be ashamed living in American society, so I want you to help the other women that were suffering.

In response to this summon, several Korean women gathered and initiated the Korean American Women's Association in the Philadelphia Korean community. This story reflects that the Korean American group identity influenced the establishment of KAWAP.

The informants of this study joined the Korean American women's association and engaged in its activities for a variety of reasons. For many informants, the most important reason for their engagement was the opportunity to help Korean American women in their community. Witnessing Korean American women going through difficulties while living in the U.S. motivated them to help. For example, one woman recounted the motivation that led her to engage in this association.

I liked the idea that I could do things for others to help them and even more so specifically that I could help women. I told her I would join, and I was with the organization when it was founded in 1986. I thought the purpose of the organization was good, and there was none like it at the time. I simply *joined* with the mindset that I would be able to help others, to help Korean women. There was no other special reason. I thought the purpose and the motivation was good, so I *donated* my time and money (Bongsun).

For these women, benevolent will toward other Korean American women in their community motivated them to keep investing in this association. As mentioned earlier, this goodwill toward other Korean American women was also linked with their self-identity as a Korean American woman. Because of a shared identity, the women thought that they and those they sought to help had common experiences and mutual understanding of their problems. One woman stated, "Because I have the same blood as them, I can understand their *background*. As I've said before, I knew *all the problems and traditions of Korea, and how they treat women, so I know* (Bongsun)."

Based on their deep understanding of what was happening in Korean American women's lives, they were emotionally engaged and felt that they needed to help these women. When they heard stories of Korean American women in unfortunate circumstances and could not provide help, they felt hurt.



Yes, there was a story about a woman at our church. The people only spoke about her situation but couldn't help so the situation became worse. So when I talked to her to offer help, because we both went to the same church, she kept her distance from me even more. She ended up switching churches because of me, and I couldn't help her. I was hurt because of that. I had good intentions, but it didn't end well (Chanmi).

The women realized that there were clear limitations to individual assistance, but continued to acknowledge the necessity of community action for the Korean American community of women. Based on this acknowledgement, they were motivated to act collectively as members of the Korean American women's association.

### **Self-identity as a professional**

Seven women informants had professional identities as teachers, doctors, counselors, and social workers. The demand in the group for these women's professional knowledge and experience also created an opening for the women's involvement in this association. Their professional identities gave them a niche in the association and they were able to provide community services that were related to their specialties. For example, one woman who worked as a counselor in Korea joined this association when there was a need for counseling services.

Since 1985. I wasn't there when it was first founded. I didn't know about it then. After they met a few times, one of the members reached out to me asking me how I felt about doing some counseling for them, and I attended their meeting. I took interest, and I *joined (Eunju)*.

For three women, the main reason for participating in this group was self-development. Women who worked as volunteer counselors in particular tended to name their intentions for career development and character building through their involvement

in free counseling services as reasons. These three women whose professions were related to counseling, involvement with this association could yield practical experience. For example, one woman recalled, "I counseled because of my previous experiences and started thinking that this is all I could do as public service. Since I did go on to graduate school, I thought I should have some kind of contribution to society (Eunju)." For Eunju, engagement in the association activity was not only a way to reuse her previous professional skills but also a chance to utilize one's own specialty to give back to a community. Another woman was also involved in this association as a part of her internship experience.

I majored in counselling in school, and I was on a curriculum that required me to get an internship. I was looking for one when I found out about the association (Dana).

For her, volunteering at KAWAP was to develop her counselling skills. Either in the case of utilizing their professional specialties or in the case of developing their skills, these women participated in KAWAP association for their own benefits rather than being altruistic. Interestingly, two women who were engaged in KAWAP continued their participation in this association even after achieving their goals of career development. Dana continued her engagement after her internship as a volunteer counselor so that she could continue providing free counseling services for people in their community. She explained her continuous engagement in this association:

I did have thoughts of quitting after just the internship. Yet, I was challenged by watching the amount of effort the members of the association were putting in to help the Korean women of Philadelphia. They have their own jobs as well, but they always look after others' needs, and I thought to myself that this is the way I want to live my life as well. Also, I think our goal in life is not to live for ourselves but to help those around us. Working here is like taking that first step to

do so. When I was a student, my only goal was for my own studies, but through the internship, I realized that there are so many people in need of help. I felt that my efforts could be put to a good use through my time here (Dana)".

While some women thought of volunteering as a chance for career development linked to their educational background, other women thought of it as an opportunity to learn a life lesson through volunteer work. These women thought that they were not only developing their career skills as counselors but also learning life lessons by hearing the stories of other women. One woman reflected that she had become a better person by participating in counseling activities through this association.

I have tough times in life too, but it helped me get through those tough times better. I also was able to understand people better. I used to also talk a lot back then, but now I've become a better listener. I think it helped me to become the person I am today and helped me to become more mature. Those people taught me so much (Chanmi).

Life lessons learned from counseling cases led the women to recognize their engagement in volunteer activity as a beneficial learning experience. Chanmi also accounted that "There are two things. It helped me, but I think the fact that I was able to help others was good." Whether the goal was to develop one's career or learn life lessons or both, the volunteers realized that their community service was not only helping others but was also helping them.

In contrast, women who were housewives described themselves as benefiting from the association in different ways. While they were not trying to add a line to their resumes, they were able to do work outside the home, thus satisfying their desire to "not be just a housewife." For example, one woman stated that:

Personally, I thought it would be better than just being at home and taking care of the kids, and I could help people through the women's association.... So I would take a book and lunch with me to the office. I would pick up phone calls, eat my lunch, and read my book. When it was time for my children to come home from school, I would go back home. I always wished I had a job in the U.S., so I worked at the office (Eunju).

In her case, working at this association was a way of fulfilling her desire to have a job in the United States. Beyond reasons for involvement that were related to their identities as professionals, these women's activities in this association were also bounded by their professional ethics. What they learned as professionals in their respective fields influenced every aspect of their engagement in this association. They applied ethical principles from their professions to their work with the group. For example, one woman recalled a situation when she could not give her contact number to a client because of her learned professional protocol.

After about 6 months, when the kids were a bit grown up, she came to the office to thank me. That was when I was leaving the office. I told her that I was leaving and going to *Washington D.C.*, and she wanted my phone number. I told her that if she needed counseling, even if I weren't there, other people would be here, so I told her to just call the association. I don't know what happened afterwards. I didn't give her my personal number. It was a *professional issue*...so I don't know exactly what happened to that woman (Gina).

Her story reflected the extent to which maintaining her professional ethics was an essential element in providing voluntary counselling services to women in their community. Like their other identities mentioned earlier, their professional identities also permeated their perspectives and influenced their practices in this association. And as will be seen, this inseparable link between the women's self-identities and their actions also manifested itself in their roles in the family.

### Self-identity as a wife

Other women also reported their identities in terms of being a wife. They recognized their roles as a wife in the system of family as one of their important identities during the interviews. One woman identified herself as "Me...I'm just Mr. Kim's *wife* (Chanmi)." She explained she initially joined this association through her husband's alumni meeting, and that her husband also supported her engagement in the association. According to the members' accounts, their husbands' support for their engagement in this association was a critical factor in their continuing engagement in this association. Another woman explained how support from the women's husbands was important to their activities.

Every time we meet, our husbands have to give us rides. About 80% of the *speakers* at our lectures were men. There weren't many female *speakers*. A lot of men also wrote and published articles. All of the articles in the association books were from *professionals*, so there were many men who wrote for us (Paran).

As they engaged their husbands in KAWAP activities, they were also very cautious about the possibility that people might be "turned-off" by a feminist label. Many women in this association were reluctant to identify themselves with feminism due to the perception that it connoted aggressive fighting with men to attain women's rights. They chose to reject the feminist label while highlighting their identities as happily married women.

Many members also support the women's movement, but *we're not feminist. We're very happily married wives*. We do have some rights that we need to have, but we've never fought men to gain those rights. Never. Dr. Lee was like that too. She had a *happy* marriage with her husband. *She loved him and he loved her*. She was also very feminine, not scary like the people in the *feminist movement*. She was very feminine and was shy talking about her husband. She has three children as well. *Happily*. She never fought men, but worked hard to raise the position of

women within society. We helped each other out, and men began to *respect* us. I don't think the women who throw pots and take off their bras in *feminist movements* are right. I think we *inherited* that mindset from Dr. Lee. Those of us who met together were all *happy*. It was mostly *happily married women (Paran)*.

Her story showed how Korean women felt uncomfortable with the hostile propaganda of earlier feminist movements and how they consequently rejected any association with feminism. As seen in contemporary feminist literature, the standardized popular imaginings of early feminist movements, as connected only to femininity, man bashing, and lesbianism, resulted in the dismissal of the feminist label among women (Scharff, 2010). Having witnessed the aggressive feminist movement earlier, KAWAP women thought that a happy marriage could not coexist with the movement. For them, being a feminist meant denying their role as wives within their family relations. Their self-identity as wives led them to not only reject the feminist label but to also step back from arguing any political stance. Although they had grievances about the disadvantaged status of Korean American women and were making efforts to remedy the situation, they ultimately felt troubled to be under the feminist banner. By rejecting feminist labeling, they could get the support of a broad range of people in their community, including their husbands and other Korean families. The strong representation of radical feminists inadvertently ostracized and marginalized the efforts of numerous feminists (Dean, 2012) including those efforts of KAWAP members.

### **Self-identity as a Christian**

Four informants expressed a Christian identity, and for the members who described themselves having a Christian identity, the Christian identity influenced their engagement in the association in several ways. First, a Christian identity provided the

rationale for their engagement: helping other people. According to one member, having a Christian identity led her to participate in the group's activities. "I'm *Christian*, so I'm always concerned about helping others live, to help the soul within them to live (Dana)." Her idealized image of a Christian was that of a believer helping others; this image became her motivation for engaging in the work of this association. In addition to being the motivation for engagement, their Christian identities also shaped their experiences and responses during volunteer work. For example, one woman found praying to God effective in dealing with her frustration during her counselling work.

I would feel frustrated with the people, and also wonder how men could treat women like this. I even thought that I should never get married. At the same time, I think I trained myself for marriage on how to raise a family. I had many more reasons to pray as a Christian (Gina).

Drawing on networks in their churches, Christian volunteers also called on their pastors to provide counseling services to callers who expressed their Christian faith. One woman who had worked with hospitalized women recalled a collaborative experience with her pastor:

She was admitted into "A" hospital, and I visited her with the pastor often. She was so happy every time I visited her and told us it was the first time she met such kind Korean people. One morning, around 8 AM, they called me to tell me that she had passed away, so I went with the pastor from my church to pray. The government provided a funeral for her. After the funeral, we had a church service in her memory. The pastor, the women's association, and counselors all gathered, and she left the world like that. I helped the case like that (Ami).

While some members actively collaborated through their networks with Korean churches, one counselor acknowledged that the services provided by their association were differentiated from those provided by the church. Because community service

provided through the church falls under a religious category, she thought that there would be certain restrictions in helping Korean American women. While religious principles and power relations limited the scope of church work, she thought that the actions of the women's association could be more flexible and directed by women:

It was comfortable for me to work with other Korean women. For example, if I volunteered at the church, I found myself saying or doing things that I didn't want to due to religious reasons. Also, when men are present, they usually take the leadership and take things in the direction that they want to, and it's hard for our generation to do otherwise. Because of the patriarchal mentality, it's hard for me to take things in the direction that I would want. In comparison, the women's association is very flexible. I can also speak Korean, and it's with other women, so it's very comfortable for me. In churches, because things are already solidified with religious labels, it's hard to reform (Eunju).

In her case, although she also identified herself in terms of a Christian identity, working in this association provided her with more freedom from the restrictions of religious disciplines and rules.

Thus, along with their other identities, the Christian identity of some women volunteers also influenced them in their motivation for engagement and subsequent interaction with women callers. The closeness of the link between their conceptions of self and their actions indicate the inseparability of relationship between who they are (their identities) and what they do (their actions).

### **Navigating multiple self-identities**

As Abraham (1996) illustrated how women activists negotiate within their multiple identities, KAWAP women volunteers also acknowledged their multiple self-identities through their experiences in this association. The women's diverse identities as



Koreans, Americans, women, wives, professionals, and Christians intermingled and influenced their experiences in this association from their initial joining through their continuous engagement in their collective actions through this association. Informed by multiple identities, KAWAP volunteers developed their own unique ways of supporting Korean American women in their community.

When we look at our history, Korean women went through a lot of persecution and difficulties. That was Dr. Lee's agenda in helping that fraction of the population. She was happily married, and she loved her husband. Her stance was to live together in peace. Together, not against each other. We also had that stance. Even if a woman who experienced domestic violence came to us, we would say that those things happened because of the difficulties of adjusting to immigrant life but emphasize the importance of understanding and reconciling with each other. Never against, but towards reconciliation (Paran).

During the interviews, informants often mixed more than two identities together when they identified themselves, such as describing themselves as both Korean American and Korean women. According to their accounts, these multiple ideations of self were so closely tied together with their life experiences, they found it difficult to define themselves simply in terms of a single identity. One woman articulated her feelings about explaining her identity:

It's ambiguous. Difficult. It's hard to find an *identity* when you have lived for decades. *I'd like to be identified as a good citizen of U.S. and retired professional, physician.* I have a Christian identity too (Bongsun).

The women volunteer's multiple identities sometimes conflicted with each other and required them to balance the different tasks demanded by each. Regarding this, one woman described their situation, saying, "I think as mothers, teachers, and women, we should have that kind of position. Yes, it's up in the air (Hana)." To fulfill their multiple

roles and identities, they worked hard to balance their time and efforts. One woman explained how she found time to work as a volunteer counselor in KAWAP while satisfying her roles as both a mother and a student.

I finish my normal tasks and before I begin studying, if I have time, I check if there are any *missed calls* and call back. If there were no phone calls at all before 4 or if I receive a late call, I let my kids study in the evening, and I call a little bit before dinner and record whatever I need to record after I put the kids to sleep later (Dana).

In conclusion, it is impossible to say that any one identity shaped the motivations and actions of the KAWAP volunteers. It is not simply that they are Korean, or American, or women, or because they are Christian that they chose to volunteer and help. Rather, it was a complex intersection of their identities that motivated their engagement.

### **Group identity**

The group of women in KAWAP have gathered to work together for almost three decades. This association did not have a strong group identity at the beginning, nor did group identity cause the formation of the group. By working together for this prolonged period of time, they gradually began to see themselves as “we.”

Academia and scholars might be tempted to view this group as a domestic violence advocate, counselling center, feminist organization, and/or form of women’s community activism, but these identifiers are not necessarily what they use to define themselves. According to their accounts, what mattered is what they are doing as a group rather than inclusion in any specific category. They saw themselves as a group of Korean American women helping other women.

Listening to the perspectives of these women forces us to consider KAWAP from a different angle. The informants stated that what really mattered for them were the motives of their association; they were not concerned with labels and recognitions. As Ami said, “It’s just a small organization. I think what’s more important is the intent of the organization.” During the interviews, many women repeatedly stated that the goal of their association was to “help Korean American women in Philadelphia.”

One of the group’s previous presidents also explained how the KAWAP members carefully chose their name to convey this intention.

We didn’t want to name ourselves “counseling center” because we didn’t like to be narrowed down. We were also not confident in legal matters, so someone *suggested* naming ourselves the Philadelphia Women’s Association. We liked it because it was *neutral*. Calling ourselves a counseling center would narrow us down, so I think we were more comfortable with the Philadelphia Women’s Association (Bongsun).

The members of the association agreed that Korean American women in the United States are often unfairly treated and suffer, and as a result, the KAWAP members wanted to support these women. While they took the position of supporting Korean American women in their community, they refused to attach the “feminist” label to their association. As mentioned earlier, some members of this association expressed their disagreement with the aggressive American feminist movement. One member explained how they were differentiated from American feminism in that:

Many members also support the feminist movement, but we are not feminists. We’re very happily married wives. We do have some rights that we need to have, but we’ve never fought men to gain those rights. Never. For their rights? I’m not sure. I think we wanted to help women. Also to build up skills in women for self-respect. Our members make an effort to do that (Paran).

The volunteers were, without any labels or categorizations, simply meeting community needs that they felt were brought to them and that they felt equipped to deal with. It is not that they formed KAWAP with any strong group identity nor that they existed to deal with any specific problem such as domestic violence. Rather, the association exists to serve the needs of Korean women in their community. In other words, they did not see themselves purely as a group aimed at addressing domestic violence. They care only about domestic violence issues in the context of women in their community suffering from these issues and needing support for them. Participants imagined their association as a space where women could come with problems and receive assistance. At the broadest level, the way these women ultimately defined the mission of their association was by drawing on their own culture and linguistic competencies to meet the unfulfilled needs of Korean American women in their community. In the next section, I explore what these needs are by detailing the general stories of Korean American women who needed the help that the association could offer.

## **Discussion**

Throughout this section, the self-identities and group identity of KAWAP members have been used to understand their engagement in this association. Both their self and group identities have profound effects on their initial joining and continuous engagement in KAWAP activities. The scholarly literature confirms the strong influence of identity in the creation of collective claims, recruitment into movements, strategic and tactical decision making, and movement outcomes (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). In fact, the links between their self and group identities and community participation revealed a great

deal about the negotiation within social relations. Based on individual identities and their social contexts, KAWAP members' experiences of engaging in community work were different from each other. For example, in terms of the motivation for their engagement, while professional women engaged in this association out of benevolence, other women participated for self-development. In this case, it was not their identity as women alone that shaped the formation of KAWAP's activities, even though it was a women's organization. Rather, it was the balancing of their multiple identities that influenced the creation and action of the group.

The accounts of KAWAP volunteers showed how they worked to balance their multiple identities. As Koreans, Americans, women, wives, professionals and Christians, they developed their own unique standpoints. By embracing often conflicting identities, the KAWAP members positioned themselves strategically in their relations with their community. For example, the volunteers recognized that in order to provide support for Korean American women, they paradoxically could not prioritize women, but actually had to prioritize family harmony. Only by rooting their work in this Korean cultural value could they connect with and serve the women in their community.

The KAWAP members also saw their multiple identities as mixed rather than as separate entities. They juggled different roles and prioritized different aspects of their identities in different contexts. For married women in particular, support from husbands and children was necessary to continue involvement with KAWAP, and they gained it by evading specific polarizing or controversial labels like feminism. The group's self-identity was gradually developed through its continuous work in the community; it had

not been established with a concrete image in mind. Avoidance of labeling (such as counseling center or feminist) helped them provide a wide range of services and avoid backlash from their community. Moving above and beyond these labels, they focused on providing culturally and linguistically competent support to meet the unmet needs of Korean American women in their community.

Despite the women empowering nature of the services provided by KAWAP, their narrow understanding of the feminist movement led them to reject feminist labels. They actively distanced themselves from being labeled as a feminist organization. Since KAWAP women imagined feminists as hostile and man-hating, they distanced themselves from the feminist banner in order to maintain their “happily married women” identity. Considering most KAWAP women witnessed the early feminist movement in 1960s-70s, these women’s rejection of the feminist label could be a result of negative representations of feminism in the media (Scarff, 2010). Their rejection could also be attributed to the exclusion of ethnic minority women in the early feminist movement by middle-class white women (Aronson, 2003).

During the interviews, the class identities of the KAWAP women volunteers were implicit in their accounts. All interviewed KAWAP women volunteers identified themselves as middle-upper class women in their demographic survey. Nonetheless, they rarely narrated their middle-upper class identities. While these privileged women had access to various social resources in the United States, they observed that other women in their community were under-resourced and excluded. Seeing lesser fortunate, troubled

women who did not have support not only made them uncomfortable as middle class women, but it also made them feel inclined to protect and uplift their group identity as Korean American women. By sharing knowledge, access, and resources with other under-resourced Korean American women, the KAWAP women could enhance their group identity as Korean American women as a whole.

### **What I see: Volunteers' stories of Korean American women seeking help**

Volunteers at KAWAP witnessed various difficulties experienced by Korean women after their migration to the United States. Difficulties commonly described by Korean American women included the language barrier, limited access to resources (transportation, money, human resources), cultural barriers, and domestic conflicts. The volunteers' collective actions stemmed from the problems that they witnessed. To understand the rationale for their collective action, and the way that they conceptualize problems faced by Korean American women in their community, in this section I consider broad problems addressed by KAWAP. Chapter 5 will look more specifically at how this association engaged with domestic violence cases in their community considering the intersections between these broad issues and domestic violence.

### **The language barrier**

Out of the many factors contributing to the disadvantaged status of Korean American women, English incompetency was the most common and often most debilitating one, and led to communication issues both within and outside the family (Min & Song, 1998). Since not all Korean women had access to English education in Korea, many came to the United States unequipped for communication. While English

incompetency was not a major issue in Korea, it became a major barrier in interpersonal and social interaction in the United States, and Korean American women struggled to communicate within and outside their families, sometimes to serious detriment. Korean American women who married American men in particular often reported domestic conflicts due to their limited ability to communicate with their husbands. For example, a volunteer described one woman's strained situation saying, "she couldn't speak English, couldn't get a *job*, couldn't speak to her husband, and the husband also grew up in a family with problems, so he couldn't get *support* either. So she suffered alone" (Gina). Another woman spoke about the communication issues that another Korean American woman had experienced with her husband:

The woman's husband was a U.S. soldier who met the woman during the Korean War. They came to the U.S. together, but the man had a change of heart. Also, the woman didn't receive too much education, so she couldn't speak English that well. Her tone of speech was also rough...it must have been uncomfortable for the husband, which is why there was a lot of discord between them. She couldn't speak English well. She could speak only basic phrases. She said her marriage was difficult. They had one child...Her husband would ignore her and not even treat her as a person. Eventually she said he put her in the hospital as a mental patient. It was a case like that (Chanmi).

When Korean American women who were not able to speak English fluently experienced marital conflict with their American husbands, they also had trouble procuring help from outside of the family. Even if these women desired to get external help such as consultations with counselors or lawyers, they could not fully utilize those services due to language barriers. Participants further described communication barriers



Korean women faced when they tried to consult lawyers. One woman said that it was hard to consult lawyers for Korean women due to language barriers:

We introduce them to the *list* of lawyers we know and the pro bono lawyer list. We are connected to some American lawyers, but because of language barriers, clients are hesitant to *contact* the American lawyers. We usually try to introduce them to free legal services (Dana).

Even when they introduced Korean women to Korean American lawyers, Korean fluency proved to be yet another obstacle. For example, one participant expounded on a situation in which she had to translate for another Korean woman during a consultation with a Korean lawyer.

The lawyer was Korean when we went, but he couldn't speak Korean very well. I went with the woman to help her (Gina).

Overall, many members of this association observed that Korean American women could not fully utilize the available legal services due to language barriers. And because of their legal disadvantage in defending themselves, Korean American women experienced unfair marital and custody issues often and potentially had to give up their children.

Dr. Lee began to see the *language barriers* and *cultural barriers* that internationally married Korean women had to go through. Also, those women were also in the *lower class*. Those women followed their husbands to the U.S., but they couldn't *adjust* and became divorced. I heard the rate of divorce was around 50%. Dr. Lee found out about that. She found that these women would marry American husbands and follow them to the U.S., where they were neglected and treated harshly, and that they would get divorced and lose custody of their children (Paran).

This communication barrier issue also applied to situations in which Korean American women tried to get help from the police. Since the police often do not have an

interpreter, Korean women cannot even report their situations. For example, one woman who worked as a counsellor related:

If a woman called the police in a domestic violence situation and the police come, whoever can speak English wins since they have to speak to the police. Whoever speaks English better can give the *report* that sounds more realistic to the police. Also, police in the U.S. do not use an interpreter. That's a problem. Koreans face a lot of injustice because they can't speak English. Even when they're right, because they can't defend themselves, if a person with legal authority says anything, they're dead (Gina).

This disadvantaged situation also applies when Korean American women who sought to escape domestic violence. Many participants said that Korean women declined to go to shelters due to the language barrier.

We connected them to *shelters*, but women don't go there. They cannot communicate in the shelter because they can't speak English (Paran).

Korean American women also needed help with English communication within the healthcare system. Offering Translation and ride arrangements for women who seek hospital care were the most prevalent services requested by Korean American women. One woman recalled when she offered to help a woman attend her prenatal hospital visits, saying,

Since 1987. Earlier, we didn't keep any records, but the first case I remember is a woman who called asking for help in translating. Back then, many Korean women went to *Abington Hospital* to give birth. She didn't know how to speak English, so we gave her *rides* and translated for her. She said that she didn't have any friends or family in the U.S. to help her. I helped her every time she went to the hospital, and eventually she had the baby (Eunju).

For the participants in this study, the language barrier was a very critical issue for Korean American women living in the United States. Their stories remind scholars of the extent to which English competency was an integral skill for Korean American women in

both their lives inside and outside of their families. In addition, these stories show how the members of this Korean American women's association tried to help other Korean American women with English incompetency.

### **Limited access to resources: transportation**

In addition to communication issues, the women volunteers of KAWAP also saw that the women in their community had limited access to transportation. KAWAP members perceived this lack of mobility to be a further marginalizing factor. The accounts of the participants revealed that Korean American women often did not have access to cars and sought help from the association. Being on the margins of society as immigrants, many Korean American families often have only one car per family. Since their mobility was dependent on their husbands, these women often became confined at home, particularly when public transportation was not located close to their homes. Many participants mentioned that they offered rides for Korean American women who needed to make hospital visits or go grocery shopping for Korean food. Another participant described a Korean American woman's isolated status in the following terms:

In another case, I'm not even sure where the phone call came from. Her husband owned a grocery market and was also a church pastor. But listening to her story, this was a complete home church. He would run a church with just his family. She said there was some kind of economic benefit to running a church. Some kind of tax reduction I think. So they ran a church together, but she felt like she was living in a prison during their marriage. She didn't have a car, no money. If you don't have a car in the states, you are pretty much stuck in one place (Eunju).

This isolated situation also applied to women who sought help outside of their families. While they are confined at home, it was not easy for them to find and use social

services. When Korean American women sought help from this association, they often dropped by the office after having walked or taken the bus to get there.

Yes. She was grocery shopping when she saw the sign "Korean Women's Association". She didn't know what it was and came in. The first time...well she didn't drive. She didn't have a car, and I think she used the bus. She said her husband would take the car, so she couldn't go outside. But the children would cry a lot, so she would take them and go grocery shopping with them. I don't think she lived that far from the office (Gina).

The participants in this study considered the issue of transportation to be one of the determinants influencing the accessibility of social resources to Korean American women. Although members of this Korean American women's association try to help these women by providing ride services, these stories reveal the larger picture of the women's immobilized status in American society.

#### **Limited access to resources: money**

Women's unpaid work also reinforces gender inequalities (Abraham, 1996; West and Fenstermaker, 1993). There are many Korean American women who do not have an independent professional career. KAWAP saw that Korean American women did a great deal of unpaid labor such as homemaking or working for family businesses. Without being directly reimbursed for their labor, they became economically dependent on their husbands.

She lived with her husband and her in-laws, but her husband was too devoted to his parents. They ran a grocery store with his parents, but he would give all the income to his mother. The client had almost no money. She would work extremely hard, but get just enough money to barely get by. He didn't share their income with her. So she didn't have any kind of economic rights within the family. Her husband managed everything related to money, and she was treated like a slave (Eunju).

Since their expenditures were overseen and monitored by their husbands, it was hard for them to get private counseling or legal services regarding domestic issues (or when there is conflict with their husbands). Considering that free counseling and legal consultation services are often not readily available, these women could feel helpless without access to social services.

*Psychiatrists* do exist, but it costs money to go to them. That's the biggest cause. It's a large fee. Also, these kinds of counseling don't end with one or two sessions...at least psychological counseling. Because of that, they don't actively seek them (Hana).

Not only were many Korean American women unable to afford help from a psychiatrist or lawyer, they also feel afraid of separation from their husbands for economic reasons. Many informants had heard of the cases in which Korean American women continued to live with violent husbands due to their economic dependency on these husbands. One informant described one of the cases below:

Rather than it being natural, I think she just had many reasons that made it impossible for her to leave her husband. Mainly, economical reason. Her husband makes money. Also she claimed that he usually treated her nicely. It's like this now too, but back then, there weren't many Koreans who had jobs at companies or firms. It was more couples running a store together, which means the family is connected altogether. This woman also ran a Laundromat with her husband. For that reason, I don't think she would've taken into consideration her economic situation for a divorce anyway (Chanmi).

In times of troubled familial situations, women's economic independency can help them receive counseling or legal consultation services. However, when these women's financial resources were limited, their access to social services were also be compromised. Thus, the members of this association tried to offer counseling services

and legal programs for these economically dependent Korean American women.

Although these programs faced some limitations, which will be discussed later, this group of volunteers recognized the needs of women in their community and combined their efforts to provide the needed relief.

### **Lack of access to resources: networks and support systems**

Another void addressed by this association was the lack of new networks and support systems in the United States for Korean American women. When women's access to resources is limited, the role of networks and social support becomes crucial in filling the gap. This is especially true for Korean Americans, who have left their communities behind in Korea and who therefore have to find a new trustworthy support system in the States (Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; S. Moon, 2003). Extended family members often serve as crucial support for family members. Korean Americans tend to lose one of these necessary support systems upon leaving their country. Although they can still remain in contact via the phone or Internet, it is hard to get practical support while living in entirely different contexts. One woman described how Korean American women felt that there was no one who could help them, noting, "She said that she didn't have any friends or family in the U.S. to help her (Eunju)." Another participant described the lack of interaction with her previous support system in Korea.

In Korea, interactions with your relatives and friends are frequent. Yet, there's nothing like that here. Even for me, I have no relatives here. I'm the only one here. In those situations, there's no way to really talk to someone and no way to interact with someone. There are no interactions, and the cultural habits become completely neglected. We're living in an Americanized *Korean community*. It's not like this in Korea (Hana).

Even if they had extended family members in the United States, they were not always readily available when Korean American women need present help. When their own family members were not available, these women often sought help from community services. One participant recalled a time when she had to be a guardian for a hospitalized Korean American woman whose sister was not available.

In another case, a woman had gone to the emergency room due to pain and called our association for help. I went to the ER to meet her and she continued to contact me afterwards. I always met with her and listened to her stories from the beginning to the end. She came to the U.S. to help her older sister who was sick. Unfortunately, she became ill herself and it turned out that it was cancer. Her sister was too sick to move and go out, and I was the only one who could move around and help her. I took care of her and even her funeral after her death. I suffered with her together through everything (Ami).

While it was hard to get support from one's extended family in the United States, it is also not easy to find someone who could be trusted and counted on to provide support. Particularly in a small Korean community, people worried about the possibility that their private situations could be leaked and shared in their communities. One woman explained how hard it was for Korean American women to find someone to confide their problems in in hopes of receiving help.

From what I hear, there are many grave situations...where would people tell someone about that? The church? If they tell people in the church, rumors would circulate to everyone. That's the problem. It's better if they tell the counseling center. There's no place for women to talk... Even if they have friends here, there are situations when they can't get everything off their chest. Also, from my experience, you share your story to people you've known for a while? Sometimes, that comes back to bite me. The friendship doesn't continue forever, and people end up in bad terms over small things. And later, it becomes a scar to both people (Hana).

Thus, for those who had already experienced significant distress after sharing their experiences with someone in their community, attempts to find trustworthy people could be profoundly stressful. After becoming frustrated with their own communities, Korean American women often gave up on sharing their private problems and getting support from their existing network. Alternatively, they chose to call anonymous free counseling services through this association, which did not pose the risk of gossip or rumors.

### **Cultural barriers**

According to the accounts of KAWAP volunteers, an important area of concern for Korean American women was cultural issues. These cultural issues were caused by 1) lack of understanding of their new culture, 2) challenges of negotiating when to act Korean or American or both, and 3) the culture of saving face. Women at the community centers understood these cultural issues faced by Korean American women which enabled them to provide culturally competent counselling services.

One example of the cultural issues cause by unfamiliarity with American culture was the difficulty Korean parents faced when their culturally assimilated children behaved in ways they could not understand. Particularly in the case of Korean couples who came to the United States with working visas, many of them did not have the opportunity to be a part of the American education system and interact with Americans in very close school settings. Also, Korean couples whose living environments were bound to Korean enclaves had less of an opportunity to be acculturated. Due to their lack of understanding regarding American culture, Korean parents (1<sup>st</sup>-generation Korean



Americans) struggled to relate to their children (2<sup>nd</sup>-generation Korean American) who were assimilated to American society. For example, one participant attributed this parent-child conflict to the parents' lack of understanding American culture:

In the U.S. children talk about prom for the four years in high school and show off their dresses to me. That's how exciting it is. But Korean parents don't send their kids to prom. In a Korean perspective, it looks like a marriage celebration. They ask "What is this marriage? What are you doing with that boy?" Yes. It almost looks like a Korean marriage, but that's not what prom is. I earnestly ask the Korean parents to send their kids because it is an event that they had been waiting for four years, but they always say no. That's why the parents and children have a bad relationship, and it breaks my heart. There were many cases like this. Korean parents have a hard time understanding their children. Koreans don't have that experience in the background they grew up and were educated otherwise. In Korea, children have always learned to obey their parents, but that creates a gap and problems when the parents try to teach as such here (Ami).

While many Korean American women often did not have the opportunity to learn about American culture, most of the KAWAP volunteers were professional upper-class women deeply acquainted with American society. Observing that other Korean American women had a hard time understanding their assimilated children, the KAWAP members were motivated to share their knowledge of the culture and systems, as education could resolve problems caused by lack of cultural knowledge. However, members of KAWAP observed that some of the cultural issues women faced were also caused by the challenges of navigating their bicultural (Korean and American) social locations.

Beyond these issues with American culture, there were also cultural issues when Korean Americans interacted with each other with different standard of enacting Korean or American culture. Korean American women encounter the culture of an unfamiliar society and navigate a way to live between the culture of their original country and that of

their new country. During social interactions, individuals decide to enact certain cultural patterns (norms) based on their own rationalizations. Conflict during these interactions is more likely to occur when Korean Americans interact with each other with differing expectations of how the other will behave because of differing cultural norms.

Korean society was difficult then, and people were busy trying to make a living. They (Korean American men) would have that mentality and come to the U.S. to study. Even if they (Korean American men) stay in American society for a few years, they wouldn't be completely westernized. But that still doesn't mean they're completely Korean. It becomes a complete *mix*. By tradition, they (Korean American men) would expect traditional things from women, but they would also have a westernized mindset and wonder why the women can't adapt to their western mindset... It's like that. Then Korean women have to follow Korean culture when interacting with their husbands and in-laws, but both Korean and American cultures when interacting with their children. Even while working, they (Korean American women) have to follow the rules of American society, work in equal footing with men. Then, when they (Korean American women) come back they have to act like a Korean woman. I think it's hard to *balance* and *manage* that kind of life (Hana).

Hana pointed out the mixed pattern of behavior of Korean Americans following perceived cultural norms of traditional Korean or American culture. In this case, it was not about knowledge of American culture (or lack thereof) but about negotiating which cultural norms would be followed within individual interactions. Even within one's family, each family member required different styles of practicing cultural norms (either Korean or American). As Hana stated, Korean American women were often doubly marginalized when they fail to negotiate cultural norm practice in their family relations by working equally outside the home in accordance with American culture and doing all the housework inside the home in accordance with Korean culture. This meant that Korean American women were expected to work the same amount of hours outside the

home, but had to do all the chores inside too. This issue, however, was about more than culture differences. It was about power relations and negotiating one's role and responsibility in the household. Couples could begin to feel discontent with each other when there was inconsistency or absurdity in role-related requests made of others.

### **Saving face**

Beyond these cultural barriers, there were additional cultural factors that came out of these women's accounts. According to women in this study, the community association was able to offer culturally competent services because of their awareness of Korean cultural concepts. This section illustrates how the informants drew on shared cultural concept to connect with and support Korean American women who sought help from this association.

In the accounts of members of the Korean American women's association, talk of cultural competence often involved talk of "saving face". Among these women, there was an operating assumption that "saving face" was critical to maintaining social relationships in Korean community. Women in this association provided stories of Korean American women who choose to save face rather than act in their own best interest as discussed in what follows.

According to the informants, Korean Americans strive for saving face. 체면 (*Chemyun*), which can be translated in English as saving face, honor, reputation or dignity. This means making one's position fair and behaving honorably in human relations. One participant pointed out the extent of the significance of saving face in the Korean community, saying that "Dignity is also very important to Koreans. In front of

others....that dignity part of *culture* is so huge (Paran).” Saving face is a cultural phenomenon in which the individual acts in accordance with her knowledge about how she is socially judged by certain standards in her community. Therefore, the way to keep one’s dignity is based on how the society has set the standard of judgments towards the individual. Sometimes, these standards were applied differently based on one’s social position. For example, one woman explained how ways to save face could be applied differently in Korean American society based on gender.

The *saving face* mentality that women had was different from men's dignity. What I mean is that men's dignity is about earning a lot of money and living well. Men who don't earn much still buy good cars. I still remember. There's a street where all of the Korean marts are lined up in *D.C.* There was a man driving his new *SUV* in that narrow street. His wife came to receive counseling. She went around wearing old clothes, but her husband always dressed nicely, oiled his hair, and wore sunglasses. He also rode nice cars...in that sense; there was a lot of "*external saving face*". In addition, he didn't speak a word of English. Even if they live in the U.S., they still work with other Koreans. Women's dignity lies with their children doing well in school. I went to a school meeting with a client to translate for her. Mothers there would say "yes, yes" to the teachers, but yell at their children "why did you do that?" From the mother's experience, if the child does well at school, the teacher wouldn't say anything. "I can't speak English, but I work so much to feed you and for you to live well, but why can't you study?" I think that's the kind of dignity mothers have: being praised by others by how well their children do. The father's dignity is about making a lot of money. It's different that way. It's cultural.

As this example illustrates, Korean individuals make efforts to present themselves as close to the idealized social image of men and women as possible, believing that this is a way to maintain their dignity. Meanwhile, when individuals cannot meet the standards of social expectations, they cannot save face and, therefore, believe that they are under social blame and feel shame. The cultural concept of saving face is closely linked with the phenomena of shame and stigma (Chung, 2006). In the accounts of women

volunteers, references to saving face also often involved discussions of shame, stigma and anonymity. Thus, understanding the concept of saving face requires one to interpret the ways in which these three phenomena are present in the world of Korean American women.

***Shame/stigma: Threats to saving face***

Shame and stigma regarding family problems in the Korean community are so strong that Korean people are reluctant to discuss the problems even with counselors (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). The emergent theme of the counseling documents was that women called this association when they could not stand the situation any longer. Due to the stigma attached to family issues, such as domestic violence, abused women only contacted this organization when they reached their limits. Even though stigma is differentiated from shame because it involves social blaming, these women often use these terms interchangeably. Korean word of 수치 (*Suchi*) can either be translated in shame and stigma. According to the accounts of the informants, Korean American women presume that when there is any family conflict, it was a shameful issue involving social blaming.

When the women talked about domestic issues that they were experienced, community people tried to pinpoint the women's role in causing the problems and blamed the women for not completely fulfilling their responsibilities as daughters, wives, and mothers. In other words, they blamed the victims. Particularly in a patriarchal society, women are expected to sacrifice unconditionally and remain subservient to fathers, husbands, husbands' families, and even to their sons. Therefore, in this social

environment, women did not tend to talk about their domestic problems with others because they knew that they could be targets for blame.

KAWAP volunteers stated that Korean American women suppressed their desire to seek counseling because of pride concerns. While having a family conflict in the first place can lessen one's dignity in the community, talking about the conflict could impair one's reputation further. When individuals believed that it was shameful to seek outside help for domestic problems, they were discouraged from getting counseling. One woman described how Korean American society suppressed women from discussing their difficulties:

Because it was a male dominant society, there was no channel to expose the difficulties that women faced to the public. Also, people were concerned with saving face that the society considered women who exposed those things stupid. They told women that they should keep those things to themselves in Korea (Gina)

Since saving face enforces women's silence regarding domestic issues, Korean American women seek outside help only when they are desperate enough to defy cultural pressures. Another woman further illustrated how an individual's decision to get counselling was connected with feelings of shame and compromised dignity.

It's a problem that requires a lot of determination. It also hurts your pride to reveal that you were a victim of violence. It reveals why the person has to be a scapegoat. It's revealing all of that. They're in that position because they couldn't avoid it? Would they be in that situation if they could avoid it? No....But still there's dignity. Our culture is from dignity. Dignity and pride, so they can't reveal it. There are many situations in which the clients can come up with the plan that the counselling center gives by themselves. The reason they call is to want psychological comfort, an outcry for breakthrough. Outcry. Right? Humanly outcry. Korean women live while suppressing even that...the fact that they don't tell even the counselling center (Hana).

Because members of this Korean American women's association recognized the relationship between dignity and shame in requesting counseling services, they allowed women callers to seek counseling without revealing any identifiable information, such as their full names, phone numbers and addresses.

Because they fear social blame, Korean women either do not actively seek help regarding their family issues or seek help anonymously. Several participants also mentioned the prevalent preference for "anonymity" among Korean women in their community as a strategy to maintain their dignity.

*Anonymity: Strategy to saving face*

To avoid possible blaming or shame in a small Korean American society, Korean women tend to live with anonymity. Judging from interactions with Korean American women in their community, several participants acknowledged that Korean American women usually did not reveal their full names when they introduced themselves. Through their interactions with various groups of Korean American women, the volunteer counselors realized that Korean women do not prefer to reveal their original full names that they used in Korea. One participant described this preference for anonymity displayed by culturally dictated namelessness:

Also, I don't know if it's to protect their identity or by habit, but I don't think our culture is familiar with exchanging names. Americans introduce themselves by their names, but Koreans don't do that. I'm not sure about men, but especially women do not (Eunju).

Korean American women's anonymity in general was observed during their interactions in the church and at other social gatherings. According to the volunteers'

account, Korean American women introduce themselves as Ms. (husband's surname), which is neither their original last name nor their first name. Historically in Korea, Korean women keep their unmarried last names. After their migration to the United States, most Korean women choose to change their last names to their husbands' family names, and in the process, they lose their original surnames. The informants of the study believed that the reasons for this namelessness stemmed not only from strong patriarchal cultural traditions and but also from prevalent distrust between Korean community members.

People don't like to share their names with strangers. Even friends of 20 years don't know each other's names. In the U.S., Koreans don't call each other by name and instead say "Mrs. this". And that last name is also the husband's, so people think it's just natural to not know others' names. In the early 90s, some women in the church wanted to put their own last names in their titles. There was a small movement like that. It became better, but *still* there were many people who didn't share their names (Eunju).

There is already existing preference for anonymity in Korean culture general. This preference heightened with migration to the United States as they assimilated to the American culture, which change women's last name following one's husbands' name.

Normally, I just go by *Mrs. Kim*. No one knows me. However, when I'm working at the women's association, I work as *Park Chanmi*... I am originally a *Park*. When I came to the U.S., I switched it to *Kim* to follow my husband's. Outside of the association, only people whom I have a personal relationship with know me as *Park Chanmi*. Most people don't. I'm just Mr. Kim's wife (Chanmi).

Korean American women's anonymity particularly stands out in the interactions between the members of this association and women callers. Besides the tendency of Korean American women to prefer anonymity, most Korean American women callers do



not give their phone numbers or the geographic areas in which they live. For example, one woman described how Korean American women tried not to give away revealing information:

Their dignity is important to them...in Korean *culture*... So problems like that, they speak *anonymously* through the phone. Everyone knows each other's face in this small community, and they couldn't risk showing their faces. Some women claim that they are calling from Baltimore or Virginia, but when we check the caller ID, the call is from Philadelphia (Paran).

One woman explained the reason for this unwillingness to give away identifying information, pointing out the socially charged shame from talking about family issues: “You know, Koreans place an importance on their dignity, so I think they're afraid of telling others about their problems. That's why not many people leave their phone numbers (Eunju).”

In Korea, domestic conflict is a source of shame to women and their families, and it can insult their reputations as individuals and harm their group identity. Due to this direct connection between shame and domestic conflict, Korean American women tried to keep their identities as much as possible a secret. As mentioned earlier, the volunteer counselors of this association respected their desires for anonymity. The KAWAP volunteers had a deep understanding of this unique and pervasive culture of “saving face”, and thus recognized the necessity of confidential counseling services for their community.

## **Discussion**

In this section, various unmet needs of Korean American women in the Philadelphia community were described from the accounts of the members of KAWAP.

Their accounts illustrated the main social and cultural difficulties faced by the women with whom they worked.

After migration, Korean American women experience intensified family conflicts due to the lack of cultural knowledge and enforced double cultural standards. Analysis of Korean American family's cultural norm practices as articulated in the scholarly literature confirms the volunteers' narrative that the relationship between maintaining traditional Korean gender ideology and experiences of domestic conflict (E. Lee, 2007; Y. Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Song, 1996). The scholarly literature tends to view these phenomena as though traditional Korean gender ideology caused domestic conflict. From the accounts of these informants, however, Korean American women experience conflict with their partners not because of the traditional Korean gender ideology itself but because of the process of negotiating which cultural norm practice (Korean or American) to follow. Therefore, the volunteers acknowledged that this issue is at its core more about how to negotiate within gendered power relations.

Although Korean American women experience more family conflicts after their migration, cultural and social barriers impede them in actively solving the problems. The Korean cultural prescription against revealing personal details prevents them from seeking outside help regarding domestic problems (M. Choi & Harwood, 2004). As ethnic minority women, Korean American women have limited access to social services due to their language barriers (Min & Song, 1998) and lack of access to social resources as well (Abraham, 1996; West and Fenstermaker, 1993, Y.Lee & Hadeed, 2009; S.Moon,

2003). After witnessing these situations of Korean American women, the volunteers decided to provide them with services in linguistically and culturally competent ways.

The volunteers had ongoing interactions with these women and decided to empower their community by listening to the women's needs and acting as responsive agents. Based on their acknowledgement of the difficulties that these women faced, the members of KAWAP worked behind the scenes to provide various services that assuaged problems such as language barriers, lack of transportation, lack of money, lack of support systems, and cultural barriers.

### **How things change**

In addition to their motivations for engagement, needs of Korean American women in their community, and their activities to address those needs, the changes this association has experienced over time is another thing that we should understand as we think about how this association responds to women in their community over time.

Most of the participants in this study were the original members of this Korean American women's association who had been in this association for three decades. Over this period of time, they noticed chronological changes in the society in which they lived and in the association in which they were engaged. As this organismic association responded to the social and cultural changes over time, these changes influenced their daily experiences in the association.

For example, domestic violence is socially constructed. Since the society changes their definition and responses to domestic violence over time, social context also changes their attitudes toward domestic violence as well. If we take that seriously, we also have to

take seriously that this association respond to social and cultural changes, so their response to domestic violence and how to treat it is constantly changing and evolving. Because of this, for context, here, provide a brief history of some major changes that this organization has been undergone over time.

### **Women's social status**

During the last three decades, all women participants in this study have noticed the drastic changes in Korean American women's social status in their communities. Their descriptions of those changes could be conceptualized as educational, professional, interpersonal, and social. These individual, interpersonal and social changes are interwoven and influenced the day-to-day experiences of Korean American women in the United States.

Many informants in this study acknowledged that women's social status was largely influenced by educational and professional backgrounds. They explained that as more Korean American women were educated and got jobs, they could gain more power in society. One participant pointed out Korean American women's increasing levels of education over time:

There are *opportunities* for women now. Back then, they didn't even let women be educated. In my mom's generation, they would say "You're pretty, so don't study!". Girls that weren't good looking would have to study in fear of not being able to get married. They didn't let girls get educated in that way. Even now, in the Al-Qaeda, girls are killed if they go to school. They didn't let girls get an education back then. In North Korea, they let girls study, but not in the south. In the North, missionaries came into Pyongyang, and people converted to Christianity fast. They called Pyongyang the Jerusalem of the east. Therefore, they let women be educated. Even my mother went to high school. Anyway, they didn't let women get educated back then, even though men were. It wasn't an issue of money. Most women could get by just doing house chores. Now, women are able to get *educated*, so they know they have power. That's why women can

become the president, pilots, and scientists. There are no limits. The status of women has increased drastically (Bongsun).

The participant quoted above received a graduate education in the United States and had worked in her professional field. Getting an education in their new country enhanced the women's English proficiency and cultural sensitivity, opening doors to various social resources in their new society. Along with their enhanced access to social resources, Korean American women started to have their own professions, which contributed to their economic independency. As Korean American women gained more access to economic resources, they began to possess greater voice and power in their interpersonal relationships. Another woman drew the connection between women's economic independency and changed power dynamic in marriages:

Since Korean women earn money together in the U.S., they don't have to rely on their husbands. I think it's similar in Korea, since many women work. I think the era in which women have to rely on their husbands for income and submit to them has passed... Women are capable and don't need to depend solely on their husbands (Ami).

Through their education and employment, Korean American women could achieve more voice and power in their new society and in their families. Their changed status also influenced their interpersonal relationships in terms of re-establishing their gender relations. Some participants acknowledged that when Korean American couples failed to negotiate and re-establish their relationship, they experienced domestic conflict and domestic violence. One participant explained how men could resort to physical violence toward women in response to the changed status of women:

As the society changed, women could receive education, and they could have a voice. Men didn't change, but as women become more educated and started

changing, there started a friction in the relationship between men and women. That comes out in the form of physical actions (Chanmi).

Some women also attributed a higher divorce rate to women's elevated social status. Upon seeing one's ability to live independently, divorce became an option for Korean American women when there is domestic conflict.

The culture is like that. They had to submit to everything the husband says. However, now they know that is different in the U.S., they change. A long time ago, there would be situations where if the husband tells the wife to die, they would pretend to die. The women would be patient like that, and the divorce rate would be low. Even when they would be sick and dying, they would be patient to keep their marriage. Nowadays, I don't think women are as patient looking at the divorce rates (Ami).

As individual gender relations change, the ways of people living in a patriarchal culture also change. When most Korean women were not allowed to get an education and profession, they were in general recognized as minors in society. However, as they started to gain access to social resources as well as greater power, social norms regarding women changed.

Traditionally, Korea was a class based society with nobles in the upper class and others in the lower class. And that mentality is rooted into us. So there's an inclination to treat others based on their status. In my mother's generation, women could not stand up for themselves. It's probably different with my grandmother's generation too. I think it was possible because they did. It was called superior-inferior relationships, and women were always considered inferior. Nowadays, some are considered superior while others are considered inferior. In the old days, the priority for women was to take care of the family, so traits like patience and perseverance were valued (Chanmi).

There is no one way of living in patriarchal culture; people's way of living in patriarchal culture is more diversified given individual power status. As a result of that, many informants reported that they experienced a substantial generational gap when they

interacted with their parents in Korea. One informant described how the mother-and-daughter communication regarding marital relationships often differed based on the generation.

Even in my case, if I don't make my husband breakfast, my mother scolds me. What I tell my own daughter is "If he can make breakfast, he should make it himself. Why should I make it for him?". My mother's generation wasn't like that. Most people who seek counseling from us are still in the mentality of my mother's generation... They're brain washed in some sense (Eunju).

Most informants acknowledged that Korean American women's social status increased over time through their individual, interpersonal and social relationships. Despite of women's increased social status overall, patriarchy is still a factor influencing women's lives, but this influence differs based on individual women's situation. While the extent to which women re-establish their relationship with men varies, women's social status has improved overall.

### **A withering association**

During the interviews for this study, most informants confided that the Korean American women's association is withering. Although no one thought that this association would close, they expressed their concerns about the sustainability of the association, saying, "Our association is withering down (Bongsun)." Not only did they discuss the changes in their association, they mentioned several reasons for this, including a dwindling number of members, economic shortages, and increasing services for women outside the community center.

Over the last three decades, the women have witnessed their membership numbers decreasing. One original member of this association mentioned:

We've been doing this for 28 years, so there are members that come in and out, move away, pass away, change jobs, and move away because their husbands *retire*. Through different circumstances, our membership number has declined (Paran).

Since this association was mainly managed with membership fees, a smaller membership brought with it financial problems. During the early period, this association had a secretary, office, and lawyer to provide various free services to Korean American women in the community. They also actively advertised their free services in a local Korean newspaper in Philadelphia, so more people would hear about their services and get help. One member recalled that they had to spend \$1,200 for the local newspaper advertisement, \$300 for renting their office, and \$12,000 for publishing books, per year. Considering this association was maintained with membership fees, individual donations, and fundraising activities in their community, it is not surprising that they had to slowly curtail the expenditures as the number of their members decreased over time.



Figure 1: Image of KAWAP office in 1987<sup>5</sup>

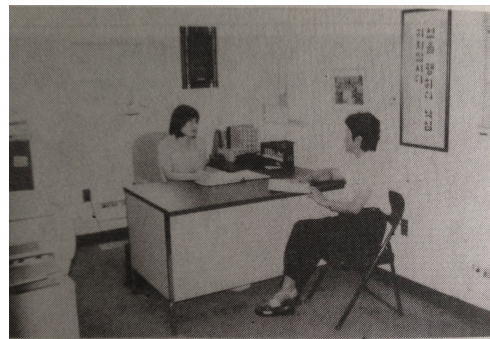


Figure 2: Image of KAWAP office in 1999

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<sup>5</sup> The image of the office was taken from the KAWAP in 1987 (KAWAP publication, 1987). Korean American in Philadelphia are generally dispersed with concentrations in areas such as Upper Darby and 52nd Street in West



After KAWAP closed their office in 2008, they mainly offered phone counseling. Some members thought that it was a good decision to close their office because of the issue of cost, small number of office visit counseling cases, and safety concerns.

We had an office until then.. and we would take turns taking phone calls and counseling. The owner of the building was a member. That person ran a business elsewhere and gave us a room to use. We paid around \$300 a month for the room, which wasn't that much if we think about it. We primarily did counseling through the phone anyway, and sharing the space was inconvenient, so we decided to stop using the office. Actually, for us who work, that was much more convenient. There is no cost. We can use the copy machines and computers in our homes. So, it's easier... Now that I think about it, when we had an office, there were some walk-in cases. Sometimes, men would come to us asking for counseling about their wives. Now that I think about it, even though there were other people in the next office, it was pretty dangerous. There was no security there now that I think about it. So I mentioned that during our last meeting that it's actually good that we don't have an office. Those people worked at the office counselling all kinds of people without any kind of security (Eunju).

However, other members thought that an office was necessary for counseling Korean American women who just wanted to drop by and get help. One member said, "I wish there was one implementation: a full-time office in which we could answer phone and refer to other places (Ami)." Another member also said, "As you know, we only do phone counseling now. When we say counseling, people call expecting to meet someone and to hear advice. We had an office for a long time ago, but not anymore (Hana)."

While the members faced internal difficulties due to decreasing membership and financial issues, the simultaneous increasing availability of other community resources also contributed to their withering-down. When they began this Korean American

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Philadelphia and in Cheltenham near North Philadelphia. The association's office was located in the Cheltenham near by Korean grocery market.

women's association, there were no other community resources providing services for Korean American women in the community. However, as time went by, additional community resources for Korean American women were established. Moreover, these new community organizations had income and funding from other sources, such as the government.

Nowadays, there are two or three community centers around Philadelphia. There is S community center, and K community center provides good service around 5<sup>th</sup> street. People get help from L community center also in 5<sup>th</sup> street. People usually only just call us nowadays. We are in no position to go out and promote ourselves, and there are financial issues. It is disappointing, but we have trouble growing as a community (Ami).

In addition to the increasing numbers of other community resources for Korean American women, changing modes of communication also influenced the demand for services provided by this association. As the Internet becomes a major mode of communication, increasing numbers of Korean American women started to use it for information and social interaction. Most members of this association stated that the availability of Internet information and counseling contributed to diminished demand for their services.

Nowadays, people use the Internet, and you can find *all kinds of information* on the Internet. It is different from decades ago. Because of *websites* and *mass communication*, there is no information you can't obtain with a few clicks on a keyboard. *Why bother to call somewhere?* Because of this, it's different from 30 years ago... There are many reasons like websites that give the same kind of assistance... there are barely any situations where you have to ask for help though phone like the *old fashioned* way. You can obtain *information* when you search for it, so there is no need to go through the hassle of calling. That's why organizations like ours have a hard time being *active*. It's not as if we can get a big *grant* and do *research* or gather people. We are just individual housewives who want to help others through our own resources. There were only a few organizations like ours back then, and we had a good purpose. Now our activity has decreased (Bongsun).

But nowadays Korean American women's website like "Missy USA" offer a lot of Internet counseling. I haven't seen it personally, but I think a lot of young people get help from things like that. It might not even be necessary to meet people face to face. It might be why the number of cases has decreased recently (Eunju).

The availability of Internet services also offered convenience and confidentiality for Korean American women. Considering Korean American women were very cautious about even getting phone counseling due to the shame of discussing domestic problems, the confidentiality of internet counseling services could alleviate their concerns about any possibility of leaking their personal information. Both increased community services and internet services contributed to the decreased demand for phone counseling and information services from this Korean American women's association.

The detailed descriptions of the members of this Korean American women's association regarding their withering down association reveal both internal factors like dwindling number of members and economic shortages and external factors like increasing services for women outside the community center and women's increased social status have shifted them from providing broad ranges of services to focusing on phone counseling services.

## **Discussion**

A group of Korean American women established KAWAP with the intention of helping underprivileged women in their community. It must be noted that Korean American women had found themselves in different social contexts over the last three decades, and with regards to these changes, this group's collective response to help women in the community underwent some transformation as well. This section sheds

light on the evolving social contexts by exploring how the KAWAP volunteers navigated and interpreted these changes that affected women in their community and in their association.

The most remarkable change experienced by KAWAP members was women's heightened status overall. Owing to neoliberalism and the efforts of the early feminist movements, women today are no longer on the sidelines or completely ignored (Cornwall, 2008). Yet improvements in women's social status have led to unanticipated issues in the process of re-establishing gender roles and relations (Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). The KAWAP volunteers thusly listed several social consequences of the reestablishment process: couples who failed to successfully negotiate gender roles were more prone to divorce and domestic violence problems. In societies as a whole, ways of enacting gender norms diversified based on various women's social positions. And lastly, in families, drastic changes in women's roles and status meant that generational gaps grew wider. While witnessing those socio-cultural changes, KAWAP volunteers acknowledged the diversified ways of living among Korean American women, and, therefore, had to be equipped with flexibility to approach these women based on each individuals' unique perspectives and contexts. The overall advancement in women's status also led the KAWAP members to debate about whether there was a decreased demand for their community services for women. Even within the organization, it is still on-going debate for the rationale of their existence. Some members think that women in their community no longer need their support due to their advanced status. However, some members think

women still need their services because now the issue is getting more complex and diverse.

While they are still debating the rationale for their existence, there are some practical issues that are changing this association. The capacity of the KAWAP decreased over time as membership dwindled due to aging and migration of volunteers. Since this association was mainly managed with membership fees and volunteer activities, decreased membership brought with it financial problems and sustainability issues. The group had to cut down on some of its services such as office counseling and free lawyer consultations to reduce the financial burden. And along with lessened capacity, the demand for KAWAP services diminished due to the increasing availability of other community and Internet services. However, despite the sustainability issues faced by the group, the members have continued to offer a variety of community services within their capacity to do so.

### **What we do**

As we have seen, the shared self-identity as Korean American women provided the motivation for gathering and establishing a community association for other Korean American women. Further, their recognition of difficulties experienced by Korean American women in the United States lead them to offer services to meet the needs of women in their community. Based on this recognition, KAWAP provided various ranges of community services through their collective actions including counseling, referral, lecturing, donation, gathering, helping individuals, and publication.

## **Counseling**

As the initial purpose of this association was to provide counseling services to Korean American women in their community, most participants positioned in-person or phone counseling service as the main community service provided by this association. The period of offering counseling varied among the members. Members who worked as main counselors offered free counseling services to clients. These members had between 6 months to 28 years of experience. In addition to the main counselors, other members sometimes provided counseling. These other volunteer counselors had between 6 months to 5 years of experience.

### **Triage system**

Initially, KAWAP had a triage system for counseling. They had a pastor counselor who majored in Christian counseling and provided free Christian counseling services. They also hired a lawyer to provide free legal consult services for Korean American women. In the early 1990s, once their secretary takes the phone, she would triage the case based on the needs of the women callers. If the woman needed counseling, she would contact the pastor counselor and connect them to set up a counseling session. If the woman needed a free legal consultation, she contacted the lawyer and set up a legal consultation session. One member described how the center provided counseling until the early 1990s.

After our secretary began to pick up calls at the office, we began to get quite a few calls. We transferred the calls to a lawyer if it had to do with legal matters. We had a counselor back then, Pastor H. He had majored in Christian counseling. So if we received a phone call from an injured woman about *domestic violence*, I would go with her to Pastor H to receive counseling (Paran).

After the early 1990s, the center could no longer afford their secretary. As a solution, rather than continuing work with the church pastor, the women volunteers took the counseling into their own hands.

They decided to have one or two main counselors. These people could take both the phone calls and provided the counseling. When those two main counselors were not available, other members took turns answering the phones and offering counseling. One member recalled that “I did some phone counselling when Sunmi (Pseudoname, one of the main counselors) wasn’t there”. One main counselor described the way they worked together that “I didn’t do it alone then. We had a time chart and decided who would work in which day (Eunju)”.

### **Training for counseling**

The volunteers who worked as main counselors had various counseling training backgrounds. Among the four participants who had worked as main counselors in this association, three of them were trained as counselor through their graduate school education. One woman was educated as a counselor and worked as a counselor in Korea. She recalled that “After graduating from college in Korea, I worked in counseling for two and a half years. I majored in psychology and studied counseling psychology in grad school as well”. Two other women were educated as counselors through their graduate school in the United States.

While these three counselors had educational backgrounds in counseling through their academic and working experiences, one woman was trained as a counselor through

the lectures regarding counseling and reading books to educate herself. She described how she learned about counseling through the lecture meetings in KAWAP.

I think there was a meeting for that. There were lecture meetings to teach how to counsel and other related matters. From what I remember now, those lectures were on basic procedures such as not revealing information about the case to anyone else....I also started to read books and educate myself (Chanmi).

While they reported various educational backgrounds on counseling, all volunteer counselors agreed that they gained counseling skills through their conversations with Korean American women. They described how they learned through trial and error during the counseling. For example, one woman described how she learned to listen.

I just kept listening to their stories. From my experience, the women that call hate it when we give specific advice to them and tell them what to do. So I just listen most of the time. Most of the time as they speak, they come with an answer for themselves. When I first worked here, I said something like "You're still young, and it would be difficult to live with that abusive husband for the rest of your life. How about getting a divorce?" and the client just hung up. (Later I realized that) she just wanted someone to listen to her when she was upset (Chanmi).

As they became more experienced in counseling through conversations, they started to understand the complicated nature of the caller's lives and become "a better listener".

### **Documentations**

In terms of documenting their counseling cases, the volunteers did not have any formal documentation system until the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, they hired a counselor who was trained as a social worker. She described how she set up the documentation system of their counseling cases while working at the association.



I made a form for counseling. Consistent *record keeping* is very important in *social work, but there was no* format to do so. People would just write a few notes and put them in the cabinet. I took those out and organized them (Gina).

Once the volunteers had a structured documentation form for the counseling, they started to document their counseling cases and report their counseling service status during KAWAP meetings. They also began to report statistical reports which eventually became part of their annual publications.

### **Referral services & general information**

In addition to counseling services, most informants mentioned the referral services of this association. For women who wanted to be connected to social resources, the members used their directories and provided necessary information. One informant described how they linked Korean American women to those resources.

We transfer anyone who needs *financial aid* to them... We are basically *trafficking* people to other resources. If they need *long term psychological therapy* or *social workers*, we refer them to the Jaisohn medical center, since it's a bigger organization. They can get connected, and we are just *trafficking* them to the right places (Paran).

Some Korean American women would call the center to ask for general information about how to solve daily problems. For example, one woman counselor recalled when they get calls from Korean American women asking about phone bills.

We got many phone calls about general problems as an immigrant and how to solve them. For example, if someone gets an overcharged *bill*, they want to know how to solve it. Or any kind of problems with their children...Or someone who has depression and needs counseling through that while also trying to get a job (Dana).

After migration, most Korean American women experienced transition periods in learning about their new society. Particularly women who were not fluent in speaking

English, learning how to manage living as immigrants in the United States is difficult and time-consuming. Seeing these needs of Korean American women regarding know-how of living in the United States, the members of this association offered life wisdom that they learned as immigrants who had already been here for a long periods of time.

### **Helping individuals**

In addition to counselling and providing referrals, this association also provided practical help to women in their community. This help involved supports such as translations, rides, English education, and friendship. All informants mentioned that they had had experience helping the Korean American women callers with translations and ride arrangements.

If people had *language barriers*, we would take them to the hospital and such. Nowadays, hospitals have *interpreters*, but back then they didn't. Also, Eunju went to *jail* to help someone once. Anyway, we helped to translate and give *rides* for people with *language barriers* (Bongsun).

Two informants mentioned that when pregnant Korean women needed assistance with hospital visits, they helped the women every time they went to the hospital until the baby was born. Chanmi explained her experiences of helping a Korean American woman for prenatal care visits and grocery shopping:

There was a Korean woman who became pregnant but had her boyfriend run away. She didn't have a car, so we had to give her rides. Sometimes it was pitiful, and we would take her grocery shopping. It was unfortunate. We helped her every time she went to the hospital, and eventually she had the baby (Chanmi).

For women who needed economic help, the volunteers sometimes gave them money or bought them supplies. Paran recounted how they helped other Korean American women, explaining, "One member would give rides and help out...and when

the baby came, we would take them both home. We even bought the baby clothes... Yes. That was all done from the member's own pockets. It wasn't through money from the association. That's how we were able to help women (Paran).” And for women who could not speak English, one member described how she helped women learn English to be used in their day-to-day lives.

I had to build up the person's capability, but that can't happen immediately... especially for internationally married wives who can't speak English. You can't help that immediately. From what I remember, I made a small dictionary for a woman by writing some Korean and English words on a note. If there was a word that she didn't know how to say, she could point to the dictionary during conversation (Gina).

The members of this association each individually provided support for Korean American women that went above and beyond the services offered by the actual organization. Regarding their range of services, one member remarked, “We would do all that we could.”

### **Open lectures**

When KAWAP was initially established, the members of this association organized monthly open lectures to build friendship and learn about relevant topics. The topics of open lectures were varied and included women's issues, counseling, immigration, child education, law, health, finance, science, communication, religions and arts. These topics were decided based on the educational needs of the members, topics that Korean women were interested in, and availability of lecturers. One informant explained how they organized open lectures.

We found experts in certain topics and held lecture relating to those topics almost every month. The first meeting we held was about “What is counseling?”. And

held a lecture on Christian counseling and legal counseling at my place. We had lectures at different people's homes. Most members then were around 40 to 50 and had children that went to elementary and middle school, so most of the interest was in topics dealing with children their age. Also, there were a lot of topics about *domestic violence*, household problems, problems with in-laws, and other similar problems (Paran).



Figure 3: Open lecture, 1987<sup>6</sup>

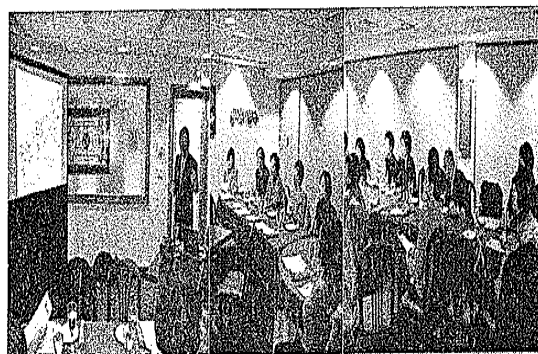


Figure 4: Open lecture, 2008<sup>7</sup>

While providing community services to Korean American women in their community, they also realized the necessity of learning about issues they faced in their day-to-day lives. For example, when they heard that many Korean American women had a hard time interacting with their children who experienced identity crises, they scheduled open lectures and workshops regarding second-generation Korean-American issues.

Another problem we had in mind was dealing with *identity* in the *second generation*. We had a lot of interest in *identity*. Korean children can be born here and speak English fluently, but in front of other American children, they are still *Korean*. So *they were so confused*. "I was born in the U.S., but everyone thinks I'm from another country because of how I look". There's *resentment* in those thoughts. The issue with *second generation Korean Americans* was important, and there were a few *Korean Americans* that dealt with that issue of *identity* that went on to prestigious *Ivy League* schools like *Yale* and became doctors... There

<sup>6</sup> This image was taken during the open lecture in 1987 (KAWAP publication, 1987)

<sup>7</sup> This image was taken during the open lecture in 2008 (KAWAP publication, 2008)

were many talented students. We gathered those students and had lectures on Korean American identity (Paran).

Not only are individual concerns addressed through counseling, the open lectures allow the members of this association to inform Korean American women in their community. The open lectures also provided an opportunity for members to meet regularly and network with each other. Along with forming friendships, they could acquire some new knowledge regarding solutions to women's issues in their community.

### **Publication**

The volunteers have published an organizational book every year since the first year-anniversary celebration. This book includes information from the open lectures as well as updates on the association and writings from the community. The first president remembered how they published their book for the first time:

We made a book at the first year anniversary celebration. We had the association's first publication. Dr. Lee came to the celebration. We met in front of the Academy's office, and we gave her the first published book. She began to cry because she was so happy. After then, we began to publish a book every year, and the books began to get bigger and bigger after time (Paran).

Book publication fulfills the dual purpose of providing education for the volunteers' fellow community members and leaving a record of activities of their association. One member stated that book publication cost "\$10,000 to \$12,000 dollars. We published those books so that people could read and be educated (Ami)." Another member also stated, "We have a book, and *at least* we have a history of the counseling we did and the lectures that we held. There's also a variety of topics, so we decided to keep a record. A lot of things we did in the earlier days were left in the records. The book is our *record*. That is our beginning (Paran)."

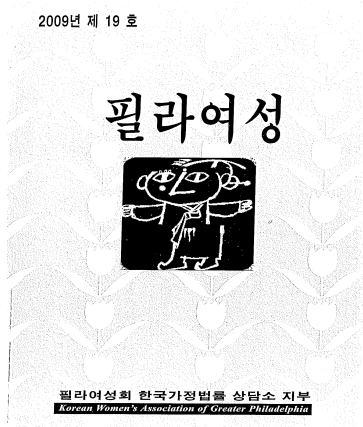


Figure 5: Front cover



Figure 6: Entire collection of the KAWAP

publications

KAWAP published a book annually or biannually depending on their funding situation. Paran recounted, “We used to publish one every year, but last time we didn’t have enough funds, so we published one in 2 years”. So far, they have published their 22th book and circulated the copies in their Korean communities. The outline of the books included the summary of their counseling activities, schedule of open lectures, and content (education, medical knowledge, essays, travels and poems).

The members distributed their books during a fund raising bazaar and locations where Korean people are gathering such as Korean grocery markets, hair salons, and churches. Since the KAWAP members targeted both men and women in their community as their audience, the content of the book covered various topics that could provide beneficial information to people in their community. Whereas their books included general issues, it contained various women’s issues which are rarely addressed in other community publications such as domestic violence, family communication, and child education. In this way, the KAWAP tried to provide information necessary to their community women as well as securing broad audience.

## Fundings

The Korean American association is maintained through membership fees, donations and fundraising. Since the association does not have any governmental funding resources or corporate sponsorship, members are responsible for generating needed funds. One way of doing this is membership fees. The membership fees were differentiated based on the type of membership: board members and regular members. One of the previous presidents of the association described their membership policy as stipulating “a fee of \$240 for board members and \$60 for members (Paran).” Board members were the members who actively participated in the management and administration of the association. Regular members were the members who were enrolled in this association but sporadic participants in the lecture meetings and fundraisings.



Figure 6: Fundraising picture in October, 1987<sup>8</sup>



Figure 7: Fundraising picture in November, 1994<sup>9</sup>

In addition to regular membership fees, the members donated money voluntarily whenever the association’s activities needed funding. One board member described how she participated in donations with respect to her membership status in the association.

<sup>8</sup> This image was taken during the fundraising bazaar activity (KAWAP publication, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Image of KAWAP members after fundraising activity (KAWAP publication, 1994).

As a board member, I gave special donations, and through membership donations, we were able to maintain the organization. No other help, no outside help...only through whatever the members gave. People would give up to \$500 dollars. (For membership), the directors would pay \$240 a year and members would pay at least \$5 a month. We took care of financial matters by ourselves. No other help (Bongsun).

Fundraising was also an important financial resource for this association. Based on need, members hold fundraising meetings and invite Koreans from their community to come. Some informants described how they appreciated the support from those community members who participated in their fundraising meetings. One informant described her experiences of helping with a raffle event during the fundraising.

I always do a raffle in the general assemblies. When I do that, I always feel everyone supporting us. They always buy raffles, and the prizes are not even that big. Cooking oils, a small bag of rice, and things like that. And yet they buy them. They show that they want to show support even if they can't come consistently. They buy it and support the association. I only see these people once or twice every year, but they participate and support us. They give their stuff to put in the auction. There's a painter who once gave us one of her paintings and a valuable scarf for auction. I heard it was an expensive item. It would've been around \$100, \$200 dollars if she had sold, but she gave it up for a cheap price. Why would she do that? It's self-sacrifice. Even though we aren't that active, I think that we can maintain ourselves through the support of people behind the scenes. That makes me so happy (Hana).

Through the participation of people in their association and their community, the Korean American women's association has been able to provide various community services for Korean American women. Although it has experienced financial difficulties with the passage of time, the members' donations and fund raising efforts have been sufficient to maintain this association since 1987. This funding has supported the organization's counselling efforts, first and foremost, and also went to help individual



women in crisis. In addition to helping these women, the organization also supported the broader Korean community by sponsoring open lectures and publishing books.

### **Discussion**

The KAWAP volunteers had a goal of empowering women in their community and provided services such as counseling, referral and general information, assistance for individuals, open lectures, publication, and funding to reach this goal. They achieved community change through their positions by directing resources in ways that increased Korean American women's access to them. This section delves into these KAWAP services by examining the ways in which the volunteers provided services based on the demands of their constituents.

The main service of this association was phone or in-person counseling, and the volunteers provided a space where women could talk about their stories without worrying about confidentiality. In addition, the group's counseling services were not limited to listening, but involved active advice-giving based on shared cultural understandings. However, this service was not without limitations. Since several volunteers were tasked with counseling, the quality of their services varied based on the availability of the main counselors and was often inconsistent. In addition, differing educational and professional backgrounds meant that methods and skills varied even among main counselors. In order to control the quality of counseling offered from this association, counseling should be offered by professionally trained counselors or trained peer counselors who are supervised by professionally trained counselors. Although KAWAP tried to hire and/or involve professionally trained counselors, there was often a void of such trained

professional personnel due to the financial and personal issues. Considering the limited funding situation of this small community association, connection with supervised students in a training program may offer them another alternatives to provide qualified counseling services.

Another main service was a referral and general information service, which connected women to various social resources and informed them with regards to managing life as immigrants in the United States. As part of the early Korean immigration wave to the U.S. that consisted mostly of professionals and higher-social-class individuals (Myers, 1995), the KAWAP members had long since established connections to institutional systems and social resources in their new country. Since the later wave of Korean immigration consisted mainly of middle class individuals who made their living in the U.S. by running small businesses (Myers, 1995), these new immigrants' access to institutional settings and/or social resources was relatively limited. Therefore, the volunteers engaged in directing community work with the purpose of bridging the gap between women and available social resources.

In addition to their formal counseling and information services, they also provided practical help to women callers based on their needs. As women's community work often involves various informal tasks (Abrahams, 1996; Park, 1998), the volunteers of KAWAP found themselves serving as translators with doctors, social service providers, and lawyers; helping low-income women with paperwork for social services, tutoring in English, and making ride and carpool arrangements. According to the volunteers, the disadvantaged status of women was not limited to a certain area and/or situation but

happened in day-to-day lives. Women's limited access to resources and their disadvantaged status was caused from the intersection of ethnicity, class, and gender inequalities. Since Korean American women's underprivileged status is linked to broad and complex social inequalities, the services provided from this association also had to be flexible and cover broad ranges of issues.

An important area of concern for the KAWAP volunteers was the education-driven empowerment of the Korean community. To educate and empower their community, KAWAP periodically provided open lectures as well as space for networking. Unlike most women's community organizations, KAWAP provided education on topics not only confined to women's issues but also covering broader areas in which instruction was beneficial for both men and women in their community. In this way, they could draw participation from both men and women for their open lectures and were able to educate them together about the issues in which the women were interested. Like other women's community organizations, they also engaged in activist mothering (Naples, 1998) on an education platform to enhance the children's education.

KAWAP volunteers also recognized that some members of their community did not have sufficient time to attend their open lectures. They addressed this problem by consistently publishing an organizational book, which, in addition to providing education to their constituents, would also inform the community about their activities. Like their lectures, the contents of the book also covered various topics that were not necessarily limited to women's issues. While their efforts to reach a broad audience were successful, their book still managed to meet the specific needs of Korean American women and

provide them with specialized information that they could use to accomplish tasks. In particular, the book addressed often-silenced women's issues such as domestic violence in the voices of women in their community and provided practical information to help with their access to social resources.

All the activities of KAWAP mentioned above were maintained through membership fees, donations, and fundraising in the community, and because there were no governmental funding resources or corporate sponsorships, KAWAP could freely manage and plan activities based on the opinions of their members. However, as Taylor (1989) pointed out, organizations that demanding high levels of commitment requiring investment of time and financial resources cannot absorb large numbers of people. Likewise, although KAWAP could retain some members over 28 years, it was hard for them to continuously expand their membership base. This had important implications for the future of the association; a dwindling group of volunteers caused KAWAP's chief income source – volunteer donations – to shrink. As a result, they often had to cut down on some of their services because of subsequent sustainability issues.

## **Chapter 5. Domestic violence**

This chapter describes the ways in which the members of KAWAP have perceived, observed and responded to domestic violence experienced by Korean American women in their community. It draws on two data sources: 1) counseling records and 2) interviews with KAWAP volunteers. As far as the counseling records are concerned, volunteers at KAWAP were themselves responsible for identifying the ones they felt reflected cases of domestic violence. These records were then shared with the researcher. As far as the interviews, all willing KAWAP board members were interviewed. This group involved volunteers who worked specifically on providing counseling services as well as volunteers who offered other various services.

Drawing on these two data sources, the first section illustrates how volunteers heard about and documented cases of abuse in the Korean American community. Next, the chapter analyzes how volunteers explain both the causes of and solutions for domestic violence in their community. It then goes on to explore how abused women respond to KAWAP's services. Finally, this chapter offers KAWAP volunteers' recommendations for health care providers when they interact with Korean American women who may be facing abuse.

### **Hearing the stories of abused women**

During the interviews for this project, every KAWAP volunteer participant shared stories of the abused Korean women with whom they had interacted with or heard about. The women who had worked as volunteer counselors for prolonged amounts of time were in particular able to provide rich descriptions of domestic violence in their community. In

addition, other KAWAP volunteers who did not regularly serve as counselors were also able to share stories of domestic violence from their community or extended families.

### **Who abuses Korean American women**

This section explores the different ways in which domestic violence manifests itself based on who is positioned as the abuser. Informants and counseling documents described Korean American women's experiences of domestic violence as involving their in-laws, American husbands, Korean husbands, and children. The driving force behind the abuse also differed depending on who was carrying out the abuse.

In terms of in-law abuse, the Korean culture of filial piety was key to understanding the dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In terms of abuse by American husbands, Korean American women's social status as ethnic minority women was the main issue under consideration. In terms of abuse by Korean husbands, the Korean patriarchal culture was the contextual key. Finally, with regards to abuse involving children, child abuse and delinquency were the most-discussed issues.

#### **In-laws**

Although feminist scholars tend to portray domestic violence as instigated by male actions, some scholars have found that mother-in-laws play a significant role in the daughter-in-law's abuse in the Asian American population (Raj et al, 2006; Chan et al, 2008; and Fernandez, 1997). In this study, the women volunteers considered the mother-in-law's involvement in the abuse of her daughter-in-law to be a significant issue in their community.

In-law abuse toward Korean American women was often illustrated in the counseling documents and interviews. Korean Americans have historically kept close relations with their extended families in accordance with paramount cultural kinship values. Furthermore, many Korean American families live with their parents (particularly with the man's parents) under the strong cultural assumption that the son is responsible for taking care of his parents. Therefore, relations with in-laws constitute a significant part of Korean women's marital lives.

Accordingly, counseling documents described how Korean American women were abused by their in-laws, including mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, or sometimes even entire in-law families. In-laws' psychological and physical violence often accompanied violence from the husband, sometimes leading to further marital conflict and divorce.

Because of her mother-in-law's harsh words and action, her relationship with her husband has become sour... Due to her mother-in-law's intense personality, the client and her husband have agreed to get a divorce (Counseling document, date unidentified).

There were varied illustrations of how in-laws abused Korean American women, including harassment, appropriation of custody of the children, beating, divorce-related suggestions, bullying, and blackmailing. Also, some mothers-in-law perceived their daughters-in-laws as threats to a strong mother-son relationship and expressed their jealousy and hatred through abuse. Counseling documents often portrayed the husband as helpless or in compliance with the abusive behavior of the mother-in-law, and even if the

husband was not the problem anymore, the woman still sometimes had to deal with her in-law relatives. One counseling document gave an account as follows:

Afterwards, she reconciled with her husband, but her mother-in-law and sister-in-law came to rail on her and made the situation worse. Due to her mother-in-law and sister-in-law's railing, she left home... The mother-in-law took their older child back to Korea (Counseling document, 1995-4-3).

Client's husband and mother-in-law violently abuse her (Counseling document, 1996-10-24).

The mother-in-law and the husband abuse the client. Mother-in-law suggested the idea of divorce to the husband. Husband is a "mama's boy" and always listens to his mother (Counseling document, 1996-6-13).

The mother-in-law is jealous and wants to disconnect her relationship with her husband. The mother-in-law treats her as an enemy and does not approve of anything she does (Counseling document, 1996-7-11).

Client's mother-in-law bothers her out of jealousy and hatred through blackmail as if she has psychological problems, and it is difficult for the client to live this way (Counseling document, date unidentified).

Client has no connections in the U.S. while her husband has his parents and siblings. It seems that it was planned by the husband and the in-laws for him to get a divorce from her and not be required to give money for child support and living expenditures. The entire in-laws family become enemies of her and treated her as if she were psychologically ill. She received a court order to not approach her husband. She feels very stupid and cannot speak a word of English (Counseling document, data unidentified).

Cultural practices must be examined in order to understand the domestic violence that occurs in a mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship (Gangoli, 2011). Although Korean Americans live in the United States, they still often reinforce this Korean traditional virtue. One woman informant pointed out this tendency, saying that, "Because she (a woman the informant had counseled) was staying with the husband's family, she had to also deal with the in-laws. The in-laws would also try to enforce Korean culture



(Dana).” During interviews with informants, women volunteer counselors explained how the extended family structure of Korean Americans and “filial piety”-respecting parents-often contribute to in-law abuse suffered by Korean American women. Filial piety is the most important Confucian virtue and when a woman is married, she should obey her parents in-law (Sung, 2003). When parents are of old age, women need to take care of her parents in-law while living together (Sung, 2003).

She lived with her husband and her in-laws, but her husband was too devoted to his parents. They ran a grocery store with his parents, but he would give all of the income to his mother. The client had almost no money... They also harassed her verbally and continued to make her do all of the work. The mother-in-law would harass her and the husband would pretend like he didn't know... The mother-in-law would curse at her and hit her. Violence is one thing, but she would stop her from turning on the heater. The heater wouldn't come on, and she wouldn't let her use it (Eunju).

Under the virtue of filial piety, Korean women should be obedient to her mother-in-law, even in an abusive relationship. This social prescription reinforces marginalized status of Korean American women in their relation with their mothers-in-law. In this strong hierarchic relationship, the Korean practice of filial piety is especially often used to justify mother-in-law abuse by demanding unconditional submission from the daughter-in-law. Due to the intensity of the reported domestic violent incidents, members of the Korean American women's association stated that in-law-related violence is one of the main reasons that the women often call them to seek help. However, while other informants mentioned that violence by in-laws remains a significantly-often reported issue in their community, Eunju acknowledged that they see fewer in-law violence cases as compared to the past.

There were many problems with the client's mother-in-laws in the older cases. There aren't problems like that in the more recent cases. Nowadays, they live separately and a lot of the older generation is gone (Eunju).

In their counseling documents, most of the in-law violence cases were documented between the periods of 1990-2000. However, even if there were fewer reports of in-law domestic violence after 2000, no informant denied the relevance and importance of the influence of mothers-in-law on their daughters-in-law in Korean American families.

### **American husbands**

KAWAP members focused on their callers' standing as ethnic minority women to contextualize the abuse they faced from their American husbands. One way this standing affected abusive situations was that the women often faced cultural and communicative barriers when interacting with their husbands. These barriers hindered them from getting help or leaving their situations. The literature often portrays Korean American women as more vulnerable in defending themselves in abusive relationships (Song, 1996) due to their limited ability to interact with the criminal and legal system of the United States. For clear reasons, obstructed access to social services impedes Korean women from resolving domestic violence issues. Since the women's American husbands were able to more easily utilize and navigate the system, Korean American women often failed to defend themselves in institutional fighting and ended up hospitalized, divorced and without custody of their children.

According to the informants, a desire to help Korean American women abused by American husbands was the one of the primary reasons that the association was begun.

During the Korean War, large number of Korean women married American servicemen and came to the United States (A. Lee & Lee, 2007). Due to the continued US military presence in South Korea, this interracial marriage has continued throughout the late twentieth century (A. Lee & Lee, 2007). When volunteers spoke with Korean American women, they realized that the women's status as ethnic minority women worked to their disadvantage in their marital relationships. Since Korean American women have language and cultural barriers, they experienced difficulties in relations not only inside but also outside of their families. Some informants described the harsh treatment that the women sometimes faced within their marital relationships.

We got a call from hospital. She called around 2 times per week. She would call and talk about her life. What she's upset about....She said her marriage was difficult. They had one child. Her husband would ignore her and not even treat her as a person. Eventually she said he put her in the hospital as a mental patient.....He treated her as if she didn't exist. He hit her. Later, she would do it too, so the husband admits his wife into mental hospitals (Chanmi).

American husbands' abuse of Korean American women and these women's isolated statuses were also described in counseling documents at the KAWAP.

Two and a half years ago, the client married an American in Korea and came to the U.S. He often physically hits her. He also hits his two step-children. The husband does not teach her how to drive, does not allow her to work, and gives her no economic responsibilities (Counseling document, 1991-08-20).

While offering counseling to Korean American women abused by their American husbands, one volunteer, Chanmi, wanted to know more about what was actually happening in those relationships. She was invited to a meeting of a group of Korean women who had American husbands. She described what she heard at the group meeting:

One woman invited me to their meeting of Korean women who had American husbands. I was curious, and I wanted to counsel those women, so I went once. But that meeting broke my heart....I didn't understand the woman from before when she said "I'm not treated as a human being." But listening to the stories of those women at the meeting helped me understand. Their husbands ignore them. Curse at them, and there's physical abuse as well (Chanmi).

According to the informants, even if their American husbands treated them brutally, it was hard for Korean American women to defend themselves due to the language barriers. Gina also pointed out other impediments faced by Korean American women:

In a household where an American and Korean live together, an educated person usually seeks counseling, and otherwise, I think they usually take it to court. Especially if the woman only speaks Korean, the man can just decide for himself and push away the woman. I think it's similar if the woman is American and the man is Korean. Whoever is the majority, or the person of the country, uses the law and the proficiency of their language for their own advantage over their minority counterpart (Gina).

From their accounts, Korean American women's status as ethnic minority women could make them more vulnerable in defending themselves against domestic violence. In this case, domestic violence issues experienced by Korean women were characterized by an unfair fight between the majority men and the minority women.

### **Korean husbands**

Regarding domestic violence between Korean couples, KAWAP members pointed out the tendency of Korean American men to rationalize their violence based on Korean traditional patriarchal culture. This culture set men as the leaders in their families and allowed them to discipline anyone in it, including their wives. Since their disciplinary acts could involve violence, scholars focused on the correlation between domestic

violence and traditional gender ideology (E.Lee, 2007; Y.Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Song, 1996). Hence, common academic understanding assumes that domestic violence in Korean American communities can be attributed to the patriarchal culture ideology.

The KAWAP volunteers also illustrated the ways in which Korean men rationalized their abusive behaviors based on these cultural traditions. As mentioned earlier, Korean traditional patriarchal culture enforces wives' unconditional submission to husbands. Under this culture, the Korean community has built up a heightened tolerance to domestic violence. Paran illustrated how Korean men's abuse toward their wives was justified in their society:

Korean men, *culturally, they don't know how to control*. They hit before speaking. It's justified in Korea to hit women. It's the kind of *society* that has sayings about how beating both laundry and women make them better. There were many men like that. They had *tempers*. They would hit women who talked back. It happened a lot. They hit a lot, and there was a lot of *domestic violence*. I witnessed a few times as well (Paran).

Under the traditional patriarchal culture of accepting domestic violence, Korean men often are allowed to display angry outbursts toward women in the form of violence. Ami also pointed out how Korean men's temper could operate in their violence toward women.

Koreans are generally short-tempered and impatient. Their hands would go up to hit as soon as they lose their temper.... There is a violence aspect of Korean culture because of their short-temper.... The short-temperedness is severe in Koreans. When I watch Korean dramas from time to time, the men hit the women, and the people who are hit don't treat it as significant. I'm not trying to disparage Korean society. I am Korean until the end. But it does exist, the sharp temper of Korean men. The short temper leads to hitting before anything else (Ami).

Having witnessed domestic violence among the first-generation Korean American couples, the second generation, their children, often decided to refuse to live under Korean patriarchal traditions. One result is that some second-generation children grew up and chose to marry Americans. One informant mentioned that many young Korean American women chose to marry American men as a result of having witnessed frequent abuse of their mothers by their Korean fathers<sup>10</sup>.

I think while they fight the husband resorts to *physical abuse*. As a result, it is said that many *Korean American* daughters who are born here hate Korean men. Statistically, most Korean girls end up marrying an American guy even though most Korean guys marry Korean girls...the reason for this is that the girls see their fathers abuse their mothers and get a bad impression of Korean men. There were statistics like that. That is one reason for why Korean girls raised in the U.S. end up marrying foreign guys. "*I don't want to live with Korean man like my father.*" They say things like that after seeing their fathers *abuse* their mothers (Bongsun).

However, although some still adhered to Korean patriarchal traditions, not all Korean American men abused their wives. Rather, their ways of enacting cultural practices varied based on their individual multifaceted contexts. The perspectives of the volunteer counselors help reveal why it is controversial to ascribe domestic violence to Korean traditional patriarchal customs. While some Korean husbands unfortunately used violence to discipline their wives based on traditions, many husbands did not necessarily use violence to discipline their families. Thus, individual contexts, and primarily those within gender role practices and beliefs, are to be considered when exploring the reasons

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<sup>10</sup> According to 2001-2006 American community survey analysis (Min and Kim, 2009), second generation Korean American females are more likely to marry outside of their ethnic group than are their male counterparts. Over two third of Korean women married non-Korean men, a rate almost 14% higher than was observed for Korean men (Min and Kim, 2009).

for Korean men's domestic abuse. Some informants further pointed out that not all Korean American men abused their wives.

I have never seen my father use any violence to discipline my mom. I think it's because of the stress from immigrant life (Paran).

While there is a strong Korean patriarchal tradition, the ways of living this tradition could be highly variable from one individual to the next. Rather than positing that domestic violence is embedded in Korean patriarchal traditional culture itself, the violence should instead be attributed to how people behave as active agents in their gender relations based on their own contexts.

### **Children**

In the Korean family unit, children often became involved in domestic violence as both victims and perpetrators. The counseling documents provided by the KAWAP revealed that the volunteers categorized children in both ways. First, not surprisingly, Korean men's violence was not limited to their wives but also sometimes involved their children. Therefore, the issue of child abuse was another important part of the stories of abused Korean American women. Several counseling documents described how children could be involved in domestic violence situations:

Client had an arrange marriage in Korean and has a 16 year old daughter, a 14 year old daughter, and a 7 year old son. The husband has a timid personality and introverted. He is indifferent toward the client and their children. At night, he abuses his kids and hits the client (Counseling document, 1996-09-10).

Client's father is a harsh drinker. When he gets drunk alone in the house, he assaults the client's mother. When the client's brother (22) tried to stop their father, they got in a fistfight. Client begun to hate her father was well and wants her parents to get a divorce (Counseling document, 1996-12-18).

Their accounts showed the extent to which domestic violence was a prevalent and deeply-rooted child abuse issue in Korean American society. Yet, while children were often described as victims in most cases of domestic violence, the volunteers' accounts revealed that children could also be the perpetrators of violence; several counseling documents recorded incidents of children abusing their parents. Both of the cases involved delinquency issues of the children such as gang involvement and drug problems.

Client has had a divorce with an American husband. She has a 17 year old daughter and a 15 year old daughter. She remarried with a Korean husband 4 years ago. She still gets child support for her younger daughter. The two daughters have made bad friends (Vietnamese, Chinese). They do not go to school, run away from home, talk back to their parents, and even hits them. Client believes that they are connected to a gang (Counseling document, 1997-11-13)

Client's son attended college for 3 years and dropped off. Due to drug problems, he did not pay tuition. He became a wreck and started borrowing money. When he was back at home, he took and sold all the household furniture to buy drugs. The client has tried scolding, appeasing, and everything they could, and even though he has said he would not do them anymore, there is no use. He threatened his father with a knife and club while arguing with him and was taken by the police. They took him out through paying bail, but the client is unsure whether she should let him go into prison or take him back home (Counseling document, 1996-10-31).

Thus the accounts of the volunteers showed us how children's abuse of parents can vary more compared to that of husbands or in-laws in terms of the women's lack of independence in the relationships. While Korean women are in a relatively powerless position as far as husbands and in-laws are concerned, they are not necessarily in a powerless position with their children, and strong attachment or affection may be the main forces that lead them to not wish to alter their situations or risk losing more by pursuing formal means of abuse intervention. In addition, since their problems are often



linked with their children's delinquency issues, Korean American women tend to focus more on dealing with those issues, rather than actively engaging in action to stop their children's abusive behaviors toward them.

### **How Korean American women are abused**

The volunteer counselors also described two different forms of violence: physical and psychological. Although domestic violence does not comprise a single form of violence and rather presents as a complex system of abusive actions (Flury, 2010), according to the volunteer accounts, people's perception of domestic violence issues differed based on the particular type of violent action involved. Therefore, this section will explore the experiences of the volunteers and the women callers based on the type of action involved.

#### **Physical violence**

Interviewed volunteer counselors and counseling documents explicitly described the physical violence experienced by abused Korean American women. Counseling documents illustrated various physically violent actions to which the women callers had been subjected including scratching, beating, pushing, hitting, and throwing. As a result of those violent actions, the women callers reported injuries including bruises, bumps, fractures, and bleeding.

Thu husband told her that if she likes to visit Korea so much, she should live there and hit her.... Her armpits and ribs hurt because she was hit too severely (Counseling document, 1992-02-04)

She remarried a Korean Man. The man has a daughter and needs financial support. However, the husband quit his job and stays home and only watches

videos and smokes. They live through the woman's earning but because she has to pay for his daughter's support, she became upset and quit her job. If she tries to not pay for the support, he hits her, breaks things, and curses. She gives him the money out of fear (Counseling document, 1992-10-20).

While fighting, the husband used physical force, and her friend called the police. The client does not want her husband to go to jail, but the police officer took records of the situation. She had bruises on her eye to the point where she could not see (Counseling document, 1995-04-03).

The husband takes out the stress he gets from trying to adjust to his new life on his wife and gets angry easily. He tells her to pack her bags and leave and hits her (1997-03-19).

Client was fighting with her husband when he told her to leave and pushed her outside (by turning on the gas in the house). She had an injury on her eye from when her husband scratched her. When drunk, he becomes violent and throws beer bottles (Counseling documents, 1998-07-09).

Been married for 10 years, husband hits her about twice a year. Does not allow her to meet her friends freely, and nags her that she is raising their kids wrong... The husband beat her and told her that she does not know how to take care of the kids. There were no bullets inside, but the husband pointed a gun at her face and threatened her (Counseling document, 2000-07-25).

Some of the informants described the stories they heard from the women callers.

When they were asked about the most memorable cases, they brought up the stories of physically abused Korean American women. Paran related one case she still remembers vividly after 25 years:

It was my turn to receive calls. One woman called... she was a grandmother... she said that her son-in-law took her daughter, and went into a room. I asked her what was going on, and she said that he was beating her daughter. I asked for her address, and I called the police. I told them the location, and the woman called again. She said that she couldn't open the door, and that the man was beating the daughter with the room locked (Paran).

Some volunteer counselors gave detailed descriptions of cases of abused Korean American women who dropped by their office to seek help. Eunju described the moment when one abused Korean American woman walked in their office to get counsel.

Something that still breaks my heart is there was a woman who was asking for help. I told her to come by, and she came by bus. Her clothes were tattered. Her mother-in-law, husband, and brother-in-law harassed her, so she came to us to talk...She was beaten by her husband once, and her nose became crooked and she would have nosebleeds afterwards (Eunju).

Another previous volunteer counselor, Gina, also described a case of a Korean American woman who dropped by their office for a few months to get counseling from her. She described how the children of the abused woman were unbathed and unkempt, and how the woman let her feel the bumps on her head from continuous physical violence.

The man would beat the woman when drunk but was actually a good person when sober...Why I remember that is one winter, the children came with their mother, but they had a runny nose where the mucus became stuck to their nose. The mother was so depressed that she couldn't take care of the kids....She said he just hit her. If he had anything in his hand, he would hit her with it. She told me to touch her head with my fingers. When I felt her head, there were so many bumps. The surface of her head was bumpy. Despite being hit like that, she never went to the hospital once. She also said he hit her in front of their children (Gina).

When the informants described the physical violence cases that they witnessed, they delineated how the concept of safety is perceived differently and leads to a heightened tolerance toward domestic violence within their Korean American community. Their stories provide clear evidence that safety is a fluid concept (Frohmann, 2005).

They pointed out that the Korean conceptualization of “safety” is different from that of Americans. While most volunteer counselors perceived domestic violence as “very dangerous,” they noticed that many abused Korean American women callers did not perceive their relationship as unsafe. Dana mentioned, “In my perspective, I think Korean society never viewed domestic violence as something life-threatening.” Gina also mentioned this different perception of Korean American women based on their different standards of judgment concerning safety.

For Koreans, problems are only problems when they arise. There’s no such thing as a potential problem. When the problem arises, if a person is dead, it’s a problem, and if not, it’s not a problem (laughs). I’m not saying the West is good and the East is bad, I just think Koreans has just build up a tolerance.... How much did Koreans get oppressed in their 5000 year history? (Gina).

The realization that their own perspectives concerning safety in domestic violence situations could be different from that of the women callers was an important step in understanding the abused Korean American women’s standpoints. By acknowledging that the callers might not perceive their situations as unsafe, the volunteer counselors of this association gradually learned how to provide support while still respecting the women’s own perspectives.

### **Psychological violence**

With few exceptions, the health and legal scholarships tend to give psychological abuse considerably less attention than physical abuse (O’Leary, 1998). However, in the volunteer counselor’s accounts, psychological abuse was given more weight than physical abuse because it was so prevalent and linked with the Korean women’s single main reason for considering divorce:

When most women call, about 80-90% is problems with *abuse*... Those people would say that they are mentally *abused* (Bongsun).

While not every informant recognized psychological violence as a part of domestic violence, most informants acknowledged the gravity of psychological trauma experienced by Korean American women in their family relations. Half of the counseling documents and interviews scripts with volunteer counselors of this association revealed the psychological violence experienced by the callers. Counseling documents described various types of psychological abuse including disregarding, insulting, cursing, humiliating, threatening, cheating, nagging, and harassing. Their description of psychological abuse coincides with the academic definition of psychological violence: acts of recurring criticism and/or verbal aggression toward a partner, and/or acts of isolation and domination of a partner (O'Leary, 1998).

He treats her cold-heartedly. Even around people, he embarrasses her without any conscience. Because of him, she has had to move churches frequently. He feels constant rivalry with his wife (Counseling document, 1992-05-04).

Abuses her psychologically, hates her, and slanders about her to others (Counseling document, 1996-12-10).

The husband cannot vent the difficulties of immigrant life anywhere and has found his hobby in gambling. He cannot quit even after the client tries to talk him out of it, and they often fight....When she tries to buy supplies for her store, because the husband has taken money out of their account, the check she uses ends up getting bounced and she feels distressed (Counseling document, 1997-4-22).

The client has a well-run deli stores (5years). The husband is cheating with another woman and keeps taking money out of the cash register (Counseling document, 1998-7-30).

Because her husband disregards her, she wants to go to college as well. The reason for her husband married a Korean woman was because of the tendency of Asian women to obey (Counseling document, 1999-05-27).

Does not allow her to meet her friends freely, and nags her that she is raising their kids wrong (Counseling document, 2000-07-25)

Two months ago, client's husband left the husband and comes back once or twice a week to provide money. He lives with another woman but claims that there is no relationship between them...He does not come home and she is hurt inside. Her in-laws blame her and tell her what she has done to make him leave (Counseling document, date unidentified).

The single mother-in-law picks on her husband (the younger son), and if he isn't there, picks on her. They give a majority of their income to the mother-in-law, but she continually harasses her and tells her to leave her house (Counseling document, date unidentified).

Although they acknowledged there is no clear-cut difference between psychological abuse and psychological conflict, they recognized psychological abuse as a situation in which women experience chronic and significant distress from the actions of the partner. Psychological violence described in the counseling documents includes a broad range of behaviors including cheating and gambling of the husband. In addition, rather than focusing on the actions of the perpetrator's behavior, the informants chose to focus more on the emotional pain experienced by the callers.

During the interviews, volunteers also focused on describing the extent to which Korean American experienced distress from psychological abuse. They recognized that the impact of psychological abuse can have a greater impact than physical actions due to long-term, covert, and devastating mental stress. Eunju described the stories of Korean American women who experienced psychological abuse from their mothers-in-law. She

highlighted that psychological abuse could be more destructive than physical abuse in some senses.

Someone said that she would rather get hit once than continue to be harassed verbally. It turns into persistent harassment. In reality, that's much more difficult, but there is no evidence for that kind of abuse. The abusers look perfectly normal from the outside perspective. Someone told me how her mother-in-law treats people so well in the church but is a completely different person to her at home. Most people are like that...abusive when other people don't see. Those people are smarter and more cunning. The wives' personalities are destroyed by these people. They say they completely lose their minds. If they get hit and break something, at least they can get some kind of immediate response, but if they are abused mentally like this for a long duration, they can go insane. Of course, I don't know how much harder it is to be physically beaten, but most mother-in-laws are like this. They harass them verbally and hold on grip on their sons. They hold a lot of the economic power, and they prevent their sons from having that independence otherwise (Eunju).

Although these cases did not involve anything of the physical nature, informants recognized the psychological abuse issue as very serious. When they heard of any family member doing something to distress the woman caller in order to gain control over her, the informants described that case as psychological abuse. Dana also described a story of a Korean American woman who requested counseling for her controlling husband.

She was a first generation immigrant, and her husband was a second generation...Well firstly, I only got to hear the woman's side, but from her story, I think the husband had some personality problems. I think he took advantage of her ignorance of American culture to try to do everything his way. For example, he would tell her that she should stop doing certain things as if she were in Korea and instead correct her ways by claiming that it's the way Americans do it (Dana).

In this case, the second immigrant generation Korean American husband forced his wife to behave in certain ways. Regarding these husbands who abuse their wives

psychologically, another informant stated that their personalities were “completely insane.”

There were people whose personalities were completely insane. They were hopeless cases. Even my older sister got a divorce due to a difference in personalities. My mom said “When my husband cheated on me, I put up with it. Your husband didn’t even cheat on you. Why are you getting divorced?” Despite that she still got divorced. My mother said “He is devoted to the family and has a good salary. Why are you getting divorced? And my sister said “You don’t understand because you haven’t lived with him”. Their personalities were completely different, and she was *abuse psychologically*. It would never work out like that...(Bongsun).

Their accounts portray the ways in which psychological abuse could be perceived within the extended line of personality differences-related conflicts. From the point of view of the volunteer counselors, the absence of the concrete social recognition of psychological abuse created a serious impediment to addressing domestic violence.

Korean American women also reported instances of economic abuse to the volunteer counselors of this association. Their counseling documents illustrated how the women callers lived with restricted access to money regardless of their working status.

He acts like he lives a Christian life, but he does not love his wife at all. He hits her, curses at her, and is stingy. They live in separate rooms. He gives good offerings to the church, but does not give money freely to his wife (Counseling document, 1992-05-07).

From Korea, husband did not take care of the family and lost all of their money through gambling and lived mostly in debt. Each time, the client had to work to pay back the debt for him. Although he runs a barber shop, he closed it and left to Atlantic City where he is accumulating debt. He has taken the client’s savings and has used her credit card without her knowing and has wasted all of her money. He borrows money from members at the church and never pays them back (Counseling document, 1996-09-10).



Her husband's personality is strange and does not give her money or allow her to drive (Counseling document, 2003-07-01)

Client works extremely hard, but the husband takes all of the money and spends in all on the in-laws. She only received enough to live for herself and cannot give allowances to her kids. Because the sons (13 and 15) get the allowances from their father, they are more attached to him (Counseling document, 2002-03-11).

According to the counseling documents, the volunteer counselors noticed that Korean American women's lack of access to money was related to their isolation. Often, these abusive husbands not only restricted their wives' access to money but also blocked their access to cars. When women did not have money or modes of transportation, it was hard for them to access social resources to seek help. Without access to money and transportation, women were not able to get legal consultations or get away from their abusive husbands. One volunteer counselor likened those women's status to "living in a prison," saying, "She (regarding one of the callers) didn't have a car, no money. If you don't have a car in the States, you are pretty much stuck in one place (Eunju)." These two factors made it hard for Korean American women to reach support.

Volunteers argued that psychological abuse, including economic abuse, had deleterious impacts on life of Korean American women. However, since it happened so commonly, there is lack of social recognition to the gravity of psychological abuse.

### **How Korean American women respond to abuse**

Korean women's responses to abuse are similar to other battered women's responses to domestic violence in that they avoid contacting the police or other agencies (Yoshihama, 2000). Yet, Korean women's responses also differ from those of other abused women as they are shaped by their unique sociocultural contexts.

According to the accounts of the volunteers, Korean women's responses could be categorized into two groups: endurance and confrontation. This section explores volunteers' description of the ways in which Korean American women responded to domestic violence.

Volunteer counselors pointed out the tendency of the women to endure domestic violence issues. As mentioned earlier, one reason for this endurance is that there is heightened tolerance for domestic violence in the patriarchal traditional culture. Another reason for the endurance is that a strong stigma is attached to divorce and the resultant hardship for children may lead some Korean American women to remain in the abusive relationship. Lastly, asking for help due to a domestic violence issue is a very shameful thing for Korean American women due to the victim-blaming and stigma attached to domestic violence. Therefore, these women often waited until they reached their limits as seen in the following excerpts from counseling documents.

He lies, curses, and drinks every nights and the client cannot stand it any longer (1992-05-21).

At night, he abuses his kids and the client. There are also many problems between the husband's parents and the client. The client can no longer forgive the husband (1996-09-10).

Because of differences in personalities, they have tried to break up several times. He hits the client and wants a divorce as well. They both cannot tolerate it any longer and want to divorce. The client says she cannot persevere any longer (1996-08-08).

Since abused Korean American women often do not actively seek help, sometimes their friends or neighbours sought help or reported to the police on their behalves. A few cases recorded in the counseling documents were reported by friends of

the abused women. For example, one counseling document narrated a domestic violence case reported by such a friend.

Client called on behalf of her friend. Her friend's husband beat her friend. Because of the beating, the friend has come to take refuge in the client's place (Counseling document, 1996-date unidentified ).

Like other battered women, not only are battered Korean American women reluctant to actively seek help first within their network, they are also reluctant to report their experiences of abuse to police. Experiences with racism and discrimination, lack of familiarity with U.S. institutional systems, or fear of culturally insensitive treatment may affect Korean American women's willingness to seek assistance from social and legal institutions. Both the counseling documents and interviews with the informants displayed how Korean American women often became silent on the topic of violence during encounters with the police.

Koreans tend to just cover up when they get hit instead of calling the police. Usually when people call us, its' to the point when furniture get destroyed, or they get hit while things get broken and go to the hospital....Situations like that (Chanmi).

While fighting, the husband used physical force, and her friend called the police. The client does not want her husband to go to jail, but the police officer took records of the situation. She had bruises on her eye to the point where she could not see (1995-04-03).

Client was fighting with her husband when he told her to leave and pushed her outside (by turning on the gas in the house). When she went to the house and knocked on their door, her husband brought her back in, but the next door neighbor called the police. She had an injury on her eye from when her husband scratched her. When the police came and asked about it, she didn't say anything out of fear that her husband would go to jail, and the police left (1998-07-09).

A combination of cultural values such as patriarchy and saving face impeded Korean American women from seeking outside help. Meanwhile, volunteer counsellors also described how some abused Korean American women confront domestic violence issues and try to find solution. When they become desperate and do begin seeking help, abused Korean American women often try to deal with domestic violence within their families and communities first. They tried to seek help from their extended family members, friends, or pastors in their churches.

She tried speaking to the pastor but he does not want to get involved so she spoke to his wife. Her husband does not come home and she is hurt inside. Her parents say that she should just give up their children to him and come to Korea to live a new life. Her son cried often (1998-1-2).

When drunk, he becomes violent and throws beer bottles. She is trying to make things right with the help of the pastor's wife (1998-07-09).

The husband beat her and told her that she does not know how to take care of the kids. She left the house out of anger and went to her brother's house....It has been a week since she has stayed at her brother's house (2000-07-25).

Unfortunately, it was often the case that these abused women could not get the support they needed from their existing networks. When their existing networks did not provide sufficient aid, only then did they try to get outside help. For Korean women, seeking outsider help for domestic violence issues meant challenging Korean traditional cultural proscriptions, which enforce women to endure domestic violence for the sake of the family. Korean women also had to swallow possible victim-blaming and stigma attached to domestic violence. Therefore, like other Asian American women (Yoshihama, 2000), asking for outside help indicates not only the degree of her distress, but also her defiance of cultural norms.

However, facing linguistic and cultural barriers, Korean women struggle to communicate in a foreign language and negotiate unfamiliar social support systems. Through interactions with abused Korean American women, KAWAP counselors witnessed how these women faced difficulties accessing supportive services for abused women. The volunteers described how abused Korean American women sought help from the members of this association in a lay provider capacity to link them to social services and social resources due to their lack of familiarity with the American system.

We could refer abused Korean women to psychiatrist or offer them cures if they want. We can give them a lot of help in that area. We can also connect them to another resource...of course it's not easy to always establish a connection (Hana).

Even if volunteers connected abused Korean Americans to various resources, these women continued struggling to communicate with staff members of the institutions and social services. Due to their concerns over the linguistic and cultural barriers, Korean American women often declined to use U.S. social services. One counseling volunteer mentioned Korean American women's tendency to avoid using U.S. social services such as shelters.

Once, a woman who experienced domestic violence asked me for a place to go, so I told her about a shelter. She asked if it was run by an American, and when I said yes, she said she wasn't going to go. It's kind of like that (Eunju).

Considering the reluctance of using U.S. social services, the volunteers pointed out that abused Korean American women need continuous language translation assistance to fully utilize such social resources.

Abused Korean women having a hard time to get help from U.S. social services because of *language*. Even if they want to call somewhere to tell their situation, they need to be able to communicate. I think that's the first reason why it's so hard. Even if we *connect* them, they can't communicate and need a translator. So

we try to connect them a different resource, such as a Korean volunteer lawyer, the Jaisohn medical center...any other necessary organizations (Paran).

Thus, the accounts of these volunteers explained how abused Korean American women face barriers in getting help from U.S. social services, and therefore need continuous assistance in order to utilize those services.

## **Discussion**

Examination of the accounts of KAWAP volunteers who work with abused women in a Korean American community reveals how domestic violence results in the layers of marginalization of Korean American women in their ongoing interaction between individuals and their social contexts. Domestic violence, a social phenomenon that occurs in interpersonal relationships, is generated within a relational dynamic. Hence, the mechanisms of abuse are closely linked with socially imposed proscriptions/norms and differ based on the social status of Korean American women. The KAWAP volunteers pointed out the role of Korean traditional cultural principles and American institutional systems in marginalizing abused Korean American women in their family and society. Korean American women remain in a defenseless position in her family relations without authority and power. Within the Korean American community, Korean traditional cultural prescription of shame regarding domestic violence issue prevented Korean American women from seeking help. Additionally, abused Korean American women's ethnic minority status puts them at a disadvantage in accessing social services from American institutional systems. These layers of marginality of abused Korean American women from their family and social relations results in the vulnerability of these women in addressing domestic violence. However, KAWAP

volunteers also identified individuals as active agents who decide how to behave in their relationships. Because the role of individual agency is a driving force in determining behavior, the volunteers also acknowledged the responsibility of the individual.

Further, the accounts reveal how domestic violence is conceptualized differently in American society and Korean society and how these varied conceptualizations influence individual perceptions of the phenomenon. From KAWAP volunteers perspectives, they see that while American society has low tolerance for physical violence and views it as a safety threat, Korean American society has a heightened tolerance due to differing conceptualizations and standards for safety. Their stories provide clear evidence that safety is a fluid concept (Frohmann, 2005). Even aggressive forms of physical violence often were not perceived as “unsafe” from the perspective of abused Korean American women. However, the individual perception of safety has been used as a method of assessing domestic violence. For example, the partner violence screening tool, consisting of three questions, has been widely used especially in healthcare settings (Guth and Pachter, 2000). This screening tool includes questions regarding individual perceptions of safety, such as, “Do you feel safe in your current relationship?” This screening tool is known to be a valid way to detect a large number of women who have a history of partner violence (Feldhaus et al, 1997). However, for Korean American women who do not conceptualize domestic violence as a threat to their safety, the validity of this screening tool needs to be re-examined.

The accounts also point out the unacknowledged gravity of psychological abuse. Although psychological abuse has as much of a devastating impact on marital

relationships as physical abuse, it receives less emphasis from the health and criminal justice systems overall (O'Leary, 1999). The evidence provided by KAWAP volunteers reveals that visible injuries are far less relevant than invisible distress in leading Korean women to consider divorce. While professionals and scholars focus on measurable objective evidence, abused women suffer from ignored subjective emotions.

Further, the volunteers described economic violence cases that are often understood as belonging to a subgroup of psychological violence (Flury, 2010). By controlling women's access to money and other economic resources, the husbands of the women callers maintained control of the family finances and therefore increased the women's dependence (Fawole, 2008). Volunteers also pointed out that the husbands also controlled their wives' access to cars, which contributed to the women's consequent isolated status. This further hindered the women from finding social resources such as domestic violence advocates, shelters, counselors, and lawyers. Thus, a critical evaluation of domestic violence intervention services is necessary, particularly for women with limited or nonexistent means.

Finally, the accounts reveal that how Korean American women respond (either endurance or confrontation) to domestic violence depending on the process of navigation within cultural proscription and the individual agency. Because Korean traditional culture of saving face enforces women's silence regarding domestic issues, abused Korean American women seek outside help only when they are desperate enough to defy cultural pressures. However, they face other layers of barriers to get help from U.S. social services because of language and cultural differences. While assisting abused Korean



American women, KAWAP volunteers witnessed that these barriers often cause many abused Korean American women to withdraw from attempts to use U.S. services and to retreat back to the abusive situation. Thus, they invite us to consider the limitations of current U.S. social services for abused ethnic minority women as well as the possible role of community resources to fill the demand for these unmet needs.

### **What they think: how KAWAP volunteers discuss domestic violence**

Based on their observations of abused Korean American women in their community, the members of this association developed and modified their own perceptions regarding domestic violence. Since their perceptions of certain phenomena influence their responses, this section will review how this group of Korean American women define and understand domestic violence.

### **How they define domestic violence**

KAWAP volunteers' definitions of domestic violence reveal the extent to which individual definitions of domestic violence can vary. Not only were their definitions of domestic violence different from each other, but their ways of defining domestic violence were also different. Some women followed the institutional definitions such as that of the criminal justice system. However, even among these women, their definitions of domestic violence varied based on when they encountered the institutional system and whether or not they had been educated about the definition of domestic violence (either in the United States or in Korea).

Based on their educational backgrounds, while some women recognized only physical violence as domestic violence, others included psychological and economic

violence under the label. Their accounts reveal the extent to which the influence of institutional definitions of domestic violence shapes individual definitions. The volunteers who were educated about the definition of domestic violence in Korean or American institutional systems before the 1980s were prone to define domestic violence as limited to physical violence. On the other hand, other volunteers who had been educated about the definition of domestic violence in the post-1980s-American institutional system tended to define domestic violence as including psychological violence.

During the interviews, half of the informants mentioned that they defined only physical violence as domestic violence. Their definition was also closely linked with the response of the criminal justice system. According to their accounts, they label domestic violence only when it involved physical actions.

I consider any *physical* hitting or breaking of furniture domestic violence. I also categorize it into verbal abuse and physical abuse separately because the police only come when there is physical abuse. So anything that the police intervene for, we call violence. Alternatively, mental abuse isn't included within violence. Any kinds of physical abuse from the mother-in-law would be considered violence, but the mental stress takes a bigger toll. (Eunju).

Even though these informants did not include verbal abuse under the label of domestic violence, they still acknowledged the gravity of psychological violence issues. Also, even among the half of the informants who defined domestic violence as purely physical, psychological issues and conflict were still linked to physical violence in their definitions.

In regard to domestic violence, women are capable of earning their own income and have become equal in status. Men don't like that and feel that they must prevent that. Wives oppose whatever their husband says, and the husband can't accept that and begin to hit them. I think that is the first complain of the women. They think "We know you are having a hard time, but we are too, so why is it like this?" And that's how the violence between couples begins. (Ami)

My definition is that when couples adjust to living in the U.S., they make a living together, and I think they both get a lot of mental stress. They go through all sorts of hardships. I think the mental stress is the cause of physical *abuse*. It is not normal for most Korean men to hit women, at least in Korea. So my definition is it is primarily physical abuse, and the cause is *I think, you know, mental conflict* (Bongsun).

The other half of the informants mentioned that they see psychological violence as a component of domestic violence.

I think it's when someone tries to *control* another person to do what he/she doesn't want to do by using mental, verbal and physical abuse (Dana).

I think domestic violence in Korea only deals with the violence of the *spouse*. In the U.S., domestic violence includes children being *physically aggressive* and *violence* between married couples. I think the *scope* and *severity* of domestic violence is also different. In Korea, it's only severe if someone dies. In the U.S., there is a classification of *discordance*, *conflict*, and *violence*, and I think it's easier to talk about them. Yet in Korea, there are no clarifications, but they also think it's obvious that couples live and deal with problems (Gina)

In some cases, definitions of domestic violence changed over time. For example, some women developed their own definitions based on their own life experiences. One informant narrated how she stretched her definition of domestic violence to include verbal abuse.

Chanmi: Domestic violence includes hitting, cursing, mistreatment, and things similar.... Back then, I didn't know too much about abuse though words. I only thought abuse was through physical actions or hitting, but now I realize words can be abusive as well.

Interviewer: When did you realize that?

Chanmi: When I took care of kids. When I take care of children, if I tell them that they give me a hard time, that's abuse too.

More importantly, irrespective of how they developed their own definitions, the KAWAP volunteers acknowledged the conceptual fluidity of domestic violence and how institutional systems also change its definition over time.

The domestic violence that we've talked about only includes physical matters...I only included physical abuse in my thought. This is the first time I'm hearing of including verbal abuse. It's changing. I don't know about this that well... It always changes... the definition. Women's right are getting better, so it should keep changing. My definition only includes physical violence (Paran).

According to their accounts, individual definitions of domestic violence are influenced by both institutional definitions as well as the individual's own experiences. More importantly, the volunteers acknowledged domestic violence as a more drastic continuation of marital conflict and incorporated possible reasons for the occurrence of domestic violence in their community into their definitions.

### **Possible reasons for domestic violence**

When people acknowledge domestic violence as a social problem, they must necessarily become interested in the societal reasons that lead to the problem. Based on what they heard from the abused women in their community, members of the association speculated about the possible factors behind. Drawing from their encounters with abused Korean American women, the informants listed patriarchal culture, gender role conflict, and stress from immigrant life as the possible reasons for domestic violence.

### **Influence of patriarchal culture**

Historically, patriarchal societies often condoned violence against women.

Emphasizing women's sacrifice and submission toward men, violence against women was often used as a mechanism to reinforce the patriarchy. Many informants of this study also recognized how traditional Korean patriarchal culture allowed violence against women in their community.

It's from a history of women's inferiority. The men are always on the top, and the women have to say "yes, yes".. If they didn't listen, they would get beat. So I think *domestic violence* is one aspect of *culture*. It was a history of patriarchy with Confucian ideals. It was part of the culture. (Paran)

In terms of Korean culture, she had the sacrificial mentality that she can die for her children and husband. She said later that her dad would hit her mom and she grew up watching that. She would always get hit a lot from her mother growing up. So she learned... She grew up in a society where that kind of *violence* is allowed, but in the U.S. doesn't allow that. Korea doesn't allow it up to a certain point, but the *definition of domestic violence* is weak. Beyond good or bad, her understanding of marriage and *domestic violence* was different culturally, and she was living in the U.S. in the Korean way. Her mentality was that even though she was dead physically and mentally as a person, as long as she could cook, clean, do laundry, and have sexual relations with her husband as he wanted, it was okay. That's how she lived (Gina).

A few informants pointed out that Korean American women who were raised under Korean traditional patriarchal culture often unknowingly picked up on that culture's norms and believed that that was the right way to live. Since the ideal image of Korean women was one of unconditional sacrifice and submission, it could be difficult for Korean American women to acknowledge the wrongfulness of violence against women and to resist abuse. One volunteer counselor described witnessing the extent to which Korean American women were under the influence of the patriarchal culture:

The woman thinks she's doing the right thing, and her goal is to become the ideal wife and mother. She also thinks it's right thing to be completely submissive to her mother-in-law's words. That's why she cannot escape from the violent situations. She thinks she's doing the right thing. If she doesn't do these things, she becomes a bad woman, and no one wants to be bad. She has to be convinced that it's not bad to be strong to be independent (Eunju).

According to their accounts, Korean traditional patriarchal culture not only allowed violence toward women, but also caused situations in which Korean American women had to endure violence in even in Korean American society.

### **Gender role conflict (power relations)**

While most participants witnessed and mentioned the influence of traditional patriarchal culture on domestic violence, they also saw increasing gender role-related tension among Korean couples. After immigration to the U.S., Korean American couples often need to renegotiate their power relations and gender role assignments based on their changed lifestyles in the United States. Half of the informants mentioned that Korean men use physical violence toward women when they fail to negotiate their power relations through communication. One informant illustrated how gender role conflicts could morph into domestic violence among Korean American couples.

Because they are in the U.S. women start to speak more aggressively. This is because in Korea, they only do house chores, but in the U.S., both the husband and wife work to make a living. The wife complains that she still has to do all the house chores, and I think while they fight, the husband resorts to *physical abuse* (Paran).

Another informant also pointed out how a gender role conflict could proceed to domestic violence particularly when men firmly stuck by traditional patriarchal culture.

Mostly, they are caused by an initial *mental conflict* which progresses into *physical* abuse. Women say “I work too” and start to oppose their husbands, and this is where fights and problems within the family arise. The men treat the women like “*second class*” and don’t help them around the house even though they both work and earn money (Bongsun).

Although still related to the patriarchal culture of gender roles, these accounts illustrated domestic violence as a negative byproduct of relationship power struggles. Dana also mentioned, “I think in those cases where the wife has the economic power and the husband doesn’t, the husband uses violence to try to claim his power.” According to their accounts, domestic violence often happens/arises during marital conflict as a means to control the other person.

### **Stress from immigrant life**

After coming to the United States, Korean immigrants face language, sociocultural, and political barriers which often lead to a socioeconomic downward mobility. As they struggle with these difficulties and try to adjust to their new society, Korean immigrants experience psychological stress. Scholars have pointed out that stress from immigrant life can trigger domestic violence among the immigrant population (Abraham, 2006; Erez, Adelman, & Gregory, 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002), and likewise, KAWAP volunteers also mentioned that some Korean American men project their unresolved stress from immigrant life toward their partners in the form of violence.

When couples adjust to living in the U.S., they make a living together, and I think they both get a lot of mental stress. They go through all sorts of hardships. I think the mental stress is the cause of physical abuse (Bongsun).

Beyond looking at stress from immigrant life as an environmental factor, the KAWAP volunteers also saw it as an individual coping issue. A few informants pointed

out that Korean American men who fail to cope with their stress often resort to domestic violence.

They take out the stress they get in American society by drinking and picking on their wives. And the wives understand that and believe that their abusive husband can change (Chanmi).

According to their accounts, domestic violence is generated from the compounding contexts of excessive environmental stress from immigrant life and improper individual coping mechanisms.

### **Possible solutions for domestic violence**

The members of this association developed lists of possible solutions for domestic violence that included teaching women to protect themselves, violence prevention education, and reporting to the police. According to the informants in this study, domestic violence is one of the strategies used in power relations. Within that context, they thought that Korean women needed to protect themselves and not allow others to abuse them. This process of self-protection also involves overcoming the notion that the ideal female is submissive and self-sacrificing. For example, one informant described the reason why building up self-protection could be a solution to domestic violence.

So, there is no way but for the individual to become mentally stronger. Mother-in-laws like that can't harass someone that she feels is stronger than she is. She harasses the wife because she knows that she is weaker. The mother-in-law holds all of the economic power, so she thinks it is okay to beat or abuse the wife. The wife has to show the mother-in-law that she is a stronger individual, but it's hard to do that when you're younger. Also, our Korean culture says that wives should be obedient to their mother-in-laws. So some people can't do anything when an American daughter-in-law comes in. They only do it to Korean daughter-in-law, so it depends on the person...It's similar to an animal. An animal can't fight another animal that's stronger than itself. It only attacks animals that are weaker.



Also, if there is a herd of cows, lions don't attack the male bulls, they go for the calves. Usually, those that get harassed are women who are tender-hearted and nice. It's like that for the majority of cases. So the mother-in-laws think they can do whatever they want. The first step is for the woman to become stronger, but as it turns out, it's not as easy as one or two counseling sessions. Still, it helps for them to know that they have to be stronger (Eunju).

Beyond promotion of self-protection, some members of this association stated that the women could report abusive situations to the police. These women thought that calling the police would lead husbands to realize that domestic violence is not allowed in the United States, preventing further incidents. Paran described how reporting to police could teach Korean men to stop using physical violence.

After reporting it two or three times, police don't allow the man to go back into the home. They get a court order to restrain them from entering the home. Then, it's embarrassing...they can't go into their own homes. Where can they go? It's embarrassing to meet their friends...and after a while, they begin to control themselves... And I think it's better now. So I think that's important. And I think that's why domestic violence has decreased. That's what I think... At least guys begin to learn. They learn the consequences, and stop hitting (Paran).

From the perspective of these members of the association, education was a crucial piece of prevention and recognition of domestic violence in their communities. This belief was further applied in their actions of community education and publications. One volunteer counselor elaborated the necessity of community education to prevent domestic violence in their community:

If we can *educate* them, we can *prevent* a lot of violence from happening. Another thing to think about is that the person that experiences violence isn't always the victim. There are many cases where it's mutual. Someone may have showed violence because another person provoked them. If two *emotionally mature* people have an argument, it's not big problem, but I think we can *prevent* problems if we can do *preliminary counseling* to *educate* people. I think we can

*prevent those cases through* public education. Then, we can reduce cases of domestic violence (Gina).

Although they could not implement these solutions on abused Korean American women, the volunteers' opinions were often reflected during their interactions with the women.

### **How domestic violence changes**

Domestic violence is a social phenomenon and it therefore occurs within the social relations and contexts of the times. As time passes, the way society perceives and responds to this phenomenon changes. Having witnessed the changes of the last three decades, the way the members of this women's association deal with abused women callers has also changed.

During the interviews, members of this Korean American women's association witnessed the shifts in domestic violence cases in their community. They acknowledged how society began to take care of domestic violence and, consequently, how women's responses toward violence differ today. Through her experiences as a volunteer counselor and social worker, Gina illustrated how the social perspective and definition of domestic violence has broadened and subdivided during the last three decades.

When I look at things by *decades*, talk about domestic violence grew, and I think the definition of domestic violence also changed. A long time ago, there was no such thing as *sexual abuse* between couples. Now there is *sexual abuse* between couples. Another thing is that abuse between parents, teenagers and children also changed. The notion of *child abuse* did exist before, but I think its *nature* is changing. *Corporal punishment* was not a problem before. It wasn't something that was reported that much. Nowadays, when we look at the *state mandatory reports*, each *state reports 10 children per day. 9 cases that are reported every 5 minutes is a child abuse case.* It's increasing by that much. So the scope and classification criteria of domestic violence is being divided a bit more. They

talked about *child abuse* a lot in the 1990s and 2000s, but I think they talked more about *domestic violence*. Now in the 2010s, there's more about *child abuse* and *sexual abuse* (Gina).

As society starts to intervene in domestic violence, women start to be informed about the availability of social services for abused women and respond more actively toward domestic violence in their communities. According to the informants in this study, Korean American women more actively respond to abuse as compared with the past. For example, one volunteer counselor described the increased awareness of Korean American women about social support services for abused women.

People were reluctant to share their problems then, but I think it's better now. Also, people are aware that you can call 911 to get help. A lot of people also thought it was fine to continue to live though physical beatings in the past. However, now, people are aware that the police can intervene and help (Eunju).

Another volunteer counselor described the increased sensitivity toward domestic violence among Korean American women.

I think women are more prone to think that their rights are violated over more for even smaller acts of violence as they have more social status now. At least from before.... In my opinion, I think women can react better to protect themselves in this age. I think the intensity of the violence and the danger to life is similar though. A long time ago, women didn't talk about their problems even if they were beaten. But nowadays, I think women react more to such violence. (Dana).

Having witnessed both a transforming society and different responses of women toward domestic violence, the volunteers, too, changed their responses toward domestic violence, as will be discussed in the next section.

## **Discussion**

The KAWAP volunteer's definitions of domestic violence reveal the conceptual fluidity of domestic violence and how individual and institutional systems also change the definition over time. Since every woman has a different definition of domestic violence, the ways of perceiving this particular phenomenon also vary. For example, some women might perceive their husbands' cursing as domestic violence and recognize that as a serious issue to be addressed. However, other women might perceive this as a way of normal communication and not necessarily raise questions regarding the relationship. As the members of KAWAP volunteers acknowledge this variable and fluid conceptualization of domestic violence, they respected abused women's callers' individual perceptions of domestic violence instead of pushing for the institution's or their own definition.

The accounts also describe what they saw as the possible reasons for domestic violence from individual, interpersonal and societal levels. They listed individual stress-coping issues, gender role-conflicts, and traditional Korean patriarchal culture as possible factors. From their perspectives, domestic violence needed to be addressed socio-ecologically in consideration of the dynamic interrelations spanning various personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural contexts. Further, KAWAP volunteers tried to find ways to deal with these multiple layers of contexts to address domestic violence in their community.

As the KAWAP volunteers viewed the possible reasons for domestic violence from multiple layers of contexts, they also sought solutions by addressing these contexts.

For the abused individual women, they saw the necessity of empowering them to build up their strength for self-protection. For the abusive partners, they recommended that the women report violent incidents to the police in order to teach them the lesson that domestic violence is not allowed in the United States. Finally, they saw public community education as a way to prevent the violence condoned by a Korean patriarchal culture that had heightened tolerance for abuse.

Finally, the accounts consider another layer of contexts: the changing individual and social perception and response toward domestic violence over time. The KAWAP volunteers witnessed how society began to recognize domestic violence as a social issue rather than as a private issue. As society identifies domestic violence as a social problem, various institutional and social services urged women to actively respond to domestic violence and provided supportive services to this end. As a result, KAWAP women also had to adjust with the changing individual and social responses to domestic violence in their community through the times.

### **What they do: their responses toward abused women**

Regarding their interactions with abused women callers, the members of this association narrated their various responses that had been based on the women caller's contexts. According to their counseling documents and interviews, their responses could be conceptualized as belonging to one or more of three categories that included giving advice, referring to resources, and community education. This section illustrates how the members of this association described their responses toward domestic violence in their community.

### **Giving advice**

As mentioned in the earlier section, the members of this association individually worked out possible ways to deal with domestic violence through the interactions with abused Korean American women. Based on their thoughts, volunteer counselors tried to provide guidance for abused Korean American women seeking help. They mentioned that their advice also depended on the particular circumstances of the women callers.

### **Recommend to stay in the relationship**

According to the counseling documents, in more than half of the cases, the volunteer counselors suggested starting with finding solutions to deal with the possible causes of the violence and conflict. Unless the case was irreconcilable, they tried to explore options to keep the family together. During the interviews, a volunteer counselor mentioned how they tried to keep the family cohesive also for the sake of the women.

I usually focus on trying to protect the family. I think if the woman's life is safe, that the focus should be on trying to save the family. I think women should be able to some kind of tool to prevent the violence and receive help in reducing the violence, and I counsel in the hopes that the family can be saved. Normally, in American counseling centers, they put *feminism* as the priority and rather than saving the family, they put focus on the women... that the women should live well. But in my case, I don't know about the association, I think both the family and the woman should be saved (Dana).

To keep the family, volunteer counsellors often tried to find ways to solve marital conflicts between Korean couples by figuring out what the woman caller could try. Particularly, when the violence was caused by power relations, they tried to find ways to alleviate power struggles. Several counseling documents described the volunteer

counselors suggesting women to compromise and reconcile with their husbands for the sake of their families.

The husband does not feel loved or respected by the client and feels self-conscious about his own weaknesses and insecurities. He feels that his wife (the client) is smarter and more useful than he is and questions the value of his presence in the family. There is no way for him to vent his stress from his immigrant life. The wife is the leader of the family, and the husband wants to be the leader. However, realistically, he cannot be due to his shortcomings. He knows that the abuse and violence is wrong. . . . The husband is a nice person so the client should be able to understand the husband's stress and forgive him. He knows that he is wrong. The client is stronger and can solve the problem. She should be willing to sacrifice and compromise by trying to love, understand, forgive, encourage the husband and try to keep the fellowship in the family alive. They have no plans to divorce as of now. (1996-09-10)

While, in some cases, they suggested women to sacrifice and fulfill their husbands' desires to lead the family to prevent further violence, in other cases, they suggested conditional compromise. The volunteer counselors recommended that the women try different strategies up until a certain point and then maintain the family if the abusive family member was cooperative.

The mother-in-law is egotistical and is rivalous with the client. . . . Client should be understanding and submissive to a certain point. She should set limits after which she should not act submissive at all. If there is too much injustice, the client should convince her husband that he does not always take his parent's side (1996-07-11).

For the sake of the children, it is recommended that the client and the husband compromise and stay together. Since a divorce lawyer costs a lot of money, client should try to get on the husband's good side and try to get child support. If the husband understands, delay the divorce for now and just separate. If the husband regrets his mistakes, think about getting back together (1996-08-08).

The volunteer counselors did not only work with the women, but also sometimes worked with their husbands in the form of couples counseling. Although there were not

many cases in which the partner accepted couple counseling and called the association, two documented cases described a husband's participation.

The client said she would contact the counselor again and means to visit with her husband (1995-04-03), The counselor called the husband and advised him to resolve the problem with the mother-in-law and sister-in-law and to reconcile with this wife (1995-04-06).

After trying to find a way to preserve the family with the woman caller, if they reached the conclusion that this marriage was no longer sustainable for the sake of the woman and her children, their conversation moved on to divorce and the accompanying logistics.

In the beginning didn't they send everyone to the pastor/priest?

### **Recommend divorce**

The volunteer counselors occasionally suggested divorce as a possible option for the abused women. One volunteer counselor described her standard for recommending divorce:

If the man is *gambling* or is *physically dangerous*, assaulting with weapons, and they have no intention of repenting or *improving*, there is no choice but divorce....For *cases* that have a possibility of saving the marriage, we do *counseling* or send them to a *specialist*. But people who have mental problems don't admit they have a problem and don't *cooperate*. They say "*That's somebody else's problem!*" and never go to a *counselor*. Those who don't have the will power to overcome their problems are those who are *addicted* to alcohol, gambling, or drugs. You know, people like that lose their homes too. In those cases, a divorce as soon as possible would be the best option. Yes, those people who cannot be *reconciled* (Bongsun).

Once they reached the conclusion through the discussion with the woman caller that divorce was the best option, they tried to assist the woman to find ways to prepare for



the divorce including consultations with a lawyer, working on economic plans, and maintenance of records for court. Several counseling documents relate how the volunteer counsellors advised women to prepare for divorce.

Because client cannot live due to fraudulent marriage, violence, and abuse, client can be introduced to a free lawyer. First, ask for a separation from the husband and then a divorce. Receive child support from the divorce and if possible split the money from the oratory and client should be able to live and support herself. If she runs to Korea and lives out of state with the child, she is lawfully at a disadvantage (1996-10-24).

The best way for her is bearing staying at shelter for a while to get legal protection and precede her divorce to get fostering expanses (1991-03-28).

Recommend her that is advantageous for her to call 911 and keep records for court. Client was grateful and said she would call if necessary (1996-08-08).

One volunteer counselor also recalled how she advised an abused Korean American woman to keep the evidence of abuse through hospital visits and filing of a court order.

She wouldn't go to the hospital even when hit. As she counselled with me, she began to get treated at the hospital, and I helped her to leave records there....Also, I went to court with the mother to file a court order (Gina).

However, due to their efforts to support abused women who desired a divorce, they often had to deal with the offended men. One informant remembered receiving a phone call from one old man accusing this association as a family-breaker.

Some people criticized us because we were a women's organization. One old men called us and complained "Why are you making other family get a divorce?". So I asked him "Have you ever attended the lectures of our association?" And he said no. So I told him that he had no idea what he was talking about and that he should attend one of our lecture and then talk. After that he became quiet (Eunju).

In spite of the offended responses from some people in their community, the volunteer counselors of this association continued to offer their supportive services for abused women.

### **Recommending calling police**

As mentioned earlier, some members of this association mentioned calling police as a possible solution to prevent further incidence of violence by showing abusive Korean men that domestic violence was not allowed in the United States. Some informants mentioned that Korean men did not know that police could intervene in domestic violence situations. Therefore, the volunteers felt the necessity of educating both Korean men and women regarding police intervention as a pre-emptive prevention tool. For example, one informant recalled an abused woman who did not know about police intervention regarding domestic violence.

In one case, a woman that I knew ran away from home because her husband hit her. It was winter, and she couldn't even wear her shoes. She was walking, and the police saw her and went to her home to investigate. That woman didn't even know that was possible. When I followed up with her, she said her husband treated her well afterwards the police visit (Eunju).

After their observations of several cases in which husbands had stopped using physical violence toward their wives after the police had intervened, they more strongly recommended that women call police to warn their husbands.

If he starts hitting her again, she should call the police and warn him (1992-10-20).

When they were beaten, we told them to call the police (Eunju).

For some cases when the woman could not call the police, the volunteer counselor often called the police instead. One volunteer counselor recalled the time when she had to call the police to get their help.

One woman called...she was a grandmother... she said that her son-in-law took her daughter, and went into a room. I asked her what was going on, and she said that he was beating the daughter. I asked for her address, and I called the *police*. I told them the *location*, and the woman called again. She said that she couldn't open the door, and that the man was beating her daughter with the room locked. I think the *police* had arrived then (Paran).

These accounts show how KAWAP volunteers actively engaged with the U.S. criminal justice system when it came to the issue of the women's safety.

### **Referring to resources**

Not only did the association provide counseling services, but it also connected abused women to other social resources such as shelters, lawyers, and other community centers. All informants mentioned their experiences of referring abused Korean women callers to other resources. Many counseling documents indicated how the volunteer counsellors introduced women to social resources.

Introduced client to several lawyers. Also told the client the phone number to a women's volunteering group for help in case she gets hit again. Called the volunteering group who said they have connections with people who can help those with low income for almost free and told them to help out the client (1996-08-08).

Client's husband throws furniture and scares her with loud yelling. Client says she has called 911 twice now. Currently, she is living separated from her husband with her 3 and a half year old son. She needs a lawyer to discuss about welfare and living expenditures.

Since Korean American women often were not familiar with the American systems that could offer the necessary services, KAWAP volunteers served as informants

to link them to the desired resources. During the interviews, the informants also described how they issued referrals to the abused women callers.

We also had phone call cases asking about divorce. We listened to everything they had to say and led them to talk to a legal specialist (Ami).

We are basically *trafficking* people to other resources.... They can get connected, and we are just *trafficking* them to the right places (Paran).

However, even if abused Korean American women were introduced to lawyers, the volunteers saw that they were often unaffordable for these women and that free legal services were not easy to access.

Introduced her to Mr. C (Lawyer) but the fee was too much. The cost was \$100.00 an hour (Counseling documents, 1996-08-07).

They don't have money, so they ask for *free* legal counseling. So even when I call a *free lawyer* association for them, even that association has difficulties contacting the client (Bongsun).

For the cases of women referred to the shelters, the volunteers observed that these women often backed away from them due to limited space.

Many shelters and places of refuge are filled, so it's hard to find a place for women to stay....I don't think there are places for them to stay (Dana).

When women like that would come asking for a place to stay, we would *refer* them to different *shelters*, but they have to leave those places after a month (Eunju).

Even if the volunteers connected abused Korean American women to necessary services, they found that those services are often unaffordable or insufficient.

### **Community education**

Many informants also expressed the necessity of community education regarding domestic violence. As mentioned earlier, they acknowledged that many abused women often did not seek help due to the shame and stigma attached to domestic abuse. This association used public education to provide information about domestic violence in recognition of these women who had no voice for themselves. One informant described the perceived necessity she felt for community education regarding domestic violence cases.

After helping abused women, I felt that I should tell the local community about domestic violence....Women need to learn how to do that with wisdom. If the women could receive *public education* from the association, the women don't have to *personally disclose* their own problems. Instead of counseling each person with their individual problems... that requires people to *self-expose* themselves, and it runs into the problems of people wanting to *save face*. For people who don't want to do that, I think it would be good to create a *support group to educate* women (Gina).

Their community education was not limited to women. They also included Korean men to inform them about domestic violence. Another informant mentioned how they had had their own husbands educate other Korean men about abuse.

*Education* is important, and through our husbands, we taught men that it was wrong to hit women (Paran).

This association also utilized public lectures and book publication to educate their community. These lectures covered family relations and domestic abuse information. The titles of the lectures included, "Healthy family life," "Domestic violence," "Family law,"

“Interacial marriage,” “Women’s social activities and role,” and “Family counseling and communications.”

In their annual/biannual book publications, they included articles providing information pertaining to domestic violence and family relations. Regarding domestic violence, the list of articles included “Violence in family,” “Wife beating in Korean American society,” “The influence of domestic violence on children in Korean American society,” and “Abused women’s seven reasons to stay in their marital relationship.” Regarding family law, the list of articles includes “American family law: protection order,” “American family law: equal right amendment,” “How Korean family law changed,” and “American family law: marital property distribution.” Regarding family relations, the titles of those articles include “Counseling cases of Philadelphia Korean community society,” “Family conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law,” “Dating and marital life of Korean immigrants,” “The images of Korean women: through the counseling cases,” and “What husbands really want.”

## **Discussion**

The KAWAP volunteers’ description of their responses to abused Korean American women reveal that their responses were neither formalized nor universal. The diverse range of their advice included both cooperation with and resistance to traditional Korean patriarchal culture based on the abused women’s preference and contexts. For women who desired to keep their families intact, KAWAP volunteers provided various strategies for coping with the perpetrator. The volunteers did not directly resist traditional Korean patriarchal culture nor encourage abused women to challenge the oppressive

cultural prescriptions because both the volunteers and abused Korean American women acknowledged the need to keep their family structure intact in order to raise their children. Both the volunteers and abused Korean American women were well aware of the possible consequences that might befall abused Korean American women should they engage in confrontation, including: blaming, divorce, economic hardship and isolation from their family and community. Rather, KAWAP volunteers suggested other ways that abused Korean American women could sustain themselves while addressing abuse in less confrontational ways. They encouraged abused women to superficially adhere to traditional patriarchal culture and appear to be endorsing the prescribed authority of husbands. By acting as obedient wives, KAWAP volunteers believed that abused women could avoid social blame under traditional Korean patriarchal culture and raise their children without economic hardship. Although KAWAP women did not challenge the traditional Korean patriarchal gender norms, they figured out how to navigate within the prescribed gender power relations within their community.

On the other hand, for women who desired to leave the relationship, the volunteers provided various resources and information needed to prepare for divorce. Since assisting abused women's efforts to divorce was recognized as challenging Korean patriarchal family structure, KAWAP women often experienced backlash from their community, for example, receiving offensive phone calls accusing their association as a family-breaker. Despite encountering the backlash, KAWAP continued to assist abused Korean American women to leave the relationship. The accounts of their interaction with abused Korean American women reveal interesting notions about how KAWAP

volunteers respected the abused women's perspectives rather than enforcing their own personal perspectives and opinions.

Further, KAWAP volunteers connected abused women to desired social services by providing referrals, although not without limitations. Although abused Korean American women were often connected to the desired services, KAWAP volunteers observed that there existed another layer of barriers faced by these women. Even if the KAWAP volunteers provided continuous translation services during the interactions with lawyers, the women often could not afford the expenses of legal counseling. In addition, even if they dared to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, shelters were not an available option for them because only short-term stay was available and they had nowhere to go afterwards. Witnessing these additional barriers, the volunteers felt the boundaries and unsurmountable limitations of their services.

Finally, the accounts of KAWAP's community education efforts show how the volunteers opened discussion about domestic violence and family issues, which were often-silenced issues in the Korean American community. Since the discussions drew from the unique cultural contexts of this community, the open lectures and publications could provide not only linguistically accessible but also culturally tailored information. Furthermore, through incorporating various voices of their community, they provided a safe space for display of various perspectives of their community on domestic violence issues- traditional to modern, academic to practical, and patriarchal to feminist.



### **What they feel: community response to KAWAP services**

Through their interactions with abused women and Korean members of their community, the volunteers came into contact with a wide range of responses regarding their services. The volunteers reported that these various responses often led them to feel emotions such as burnout, sadness, and pride. This section illustrates how KAWAP members talked about the way community responses affected their work.

#### **Abused women's response**

KAWAP volunteers categorized domestic violence cases as not-followed up cases and followed-up cases. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, most of the domestic violence cases terminated with only one phone call. While most scholars found burnout to be associated with work overload, emotional involvement, and lack of experience in helping professions (Baird and Jenkins, 2003), according to the accounts of the KAWAP volunteers, much of their burnout was associated with disconnected follow-ups with abused Korean American women. The counseling documents provided by KAWAP reveal such cases. For example,

Called three times but no response (2003-08-06).

During the interviews, the volunteer counselors mentioned how hard it was to follow up with abused Korean American women callers.

It is hard for us to *follow-up*. When we want to meet up and help in person, they refuse. Korean people don't *identify* themselves and it is hard to *follow-up* (Bongsun).

Since most abused Korean women were reluctant to be followed up with, the KAWAP members described being debilitated by the sense of "not being helpful." When

they were asked what the most difficult thing during their counseling careers was, many of them replied that it was the absence of follow-up calls from the women callers.

Domestic violence cases like the one we talk about was difficult because there is no end. There is no solution. I also didn't have anyway to contact her. They don't leave us their phone numbers, and we don't force them to give it to us. So all we can do is wait for their phone call, but when they stop calling, it makes us sad (Chanmi).

The volunteer counselors related that two major reasons for the lack of follow-up were the absence of immediate access to social services and a strong social stigma on domestic violence. As mentioned earlier, abused Korean American women face linguistic and cultural barriers when trying to access U.S. social services. Even if they overcome the barriers by themselves or get continuous assistance from the volunteers of this association, shelters and/or legal counseling services are often not readily available or affordable. After the abused women are informed about this limited availability to the most necessary services, they might feel helpless and find no reason to call back. Since the volunteers also acknowledged that they could not meet the abused women's needs, they often reported that there was "no solution."

Another reason for lack of follow-up by abused women was that of the stigma associated with domestic violence. As mentioned earlier, the act of getting a consultation for a domestic violence problem is recognized as a shameful behavior in Korean communities. While domestic violence requires a long-term process of assessment and counseling intervention, the volunteers pointed out that most women callers expected them to provide immediate solutions to address their situations. Although this association offered anonymous phone counseling services, abused Korean American women often

felt reluctant to make long-term follow-up calls due to their concerns about confidentiality. One informant explained how the shame of domestic violence hindered abused Korean American women in calling back for follow-up.

They call and then never call again. There are many cases that end with one call. It's hard to connect with someone for *long term*. They feel it's shameful... Very shameful, so they stop after calling just once. There are no phone calls that last long term. We aren't *psychiatrists*, so people just call us in emergencies once or twice, similar to a *hotline*.... There's a lot of shame. *They don't want to reveal their name, address, and phone number for follow-up*. They think a rumor will circulate...that's the most frightening. Everyone knows each other in this neighborhood...Even one person can spread it to everyone else. It's worse because the *society* is so small. Dignity is also very important to Koreans. In front of others... that dignity part of *culture* is so huge. That's why they hide and use fake names. And they don't *follow-up* because it increases the chance of us knowing them (Paran).

In the case that the abused woman caller's identity was unintentionally exposed to the volunteer counselor, the woman often cut off her connection to the community. Chanmi recalled one case in which the woman caller left her church community after finding out that the volunteer counselor attended the same church.

Chanmi: One day, she asked if she could come by to visit the office. I was very happy and welcomed her to come because there was rarely anyone who wanted to come by. She says she would bring her two kids too, so I prepared toys for them and everything. She finally came, but she was one of our church members. Oh my... I got goose bumps just thinking about it.

Interviewer: what happened?

Chanmi: I just pretended as if I didn't know her... And she did as well. I remember this case because of that. She also changed churches. Sometime later, I ran into her while shopping at the Korean mart. I asked her how she was doing, and she said she was fine.

This account shows the extent to which limited availability of social services and social stigma of domestic violence influence interactions between abused Korean

American women and KAWAP volunteers. Considering the social shame of domestic violence issues, the members of the KAWAP were very cautious in their response and discussion concerning these incidents. In addition, since the abused Korean American women were reluctant to be followed up with, the volunteers could have interpreted this as a rejection of their services.

### **Community's response**

Although the volunteers never labeled KAWAP as a domestic violence advocacy group, interestingly enough, community women often recognized KAWAP as a place to call and seek help regarding domestic violence. According to their annual publications, KAWAP had counseled more than 1221 cases of domestic conflict cases and 98 cases of physical violence since 1996. One member also described how some community women recognized them as an organization that supported abused Korean American women.

I distributed our book at a Korean restaurant, so community people can read it. And I heard how the restaurant staffs were talking about our association. One female staff asked to another female staff that what is our association about. The staff responded her that “it is where you can make a phone call when you were hit by your husband (Eunju).”

Witnessing the negative connotations of domestic violence in their community, KAWAP volunteers kept providing a broad array of community services for Korean families and were also able to procure support from people in their community. Within the first year, the number of their membership increased drastically to 83 women. During the last 28 years, a total of 716 people participated in their lecture meetings and/or fundraising activities in the Korean community in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia Korean community people like us. They knew that KAWAP members gathered with goodwill and provided services for the community. They respect us and support us (Paran).

However, due to the fact that they had provided support for abused Korean American women, KAWAP volunteers often faced the hostility of some Korean men. For example, as mentioned earlier, one volunteer counselor remembered receiving a phone call from an older man accusing this association of being a family breaker.

Some people criticized us because we were a women's organization. One old man called us and complained, "Why are you making other family get a divorce?" (Eunju).

Facing both positive and negative responses from their community, KAWAP volunteers kept providing services to their community over the past three decades.

## **Discussion**

This section has described how the Korean community has responded to KAWAP services, according to the volunteers of the association. Particularly, the responses of abused Korean American women callers challenge us to acknowledge the grim reality of the circumstances under which traumatized women, after long consideration, decided to stand up and speak. The sheer volume of the failure to follow-up by abused women reveals a portrait of a community and social service system that sent them back into silence. The volunteers' accounts force us to rethink the social contexts of abused Korean American women. They counter the possibility that the problem lies in particular women's passive responses toward violence or a preference for staying in an abusive relationship. Instead, abused women tried to find possible solutions, but often could not defy the cultural and systemic barriers that they faced. Although community people

supported their services, KAWAP volunteers were often disempowered by witnessing sufficient problems in their community and U.S. social services.

### **Health care provider's role**

When it comes to domestic violence issues, the KAWAP has provided a space for abused Korean American women in Philadelphia to call and seek help over the last three decades. Through KAWAP volunteer's interactions with abused women in their community, the volunteers have accumulated knowledge and experiences regarding how to address domestic violence issues with women in their community. This includes opinions about the role of health care systems.

Based on how the volunteers conceptualize domestic violence issues, social problems and/or health problems, their opinions on the possible role of health care providers addressing domestic violence issues vary. This section will explore these opinions as a lens for considering how the health care system can best meet the needs of abused Korean American women.

### **No reliable help from healthcare providers**

Two KAWAP volunteers conceptualized domestic violence as a social problem, not as a health issue. They thought that it was outside of the health care provider's scope of practice to deal with domestic violence, unless abused women had physical and/or psychological injuries. Therefore, these informants said that there is not much that health care providers can do to help abused Korean American women.

But how do we help them in those matters, let alone help them in their domestic affairs? Of course if they ask for help, we can *refer* them to a *psychiatrist*, but other than that, we can't do much. There must be a lot of *social* problems, and

health care providers can't listen to all of that. *I think we have to separate that problem (Bongsun).*

Since they believed that it is not the health care provider's business to address domestic violence issues, they did not see the health care provider as reliable resource for providing services to abused Korean American women.

Korean health care providers don't help women like that and there are no systems in place to do that. As far as I know, there are no medical professionals who are willing to help Korean women like that.... Health care providers might can help their pain or even offering counseling. However, we can't rely on them for that. That's what the community centers do. Women can get their injuries sutured as patients, but I don't think they can give counseling (Ami).

However, most informants believed that healthcare providers should provide support to abused Korean American women. They saw the possible role of the healthcare provider as including both offering contextually competent services and providing referrals to other resources.

### **Offering contextually competent services**

Several participants mentioned that healthcare providers need to consider both the cultural and linguistic position of abused Korean American women in order to provide contextually appropriate support. The volunteer counselors urged health care providers to consider the shame and stigma associated with domestic violence in the Korean American community so that they could address the matters in culturally competent ways. Taking into consideration the cultural meaning of domestic violence to this particular group, the informants stated that healthcare providers should tread carefully when they asked Korean American women about domestic violence issues.

I think it should be approached carefully. Americans are usually more open if someone offers them help. And also they are very grateful for it. But the Korean mentality is that it is shameful to receive help about domestic matters. So I think ways like that should be approached a bit differently than with American people. In general, domestic problems are considered shameful, so it's hard to reveal it and receive help for it (Chanmi).

Since domestic violence is a very private and culturally sensitive issue, they also suggested advance establishment of a reliable relationship between healthcare providers and patients. They saw a trustworthy relationship as an essential prerequisite in having open discussions regarding domestic violence. Chanmi mentioned the importance of the healthcare provider's attitude in interactions with abused Korean American women.

Also, I think from my experience, how you speak is very important. If the person thinks that you're ignoring her, then it's hard to share anything with her. I think first impressions are very important. You need to give the impression that you truly care about the person and want to help them. But that's hard (laughs). If we make a mistake, then they will think thoughts like "who are you to tell me what to do", or "you think you're so much better (Chanmi)."

Another informant also mentioned, "It takes some time until the Korean women can trust the healthcare provider to tell their story. They should give a chance for them to speak (Dana)." From these accounts, it can be seen that unless the healthcare provider builds a reliable relationship with the abused Korean American woman, it is likely that women will shy away from speaking about their experiences of domestic violence.

In addition to providing culturally competent services, the volunteer counselors highlighted the importance of language translation services for abused Korean American women. As mentioned in the earlier sections, abused Korean American women feel reluctant to use American social resources for battered women due to language barriers.



Therefore, the volunteer counselors pointed out the necessity of translation services to facilitate support in health care settings.

Honestly, all Americans can help out with is limited to something like shelters. Koreans tend to reject other things since they can't speak English. It'd be better if there was a Korean who could mediate (Eunju).

By providing both culturally and linguistically competent services, the informants illustrated how healthcare providers can better serve abused Korean American women. In addition to providing contextually competent services, the volunteer counselors also recognized the significant role of the healthcare provider as a bridge connecting the women to social resources.

### **Providing referrals to resource**

Most informants believed the role of healthcare providers should involve supporting abused Korean American women by linking them to social resources such as psychiatrists, shelters, and community resources. As mentioned earlier, abused Korean American women face a lack of knowledge in accessing resources as well as difficulty with English, which are two crucial obstacles to getting help. Therefore, the volunteer counselors further highlighted the critical position of the healthcare provider in terms of introducing those women to social resources.

I wish there was system to connect such people to a *social worker* who can provide them with *resources* to be independent. If all the hospital does is treat them and then discharge them, they'll probably be beaten again. Any physical injury just take time to fix, but I don't think it's right to ignore the problem and let it continue to happen (Eunju).

While healthcare providers refer the abused women to social resources, the informants suggested that they link them to resources where linguistically and culturally competent support can be provided. For example, one informant recommended referring abused Korean American women to Korean social workers or psychiatrists to make the language barrier a nonissue.

Well, health care providers have to connect abused Korean American women to a *social worker* and find an organization from there. They could connect her to a shelter, give her *financial support*... We can't do something like that, not with our *limited access to resources*... But both the *social worker* and *psychiatrist* must be Korean. Because of language... If they go to an American organization, *they got lost*. Most because of *language*... It's different if someone can translate (Paran).

Other informants suggested linking them to their Korean cultural community resources as well. By linking the abused women to such resources as the KAWAP association, the informants mentioned that the language and cultural barriers could be addressed.

Yes, even just connecting them to our association can be a help. Then we can do counseling on our own or connect them to *legal* or *social services* (Bongsun).

Health care providers could connect them to Korean organizations like the women's association. Koreans are different from Americans, and I think Korean women are better equipped to support other Korean women (Dana).

Thus the accounts of these volunteers explained how health care professionals could address the language and cultural barriers by collaborating with ethnic community resources and therefore provide contextually competent services.

## **Discussion**

Although there are growing debates regarding the nature of appropriate responses of healthcare providers to address domestic violence (Feder et al, 2006; Ramsay et al, 2002; Taket et al; 2004), these debates rarely consider the nature of contextually competent responses toward ethnic minority women. From the accounts of KAWAP volunteers, it is evident that current health care systems have not been recognized by abused Korean American women as a reliable source to get contextually competent support. Due to either their conceptualization of domestic violence as not a health issue or the lack of contextually competent services, KAWAP volunteers witnessed the unmet need of abused Korean American women during their encounters with health care systems.

These volunteers' accounts inform our understanding of how health care providers can better address domestic violence experienced by ethnic minority women. To enhance health care providers' support for abused Korean American women, the volunteers suggested several strategies including establishing trust, approaching the matter sensitively (acknowledging strong stigma attached to the issue), providing language translation services, and utilizing ethnic community resources. If health care providers collaborate with existing community resources, abused Korean American women are more likely to receive necessary support in the health care setting smoothly and certainly.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation documents KAWAP volunteers' endeavors to empower abused Korean American women. The volunteers aimed to offer a support system to women who had restricted access to supportive services in the U.S. social and healthcare systems. The study draws on the stories of these Korean American women activists to shed light on the best practices for addressing domestic violence among Korean American women.

Chapter 1 provides background for this dissertation and calls for the exploration of the experiences of Korean American women activists to inform contextually competent services for abused Korean American women. The chapter discusses theoretical perspectives as well as the researchers' standpoint and assumptions to further introduce the backdrop of the study. Chapter 1 also gives an overview of the significance of the problem and situates the aim of this dissertation: supplementing current knowledge in the interest of developing better solutions. I argue that a more thorough understanding of the problem will lead to more appropriate supports and interventions for Korean American women.

In chapter 2, I analyze the body of existing research regarding women's community activism and domestic violence to discuss the conceptualizations, intersections, and gaps in the literature. The literature shows that women's community activists serve as key resources for women subjected to domestic violence. However, there is a lack of information regarding the intersection of domestic violence and women's community activism, particularly the activism of ethnic minority women.

Hence, this inquiry describes how Korean American women activists provided support for abused women in their unique context.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of methodology. Through a community-based approach, the interpretive description method (Thorne, 2008) guided the construction of design, data collection and data analysis procedures. From counselling documents and 8 KAWAP volunteers' accounts, I could explicate the volunteers' perspectives toward and experiences with abused Korean American women in their community. Major themes from the analysis are presented. Chapter 3 also includes ethical considerations I kept in mind throughout the study.

In chapter 4, I describe the experiences of KAWAP volunteers in relation to their identities, motivations, problems and actions. How have they drawn on their own unique perspective and sociocultural contexts to provide customized services for Korean American women? The chapter demonstrates that as KAWAP volunteers work to balance the multiple identities they hold (Korean, American, woman, wife, professional and Christian), this identity work in turn shapes and influences the work they do as volunteers. Because the KAWAP volunteers understand their own identities as complex, they have respect for the multiple identities of women callers who contact the association. As such, they try to provide assistance to meet women's needs based on individual perspectives and contexts. Their stories show how their activism exists in dynamic and interactive ways in relation to their community. The KAWAP volunteers perform women's community activism in a way that looks different than how the public usually imagines this activism. Their work is not confrontational or driven by identity politics.

Rather, these women are working *for* women without ever putting “women’s interests or women’s rights” directly upfront. Instead they embrace the perspectives of the Korean community and traditional culture, working from these principles to meet the needs of women they encounter.

Chapter 5 illustrates how KAWAP volunteers perceive and respond to the phenomenon of domestic violence in their unique context. The KAWAP volunteers’ accounts reveal that domestic violence is conceptualized, defined, and perceived diversely based on individual, interpersonal and social contexts. The volunteers did not view themselves primarily as addressing “domestic violence”. Rather they respected each abused woman’s unique perspective and context and developed customized responses to meet her needs. Their accounts reveal the limitations of current social services for abused Korean American women; these services do not adequately address the linguistic, cultural and economic needs of this population. This void of services needs to be filled, taking these needs into account. This is particularly important for health care providers who are often on the front lines of engaging with domestic violence cases. Recognizing this, the KAWAP volunteers suggest culturally competent strategies for health care professionals based on their experiences.

### **Implications**

This dissertation reveals one example of local ethnic minority women’s activism in the United States. The needs of underprivileged women often remain neglected and/or barely addressed. Because their needs are unmet, marginalized women often build up a network to share their resources and support each other within their community.

Likewise, witnessing marginalized abused Korean American women, a small number of middle class women gathered together and created a supportive network for women in their community. Not surprisingly, led by privileged middle class women, KAWAP women often aligned with patriarchy and class privilege. However, KAWAP women tried to overcome lack of access to social resources faced by abused women and find the best solutions within these disempowering realities.

This inquiry has implications for researchers. Similar to recent calls for redefining contemporary feminism (Evans and Bobel, 2007), this study demonstrates the centrality of recognizing the needs of underprivileged women based on their perspective rather than focusing on identity politics. The categories researchers use to talk about social phenomenon can prevent us from seeing some of the most important work being done around domestic violence if it does not fit into these categories; this includes the work of KAWAP volunteers who meet the needs of abused women based on their perspectives and contexts. Through the words of KAWAP volunteers, scholars are reminded that narrow views of what counts as women's activism may exclude some women who have worked invisibly and noiselessly in order to embrace broad ranges of people in their community. If more diverse voices of women activists could be reflected in the media and scholarly literature, perhaps more women would align themselves with feminist aims and politics. Fostering diverse communities' participation in women's activism will ultimately facilitate community collaborations toward equality.

Hence, this dissertation illustrates the unspoken stories of Korean American women's activism. KAWAP women's activism was characterized by its strategic

navigation rather than aggressive fighting to support other women in their community. Since many KAWAP women were highly educated and had professions, they had more access to power and resources than other underprivileged Korean American women. While KAWAP women had some shared experiences with other women in their community as Korean American women, these women's privileged class status allowed them to have differing experiences based on their positionality. By having relatively more access to social resources, the KAWAP women could be able to link abused Korean American women to these resources and provide help based on individual needs.

However, compared with Korean American men, KAWAP women were still located in the lower social hierarchy under the strong Korean patriarchal culture. KAWAP women still needed to get their husbands' permission and support in order to engage in this organization that required investing their time and money. Hence, these women had to strategically position themselves to get men's support. KAWAP did not challenge this patriarchal gender structure directly. Rather, they often appeared to endorse the Korean traditional patriarchal gender norm. For example, they refused feminist labels and highlighted family harmony. By doing this, they could win their husbands over to their side and used their husbands' resources to help other women in their community. Like black women's activism (Collins, 1991), the KAWAP women's activism indirectly resists oppressive structures by drawing upon existing power and resources.

This dissertation describes an empirical case from the perspective of KAWAP volunteers in order to illustrate often overlooked contextual factors of domestic



violence among Korean American women. As Crenshaw (1995) has noted, experiences of domestic violence against women of color are qualitatively different than the experiences of white women. The accounts of the KAWAP volunteers reveal the unique context the abused Korean American women they worked with faced in their day-to-day lives. Regarding the multidimensional nature of domestic violence experiences, Lindhorst (2008) argues that researchers must attend to situational or relational contexts, the individualized social construction of meaning, the cultural and historical contexts, and the context of oppression in order to have more valid understandings of the nature, dynamics, meaning, and consequences of domestic violence.

In terms of the situational/relational context, KAWAP volunteers teach us that it is not enough to assess only the objective acts of domestic violence; we must also attend to the subjective experiences of abused victims. KAWAP volunteers did not work from a definition of domestic violence as prescribed by current institutional systems. Instead, they listened to the way abused women described their suffering and worked to meet their needs from this perspective. For example, current institutional systems often solely focus on measurable injuries from physical or sexual violence. However, the volunteers pointed out that Korean American women often suffer from a more comprehensive range of injurious acts. For example, the volunteers described Korean American women in their community reporting psychological abuse as more devastating than physical violence. Rather than assuming physical violence will have a more serious impact than other types

of violence and prioritizing addressing physical violence, hearing what women suffers from and addressing it based on their priorities is critical.

KAWAP volunteers suggest Korean American women attribute different meanings to domestic violence depending on their understanding of the concept of safety. Since Korean American women do not perceive domestic violence as an unsafe relationship, current domestic violence interventions highlighting the safety issues for women may not be compatible with this group. For example, assessment questions such as “Do you feel safe at home?” are not always useful in determining whether or not domestic violence is occurring with Korean American women. Therefore, it is important to further explore how Korean American women socially construct the meaning of domestic violence and to examine the validity of current domestic violence assessments and interventions for this population.

All interviewed volunteers pointed out the importance of considering the cultural context of abused Korean American women. Particularly, cultural context shapes the level of support and the social consequences that abused women experience (Sokoloff, & Dupont, 2005). The volunteers recognized the strong impact of the Korean cultural concept of “saving face” which hinders abused Korean American women from discussing domestic violence issues. Due to the stigma attached to domestic violence, abused Korean American women seek help anonymously and/or leave the community when their identity as an abused victim is exposed. Since domestic violence is such a sensitive and shameful issue in their community, abused Korean American women need confidential support.

Some KAWAP volunteers were concerned about portraying Korean traditional culture as pathologically violent in nature, resulting in domestic violence. All cultures have beliefs, traditions, and practices that could place women at risk of abuse. The volunteers described these practices as they manifested in the Korean community; at the same time, they saw individual agency as a critical factor that could prevent violence and ameliorate its effects. The volunteers pointed out the importance of individual agency because they saw it as a driving force in determining behaviour. Hence, rather than ascribing domestic violence as a Korean cultural trait, the volunteers considered individual background, agency and contexts to understand Korean American women's personal experiences of abuse in depth.

KAWAP volunteers described the issue of systemic oppression as experienced by abused Korean American women during their interactions with U.S. institutional systems. This oppression was influenced by the intersection of racism, economic exploitation, and classism. As ethnic minority women, abused Korean American women face systemic barriers due to their limited language proficiency, limited access to money, immigration status and mistrust of the dominant institutional systems. Witnessing abused Korean American women who could not freely access or get support from the criminal justice and social systems, KAWAP volunteers tried to assist them by providing free translating, counseling and information services. However, these supports alone were not enough to meet the needs of abused women. For the needs of these women to be met, U.S. institutional systems would need to begin taking steps toward addressing the barriers faced by abused ethnic minority women to enhance service accessibility.

The volunteers talked about the salient historical context to understand the patterns of domestic violence experienced by Korean American women. Particularly, individual Korean American women's migration experiences could be drastically different based on the historical time period of their immigration. For example, the first wave of immigrants from Korea were highly educated and, therefore, settled as relatively economically secure and socially well supported in the United States. However, the second wave of Korean immigrants began arriving in Philadelphia around 1970s (Myers, 1995). These individuals tended to be less educated and have more limited resources. Therefore, even though both are first generation Korean immigrants, the range of linguistic and cultural capacity possessed by these two groups is hugely different. Also, based on how domestic violence was defined by the Korean legal system when they left Korea, these different groups conceptualize domestic violence differently. Thus, social services involving Korean immigrants should consider not only the generational status but also the historical time period of immigration to understand women's perspectives and needs. This inquiry also has implications for health care providers. Most notably, KAWAP volunteers suggested how abused Korean American women can better be attended to in health care settings based on their reflections. The volunteers pointed out language barriers faced by abused women during the interactions with health care providers and argued for the necessity of translation services in the health care setting. They also suggested the necessity of culturally competent services considering the social stigma attached to domestic violence issues and recommended that healthcare providers engage abused Korean American women by establishing confidential and trustworthy

relationships. This culturally competent care in health care settings could help to enhance health equity for Korean American women in the United States.

Within a health care climate, nurses are on the front line of care in the community and are responsible for assessing the health of individuals within their own unique contexts. This often includes assessing for risk of impaired safety related to domestic violence in the home. When nurses ask about experiences with domestic violence, several points need to be considered. Firstly, the patient should be informed about the role of health care providers in addressing domestic violence in advance. When Korean American women are not aware of what health care providers can do in cases of domestic violence, they are less likely to inform nurses of their abusive circumstances. Nurses can briefly explain the benefits of informing health care providers about their experience of domestic violence, such as the option of using medical documentation in the court as forensic evidence. Secondly, timing can influence an abused women's response during an assessment due to the sensitive nature of discussing domestic violence. Before asking questions related to domestic violence, rapport should be established in order to overcome Korean American women's mistrust toward the American institution. Hence, domestic violence assessment questions should be asked during the time frame closer to the end of an encounter rather than at the beginning. Thirdly, nurses should assure Korean American women that confidentiality is to be maintained. Considering the strong stigma against domestic violence among the Korean community, nurses should inform women about the rules of privacy and encourage honest and open

communication regarding sensitive and private issues. Lastly, Korean American women's unique perspectives and responses to domestic violence should be respected and not judged by nurses. Korean American women are agents who continuously navigate between the cultural context of Korean American communities and the systems of American social institutions. It is imperative that nurses promote safety while providing unbiased care and respecting the autonomy of Korean American women, even if they do not agree with the way in which their patients respond to domestic violence.

The voices of KAWAP volunteers can inform both social and health care policy. This study illustrated the remarkable commitment of a group of Korean American women working for the sake of disadvantaged women in their community. This work involves tremendous amounts of time, capital and effort without any governmental support or funding. This group of women sought to meet the unmet needs of women in their community who were often facing systemic oppression in their interactions with institutional systems in the United States. Understanding the unmet needs of abused Korean American women can help social and health care policy makers become aware of the voids in services provided by current institutional systems. Providing linguistically and culturally competent services is not a new goal for health and social service systems; that said, current services fall drastically short of meeting this goal. This is partially because health and social service systems are overwhelmed and underfunded to serve the needs of ethnic minority women. This study highlights a potential solution for this problem: drawing on existing community resources and building meaningful

collaborations to provide contextually competent support systems for abused ethnic minority women in the U.S. Drawing on these community resources creates a win-win situation; governmental funds could be saved while women receive better services. It would be not only socially responsible, but financially responsible and efficient.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This study has several important strengths and limitations. First, the KAWAP volunteers were interviewed regarding their experiences of supporting abused women in the Korean American community. This is the first study to explore these experiences. It contributes to our understanding of both Korean American women's activism and domestic violence in a Korean American community. Given that there is increasing attention on the marginalization of abused ethnic minority women in the United States, findings of this study provide valuable contributions to the literature. This study also contributes to the development of culturally competent services for abused Korean American women in social and health care settings.

Second, through the use of multiple data sources with triangulation and prolonged engagement with the association, I was able to attain a rich description of the experiences of KAWAP volunteers over three decades. I also obtained feedback from the volunteers to verify data analysis. In the second interview, I asked the informants to express their opinions regarding the results of initial data analysis from the first interviews. This process strengthened the findings by reflecting the informants' feedback.

While I was able to explore the voices of KAWAP volunteers, some important voices were not included. Informants were recruited from the board members of KAWAP

to explore their experiences of working as volunteers. However, there are many KAWAP members who do not participate actively in volunteer work and occasionally attend their annual open lectures. In addition, all recruited volunteers self-identified as Christian. Although the majority of KAWAP members were Christian, this affects the findings of this study and limits the transferability of the findings to other women volunteers. Given that the experiences of women volunteers were rooted in their multiple identities, future research needs to examine the voices of Korean American women from more diverse identities and backgrounds.

Last, but not least, the voices of abused Korean American women were not included in this study. Although this inquiry aimed to understand the experiences of KAWAP volunteers and their responses to domestic violence in their community, it is also critical to understand abused Korean American women's experiences from their perspective, including their response to community services. The way abused Korean American women use institutional and community support services remains an underexplored area. Therefore, further study is needed to understand how abused Korean American women use existing support services and how these services can better support them.

### **Conclusion**

The social context of domestic violence, at the individual, interpersonal, social and institutional levels, has to be considered if we want to understand how women perceive and respond to the issue of domestic violence. At the same time, we must also remember that women are active agents in shaping and reshaping their social contexts.



Current scholarship often situates women as passive recipients of their environments, rather than considering the bidirectional relationship between the context and women's agency. Attending to social context reminds us that women have to figure out their own ways to navigate complex and conflicting realities. Confronting drastically changing social contexts over time, both the Korean American women activists and abused Korean American women in this study demonstrate the importance of perceiving and responding to domestic violence in diverse ways.

However, because society hold a narrow conceptualization of domestic violence, and fails to attend adequately to social context, the practical needs of abused Korean American women have not been met. This narrow conceptualization fails to incorporate diverse ways of both participating in women's community activism and understanding domestic violence. This leads to a lack of social services that meet women's diverse needs. In order to meet the needs of diverse women, both scholars and practitioners must challenge institution's restricted conceptualizations of women's community activism and domestic violence. We have to pay attention to people like the KAWAP volunteers who are directly engaged with supporting women on a day-to-day basis. The volunteers demonstrate that supporting women is not only about *acknowledging* diversity, but also about effectively *responding* to diverse individual needs.

While this study has provided many suggestions for practical interventions, most importantly, it leaves us with a question. How can scholars and practitioners both prioritize and respect the diverse experiences of women around domestic violence, while at the same time, find ways to consolidate these perspectives to create policy solutions?

While this dissertation does not answer this question, it highlights its importance and argues that listening to the voices of Korean American women is an important starting point.

## **Appendix A: Research Question Map for Counseling Document Analysis and In-**

### **Depth Interview**

**Research Topic:** Women's community activism and domestic violence in a Korean American community

**Research Purpose:** To explore the community-based activism from the perspectives of a local Korean American woman's community activists in Philadelphia over the last three decades

1. To explore how these activists identify themselves when they work in the community organization
2. To describe how these activists become motivated to voluntarily work for their community
3. To inform how these activists engage in local women's community activism through their everyday lives

**Research design:** A qualitative interpretive description study to collate data through counseling document review, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Counseling documents are the organization's records of abused Korean American women who called for support between 1986 and 2012.

### **Research question map:**

Central question: What are the experiences of the Korean American women's community activists working with abused Korean American women in the North East over the last three decades?

Sub questions:

- How has Korean American women's activism developed and for what purpose?
- How do these women identify themselves when they are working in the organization?
- What is the meaning of working as a member of the organization?
- What are the raced, gendered, classed experiences as a community activist?
- How do they engage in community activism in their day-to-day lives?
- How do they define domestic violence?
- How have their experiences with domestic violence cases changed over the last three decades?
- What were the perceptions and responses of these women regarding domestic violence cases?
- How do their gendered, raced, classed experiences influence their definition/perception/response of domestic violence?
- What were the challenging experiences of these women in working with domestic violence cases?

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>In-depth interview questions</b>	<b>Questions for document</b>	<b>Rational</b>
1. How has the Korean American women's activism developed and for what purpose?	<p>1. Do you know how this association originally created?</p> <p>1.1. (Probes) How did you know about this? Did you heard from someone? Or Do you an original member who founded this organization together?</p> <p>1.2. (Probes) If you were original member, why this association was created? In what purpose?</p>	Do they have written documents regarding development of their organization? What is written as the purpose of the foundation of this association?	History of the association Purpose of the association
2. How do these women identify themselves when they are working in the organization	<p>2. How do you introduce your self when you're in this association?</p> <p>2.1. (Probes) Does it different from when you talk about your self outside of this association?</p> <p>2.2. (Probes) How do you see/define yourself?</p>		Identity question (identity of race, gender, sexuality, class, and activists)
3. What is the meaning of working as a member of the organization?	<p>3. What is the meaning of being a member of this association?</p> <p>3.1. (Probes) What is the meaning of working in this association?</p> <p>3.2. (Probes) Why do you think this association is important for your community?</p>		Meaning of their activist involvement
4. What are the raced, gendered, classed experiences as a community activist?		How their experiences are shaped from the intersection of race, sexuality, gender, and class?	This question will be answered through the interpretive analysis of data rather than asked directly to the participant.
5. How do they engage in community activism in their day-to-day lives?	<p>5. What have been your experiences in working in the hotline as a volunteer?</p> <p>5.1. Tell me about your typical days in working at the</p>		What are the living circumstances of Korean activists?

Research Questions	In-depth interview questions	Questions for document	Rational
	<p>hotline as a volunteer.</p> <p>5.2. How do you find time to volunteer?</p> <p>5.3. Why do you come back to volunteer?</p>		
6. What were their perceptions and responses of these women regarding domestic violence cases?	<p>6. How do you think about domestic violence?</p> <p>6.1. How do you define domestic violence?</p> <p>6.2. As a Korean, how is the domestic violence experienced as a Korean similar/different from that of the U.S. general population?</p> <p>6.3. (Probes) If different, why does domestic violence experienced by Korean differ from that of the U.S. general population?</p> <p>6.4. As a woman, how is the domestic violence experienced as a Korean similar/different from that of men?</p> <p>6.5. (Probes) If different, why does domestic violence experienced by women differ from that of men?</p> <p>6.6.</p>	<p>What were the cases that they sorted as domestic violence case?</p> <p>How their perception and response to domestic violence cases were influenced by gender role, traditional Korean culture, and class?</p>	<p>Domestic violence, which is a social construct, could be defined similarly/differently by individual.</p> <p>Intersectionality</p>
7. How have their experiences with domestic violence cases changed over the last three decades?	<p>7. How do you think domestic violence cases have changed over the last three decades?</p>	<p>How have the defining patterns of domestic violence changed over time?</p>	<p>Chronological changes. Historical event, context could change their social construction of domestic violence.</p>
8. How do their gendered, raced, classed experiences influence their definition/perception/response of domestic violence?		<p>How their definition, perception and response to domestic violence cases were influenced by gender role, traditional Korean culture, and class?</p>	<p>This question will be answered through the interpretive analysis of data rather than asked directly to the participant.</p>

Research Questions	In-depth interview questions	Questions for document	Rational
9. What were the challenging experiences of these women in working with domestic violence cases?	<p>9. What are the difficulties you experienced in supporting abused Korean American women?</p> <p>9.1. What made it hard to support abused Korean American women?</p> <p>9.2. What are the unmet needs of those abused Korean American women?</p> <p>9.3. What do you need to better support abused Korean American women?</p>		Challenges of supporting Korean American abused women
10. What are the implications for the health care providers?	<p>10. What are the roles of healthcare providers for abused Korean American women?</p> <p>10.1. What do you think is the role of healthcare providers in supporting abused Korean American women? (Probes) What do you think is the role of nurses in supporting abused Korean American women? What are the roles of other healthcare professionals such as doctors and counselors? If different, how?</p> <p>10.2. What were your experiences collaborating with healthcare providers to support abused Korean American women? (Probes) Have you ever collaborated with nurses?</p> <p>10.3. How can healthcare providers support Korean American women in culturally competent ways? (Probes) How can nurses support Korean American women in culturally competent ways?</p>		Implications for Nursing discipline

## Appendix B. Interview Guideline

**Research topic:** Women's community activism and domestic violence in a Korean American community

**Research design:** A qualitative interpretive description study. Data collection through participant observation, counseling-document review, and in-depth interviews. Counseling documents are the Korean American Women's community association record of abused Korean American women who called for a support between 1986 and 2014.

<p>- Personal intro Hi, my name is Su Kyung Kim. I'm a PhD student at UPENN nursing school.</p> <p>- Statement of purpose This interview is to describe the support of Korean American women's community volunteers for abused Korean American women in the Philadelphia. This study aims to learn from Korean women how to provide culturally competent services for abused Korean American women</p> <p>- Why is the counselor being interviewed/PURPOSE This study intends to explore perceptions, responses, challenges, and needs of Korean American community activists to support abused Korean American women. I'll ask you several questions regarding this.</p> <p>- What will be done with results of the study Based on your responses, implications could be ascertained in tackling community challenges of supporting abused Korean American women.</p> <p>- Permission to tape (audio/video); take notes during interviews If you don't mind, I'll take notes during the interview and our interview will be recorded with a voice recorder.</p> <p>- Confidentiality For your confidentiality, your name and personal information will not be disclosed. We'll use pseudonyms, such as Amy.</p> <p>- Stopping/refraining If you need, want, or have a question, the interview can be stopped or interrupted at any time. If you don't want to, you don't have to answer.</p>
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In-depth interview questions for Korean American women's community activists (The questions will be revised, added, dropped and refined based on responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### In-Depth Interview Questions

<p>1. Do you know how this association originally created?  <i>1.1.</i> (Probes) How did you know about this? Did you heard from someone? Or Do you an original member who founded this organization together?  <i>1.2.</i> (Probes) If you were original member, why this association was created? In what purpose?</p>
<p>2. How do you introduce your self when you're in this association?  <i>2.1.</i> (Probes) Does it different from when you talk about your self outside of this association?  <i>2.2.</i> (Probes) How do you see/define yourself?</p>
<p>3. What is the meaning of being a member of this association?</p>

<p>3.1. (Probes) What is the meaning of working in this association?</p> <p>3.2. (Probes) Why do you think this association is important for your community?</p>
<p>4. What have been your experiences in working in the hotline as a volunteer?</p> <p>4.1. Tell me about your typical days in working at the hotline as a volunteer.</p> <p>4.2. How do you find time to volunteer?</p> <p>4.3. Why do you come back to volunteer?</p>
<p>5. How do you think about domestic violence?</p> <p>5.1. How do you define domestic violence?</p> <p>5.2. As a Korean, how is the domestic violence experienced as a Korean similar/different from that of the U.S. general population?</p> <p>5.3. (Probes) If different, why does domestic violence experienced by Korean differ from that of the U.S. general population?</p> <p>5.4. As a woman, how is the domestic violence experienced as a Korean similar/different from that of men?</p> <p>5.5. (Probes) If different, why does domestic violence experienced by women differ from that of men?</p>
<p>6. How do you think domestic violence cases have changed over the last three decades?</p>
<p>7. What are the difficulties you experienced in supporting abused Korean American women?</p> <p>7.1. What made it hard to support abused Korean American women?</p> <p>7.2. What are the unmet needs of those abused Korean American women?</p> <p>7.3. What do you need to better support abused Korean American women?</p>
<p>8. What are the roles of healthcare providers for abused Korean American women?</p> <p>8.1. What do you think is the role of healthcare providers in supporting abused Korean American women? (Probes) What do you think is the role of nurses in supporting abused Korean American women? What are the roles of other healthcare professionals such as doctors and counselors? If different, how?</p> <p>8.2. What were your experiences collaborating with healthcare providers to support abused Korean American women? (Probes) Have you ever collaborated with nurses?</p> <p>8.3. How can healthcare providers support Korean American women in culturally competent ways? (Probes) How can nurses support Korean American women in culturally competent ways?</p>





## Appendix D: Informed Consent

**Title of the Research Study: Community volunteers' support for Korean American in Philadelphia: A Korean American community counseling for domestic violence cases**

**Protocol Number:**

**Principal Investigator: (name, address, phone and email):**

Dr. Anne M Teitelman, University of Pennsylvania, School of Nursing, 418 Curie Blvd. Philadelphia, PA, 19104. Tel: 215-898-1910; email: [teitelm@nursing.upenn.edu](mailto:teitelm@nursing.upenn.edu)

**Co-investigator Contact: (name, address, phone and email):**

Ms. Su Kyung Kim; University of Pennsylvania, School of Nursing, 418 Curie Blvd. Philadelphia, PA, 19104. Tel: 919-360-0160; email: [sukkim@nursing.upenn.edu](mailto:sukkim@nursing.upenn.edu)

**Emergency Contact: (name, address, phone and email):**

Ms. Su Kyung Kim; University of Pennsylvania, School of Nursing, 418 Curie Blvd. Philadelphia, PA, 19104. Tel: 919-360-0160; email: [sukkim@nursing.upenn.edu](mailto:sukkim@nursing.upenn.edu)

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You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study and what you will have to do if you decide to participate. The research team is going to talk with you about the study and you can read this consent document.

If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form: in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you.

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this research study is to listen to the voice of Korean community counseling volunteers serving abused Korean American women in Philadelphia.

### **Why was I asked to participate in the study?**

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are counseling and supporting Korean American women experiencing domestic violence in Pennsylvania.

### **How long will I be in the study? How many other people will be in the study?**

The study will take place with a one-time interview and one follow-up interview. If you participate, you will be one of approximately 5 to 8 people in the study.

**Where will the study take place?**

If you decide to participate in the study, I will make an appointment with you for a convenient time and location. After making the appointment, I will meet with you individually at a convenient location.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you decide to participate in the study, I will ask questions regarding your experience of counseling and supporting abused Korean American women in your community. The two interviews will take a total of about 1–1.5 hour to complete.

**What are the risks?**

One risk is that you may become tired or distressed during your interview. If you become tired during the interview, you may take a break or we can set another time to complete the interview. Another risk is that you may be uncomfortable answering some questions. If you do experience any negative emotional consequences from participating in this interview, you will be referred to qualified social service agencies where a counselor will provide appropriate assistance for you.

**How will I benefit from the study?**

There may be no direct benefit to you; however, the information you provide will help us to better understand the Korean community group serving abused Korean American women. Although we cannot guarantee that you may benefit from this interview, it may be helpful to have the opportunity to talk about your counseling and supporting experience of abused Korean American women. You may also find it meaningful and beneficial if the study findings are useful to Korean immigrant community and Korean American women in the United States.

**Will I receive compensation for my participation in this study?**

You will be given a \$25 gift card as compensation for the time and effort to complete the interview.

**What other choices do I have?**

Your alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.

**What happens if I do not choose to join the research study?**

You may choose to join the study or you may choose not to join the study. Your participation is voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study. You will lose no benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would come to you in the future.

**Can I leave the study?**

You have the right to drop out of the research study at anytime during your participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to do so. Withdrawal will not interfere with your future care.

**How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy be protected?**

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information obtained during the course of this research study will be kept private. However, we cannot guarantee total privacy. Your personal information may be given out if required by law. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will create a research identification number that will be kept in a secure, password protected computer file. This number will be used instead of your name on all research records. Only the principal investigator, the project manager, and the research assistant will have access to this list of codes. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pennsylvania will have access to these records if required.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

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*Participant Signature*

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*Printed Name of Participant*

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*Date*

## Appendix E: Distress Protocol

### Korean Community Study

#### Research Interview and distress protocol

The following protocol outlines the actions of the interviewer if, during the course of the interview, a participant exhibits acute distress or safety concerns or imminent danger to self or others.

Indications of distress during interview	Follow-up questions	Participant behavior /responses	Acute emotional distress/safety concern? (Y or N)	Imminent danger (Y or N)
Indicate they are experiencing a high level of stress or emotional distress, OR exhibit behaviors suggestive that the interview is too stressful, such as uncontrolled crying.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stop the interview</li> <li>2. Offer support and allow the participant time to regroup</li> <li>3. Assess distress status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me what are feeling right now</li> <li>• Tell me what thoughts you are having</li> <li>• Do you feel you are able to go on with this interview?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Determine if the person is experiencing acute emotional distress beyond what would be normally expected in an interview about a sensitive topic.</li> </ol>			
Indicate if they are thinking of hurting themselves	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stop the interview</li> <li>2. Assess distress status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me what are feeling right now</li> <li>• Tell me what thoughts you are having</li> <li>• Do you intend to harm yourself?</li> <li>• When do you intend to harm yourself?</li> <li>• Do you have the means to harm yourself?</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Determine if the person is in imminent danger to self.</li> </ol>			

Indications of distress during interview	Follow-up questions	Participant behavior /responses	Acute emotional distress/safety concern? (Y or N)	Imminent danger (Y or N)
Indicate they are thinking of hurting others	1. Stop the interview. 2. Express concern and conduct a safety assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me what are feeling right now</li> <li>• Tell me what thoughts you are having</li> <li>• Do you intend to harm someone else? Who?</li> <li>• When do you intend to harm him/her/them?</li> <li>• Do you have the means to harm him/her/them?</li> </ul> 3. Determine if the person is an imminent danger to others.			
Indicate if they would be in any danger if anyone else found out about their participation in the study	1. Stop the interview 2. Assess danger from other person. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might you be in danger?</li> <li>• How might the other person find out you were participating?</li> <li>• What do you think the other person would do if they found out you were participating in the study?</li> </ul> 3. Determine if the person is experiencing a safety concern			

Action for interviewer:

1. If a participant's distress reflects an emotional response beyond what would be experienced in an interview about a sensitive topic, offer support and extend the opportunity to (a) stop the interview; (b) regroup; (c) continue.
2. If a participant's distress reflects acute emotional distress or a safety concern beyond what would be expected in an interview about a sensitive topic, but NOT imminent danger, take the following actions:

- a. Encourage the participant to contact a mental health provider for follow-up.
  - b. Indicate that, with the participant permission, the researcher will contact him/her the next day to see if he/she is okay.
  - c. Notify Dr. Teitelman (Principal Investigator) of the recommendations given to participant.
3. If a participant's distress reflects imminent danger, take the following actions:
- a. Contact local law authorities unless arrangements can be made for the participant to be transported to the emergency room by a family member.
  - b. Indicate that, with the participant's permission, the researcher will contact him/her the net day to see if he/she is okay.
  - c. Immediately notify Dr. Teitelman of actions taken.

Protocol adapted from Developing Distress Protocols for Research on Sensitive Topics, by C. B. . Draucker, D. S. Martsof, & C. Poole, 2009, *Archives. of Psychiatric Nursing*, 23, 348. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2008.10.008. Permission granted to reprint the protocol.

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