

Chapter #19

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON THE SELF-RELIANCE EDUCATION PROCESS OF THE DIVORCED MIGRANT WOMEN IN SOUTH KOREA

Sooan Choi, & Youngsoon Kim

Dept. of Multicultural Education, Inha University, South Korea

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the point where divorced migrant women who have been given the goal of self-reliance for their new lives are reconstituted as ‘Adventurers’ and identify the limitations. For this objective, a case study was conducted using the life histories of 5 divorced migrant women residing in the self-reliance support facility (named Didimteo), selected among the life history interviews of 80 migrant women. We performed open coding for data analysis, repeatedly reading the participants’ interview data. As a result, qualitative classification revealed three distinct meanings for the self-reliance education process: *Recovery of affirmative*, *Rediscovery of ‘becoming,’ Empowerment for the future*. If the self-reliance education experience is defined in terms of the results of this study, it may be described as a ‘process of becoming an adventurer for economic self-reliance’. However, the psycho-emotional comfort and support that migrant women experience through self-reliance education at Didimteo confirmed the possibility that Didimteo could move forward as a self-reliance education community and social network for divorced migrant women.

Keywords: divorced migrant woman, self-reliance education, self-reliance support facility, qualitative case study, South Korea.

1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of capitalism and globalization has amplified the feminization of migration from underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia. In this new phenomenon, South Korea tries to maintain the patriarchal gender division of labor and solve social reproduction and care work problems through a new marriage system called ‘international marriage’ (Hwang, 2009; Kim, E. J., 2016). On the other hand, if we examine this phenomenon from marriage migrant women’s perspective, migration through international marriage can be viewed as an objective of providing a livelihood for the family in their home country and as an active practice of the modern desire to live in a country that is wealthier than the home country and enjoy the middle-class life (Hwang, 2009; Palriwala & Uberoi, 2005; King & Christou, 2011).

The marriage migrant women are ‘adventurers’ who have decided to move (Hwang, 2009), but migrant countries’ social norms, including family norms, make them passive and dependent on others (Kim, S. N., 2014; Kim, Y. S., 2010). Regarding the divorce of marriage migrant women, Hwang (2009) reveals that it is one of the common phenomena in the diversification of marriage and family systems in a postmodern society. The divorce rate of marriage migrant women in 2020 decreased by 12% compared to 2019, and the proportion of the total divorce was 8.2% (Statistics Korea, 2021). Nonetheless, the lower percentage of divorced migrant women and the reduced divorce rate do not mean their minority status has improved.

In South Korea, where migrant women have no family or relatives, divorced migrant women who have lost their qualifications as ‘Spouse of the people’ⁱ face the triple blows of being migrant women along with the stigma of divorce and the rejection due to the absence of their husband (Kim, Choi, Huang, Cheong, & Kim, 2019). In addition, after divorce, most migrant women encounter the burdens of raising children and adjusting to psychological, social, and economic conditions (Kim, T. R., 2019; Lee, 2013).

Didimteoⁱⁱ is an institution where migrant women who divorced due to the violence of their spouse can stay for two years, receiving various education for self-reliance. For those who have experienced the life-changing event of divorce, a community such as Didimteo not only provides emotional support and comfort but also enables them to move forward as a subject through learning (Cooley, 2007; Kim, Y. J., 2019; Back, 2016). Still, previous studies on the self-reliance of divorced migrant women (Kim, K. N., 2016; Kim, T. R., 2019; Lee, 2013) did not discuss the process of self-reliance in facilities such as Didimteo. Therefore, this study is differentiated in that it examines the process of self-reliance in facilities that was not covered in previous studies. According to the necessity and purpose of this study, the research question is “What is the meaning of the self-reliance education process in Didimteo for divorced migrant women?”

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Self-reliance of divorced migrant women

The dictionary definition of self-reliance is “not dependent on others, not subordinated, and self-sufficient.” However, self-reliance is not treated as a single point of view but rather a concept that includes the process, experience, and state of self-reliance (Sung, 2017). Yasutomi (2011) defined self-reliance as not the ability to do anything alone but properly utilize its resources.

Sung (2017) defined Korean divorced women’s self-reliance experience as accepting divorce and exercising self-control, securing expertise through various job experiences and exploration, establishing and retaining social support, establishing mid-to-long-term goals, and designing the future. Kim and Wang (2021) defined the self-reliance of marriage migrant women after divorce as a process of maximizing self-efficacy through solidarity of migrant communities, strengthening human capital, psychological and emotional support of their families, establishing social trust, and helping them.

Kim, K. N. (2016) stated that the self-reliance experience of divorced migrant women consists of economic self-reliance, psycho-emotional self-reliance, and socio-cultural self-reliance. First, economic self-reliance is a process of coming out of poverty and achieving dreams. Second, psycho-emotional self-reliance is the process of accepting wounds and difficulties as a single parent in the divorce process and healing them. Third, socio-cultural self-reliance is the process of living a self-reliant life by participating in the community along with efforts to survive in Korea as a stranger, the crisis and coexistence of single-parent migrant women, and difficulties in naturalization due to divorce. Choi and Kim (2021) defined the self-reliance of divorced migrant women as a nomadic subject to form various relationships in new environments, although they are treated as strangers after divorce.

In other words, the self-reliance of divorce migrant women can be defined as a process of actively utilizing various resources (economic, psycho-emotional, and socio-cultural) around them on the journey to heal the wounds of divorce in the past and move toward a new life. Thus, this study intends to examine the meaning and limitations of how divorced migrant women are reconstructed as ‘adventurers’ with a focus on self-reliance education in Didimteo.

2.2. Self-reliance education in Didimteo

In November 2010, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and the Seoul Metropolitan Government jointly founded the ‘Didimteo.’ It is located in Seoul and has an independent residential space for each household. Around 40 devoted migrant women, victims of domestic violence (together with accompanying children), can stay in the center. From its inception to September 2020, this facility accommodates a total of 176 people, including 81 migrant women and 95 accompanying children. The education manual after admission is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Education manual after admission.

Stage	Early (1 month)	Middle (12-17 months)	Final (6 months)	Follow-up
Con- tents	-Psychological and health checkup -Korean language test -Vocational aptitude test	-Regular vocational education -Life culture education -Individual vocational training	-On-site practical training -Work counseling -Support for jobs near the residence	Counseling management for stable settlement

Source: Reorganization of the education manual for Didimteo (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2020)

As illustrated in Table 1, the period of residence in Didimteo is two years in total, and it is operated according to a 3-step education manual. The early stage of admission is approximately one month. Through this education for adaptation to life, Didimteo carries out psychological and health support, Korean language test, vocational aptitude test, etc. Korean language classes, computer use practice, parent education, psycho-emotional programs, and regular vocational education are provided during the middle stage of admission. Regular vocational education is divided and operated according to individual characteristics. In the final stage of the admission, it provides on-the-job training in preparation for leaving Didimteo, job support near the residence, etc. For follow-up management, counseling for stable settlement after discharge is conducted (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2020). It can be inferred from the education manual that its focus is on economic self-reliance.

On the other hand, divorce can be defined as life transformation events that trigger individual cognitive, psychological, and social changes (Park, 2016). Schlossberg and Goodman (2005) stated that these decisive life events could lead to the change of life through learning. Cooley (2007) pointed out that friendship, trust, and the importance of residence or gathering as factors that help women learn and that a deep relationship in a group leads to a change in the meaning perspective. In particular, the educational space based on intimacy serves as the basis for moving toward a participatory entity that practices emotional support and comfort, career development for the future, and sharing with the local community (Back, 2016; Kim, Y. J., 2010). Therefore, although Didimteo’s education focuses on economic self-reliance, they will be able to provide various learning experiences for self-reliance as an educational space.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research design

This study conducted a case study, a representative method of qualitative research. A case study restricts the boundaries of topics to be addressed through research problems on ‘how’ and ‘why’ within the context of real-life when the demarcation between phenomena and context is not clearly defined (Yin, 2005; 2009). In other words, it is critical to establish appropriate case study limits by imposing constraints on data collection, including research subjects or the time and place of observation. Through this, a case study enables researchers to gain a unique perspective on the phenomenon they want to explore by exclusively focusing on the bounded system (case) (Kim et al., 2018).

In this study, data from five women who fit the purpose of the study were used from the life history interviews of 80 marriage migrant women performed with funding from the National Research Foundation of Korea from 2017 to October 31, 2020ⁱⁱⁱ. As for the data selection, 7 cases of migrant women who have experienced divorce and live in Didimteo were first selected. After that, the life history data of 5 people were finally chosen after consultation among researchers. Their life history data totaled 115 sheets.

For data analysis, open coding was executed to examine the meaning of the self-reliance education process in Didimteo while reading the life histories of 5 divorced migrant women. The final topic was determined by categorizing it through a comparative analysis between the topics derived from open coding. Additionally, in order to secure the reliability of this study, peer examination^{iv} and external audit^v were implemented as suggested by Merriam (1998).

3.2. Research participants

The basic information of the selected research participants is shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Basic information of research participants.

No.	Age	Period of residence	Visa	Country of origin	Family relations (Age)
1	25	6yr.	F-6	Vietnam	2 children (3,6)
2	27	5yr.	F-6	Vietnam	1 child (4)
3	28	7yr.	F-6	Cambodia	1 child (7)
4	37	7yr.	F-6	Vietnam	1 child (4)
5	28	4yr.	F-6	Vietnam	2 children (3,5)

The basic information of the participants is as follows. First, their age range is between the 20s and 30s. Second, the average residence period in South Korea is 5.8 years. Third, their residence status is F-6 (marriage visa), and they did not acquire permanent residency or nationality in South Korea. Fourth, all participants were staying at the facility with their children. In the case of study participant 1, the first child was living with her ex-husband. Participant 4 wanted to bring her children from a previous marriage living in Vietnam once she achieved self-reliance.

4. RESULTS

According to qualitative analysis, the self-reliance process in Didimteo has the following three features: Recovery of affirmative, rediscovery of ‘becoming,’ and empowerment for the future.

4.1. Recovery of affirmative

Divorce, which they had never imagined in their lives, became a reality. As discussed above, divorce is a life-changing event that induces personal change, leading to learning. However, the study participants, who have no basis in Korea, experience economic and psychological difficulties due to divorce and cannot proceed with the process that leads to learning. Didimteo is a place of psychological comfort that allows participants in this situation to move forward to the next step. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5 described Didimteo as ‘Chin-jeong.’ Chin-jeong, a Korean word, is used by married women to refer to their parent’s home, including parents, siblings, and hometown. The divorced migrant women heal the stress they suffered during their marriage at Didimteo, like Chin-jeong, and the psychological wounds, “feeling of wanting to die,” (participant 4) caused by the divorce process.

When I lived with my husband, he reprimanded me every day, saying, “How come you’re doing it so wrong? I can’t stand it.” I was under a lot of stress at that time. When I got divorced and came here, my teachers constantly told me, “Oh, that’s all right. You can do it. You can do it much better in the future.” It really warmed my heart. I want to work hard. - Participant 1

Kim, E. J. (2018) mentioned that a relationship was a network that connected with others, and through this, abilities and competencies could be drawn out. The various relationships formed at Didimteo become the basis for their mental support. In addition, parental education can help restore relationships with children. This is the first step towards recovering the affirmative to assist them in developing their abilities and capabilities.

I used to have a lot of fights with my child in the past. We were unable to understand each other. Whenever I had a hard time, I yelled at my son. So, he was stressed and peed in his pants. He looked at me while he was peeing. It enraged me. I didn’t know what to do or how to raise my child. But, through parental education, we can understand one another now. - Participant 2

4.2. Rediscovery of ‘becoming’

In Deleuze’s concept, “becoming” means breaking away from the modern human being who has as its identity a molar multiplicity such as the dichotomous gender division of labor and patriarchy (Kim, E. J., 2014). Behind the marriage process of migrant women, there is a tentative agreement that they should conform to the new hierarchical order from their home country’s patriarchal system to the Korean patriarchal system and take responsibility for their livelihood (Kim, E. J., 2016). Nonetheless, divorce breaks this agreement, and they explore a new role as daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law. Regular vocational training at Didimteo and, depending on individual aptitudes, professional programs rekindle recollections of long-forgotten dreams.

I'm currently learning to use computers, bake bread, and cook. What a variety! I also learned how to groom dogs. I chose it as my profession because I like dogs. - Participant 4

I originally dreamed of working in interpretation and translation, so I wasn't interested in anything else (independent programs at the center). I just studied hard according to the program, but I wasn't interested in it and didn't want to do it. Just one thing, I graduated from college dreaming of becoming an interpreter and translator. - Participant 3

On the other hand, they share concerns about their ability to fulfill a mother's role after achieving self-reliance in discovering the desire. Since a daycare center is also operated in the Didimteo facility, participants are relatively less concerned about child-rearing when receiving vocational education or performing internships. Still, after discharge, they are confronted with the reality of working and raising children simultaneously. They hope to accomplish a balance between work and parenting but are compelled to leave their children at the daycare center until late because "if I don't work, I don't have enough money" (participant 4).

This place (Didimteo) is close to the daycare center. The daycare center is right in front, so I am satisfied with my current life here. But I'm worried about what to do after leaving here. - Participant 2

Although self-reliance proceeds in a complex process, economic self-reliance is the most crucial part for divorced migrant women. This is because, to survive with children in Korea, a minimum stable life must be supported. Participant 5 is learning nail art, which she wanted to learn from her home country, but considers she should have a different job to achieve stable self-reliance with her children.

(What are you planning to do after learning nail art?) I just want to do it as a hobby. This job makes less money. I have to work late to make a lot of money in this field. But I can't work late because there is no one to look after my children, and I don't make enough money. (Then it would be difficult to do nail art.) However, I really wanted to learn nail art in Vietnam. I like it so much as it allows me to do what I want to do at Didimteo... I'm still learning nail art because it's what I wanted to do. - Participant 5

4.3. Empowerment for the future

The 'support facility' becomes a place that provides solid social support to divorced migrant women (Im, 2016). Social support can be established through all types of interactions with others (Cobb, 1976), and these interactions are the driving force for 'personal effort.' It suggests that women who remain social minorities can have the ontological competence necessary to revalue and create their own values (Braidotti, 2008). Participant 3 endeavored to prevent divorce but ended up divorcing. Her shattered expectations for life deprived her of her will to achieve self-reliance. However, "the will, which I can do on my own," has grown stronger at Didimteo. Participant 5 now can give a word of consolation to others.

I can live well independently. I have confidence and don't think of my ex-husband. There is no one to rely on, and I can do it myself. It makes me stronger. - Participant 3

At first, I was stressed as well. But, after studying hard, I passed the test. Now I can also tell other people. “If you work hard, you can do anything.” Everything was stressful at first. - Participant 5

In spite of this reevaluation, the participants fear stepping out of the fence and becoming ‘adventurers.’ It is a place that provides the foundation for them to “live comfortably” (participant 1). Leaving Didimteo like a “Home” is another challenge.

It’s not enough. As I’m unemployed and just came in, I have no money, and my house requires high monthly rent. That’s how I pay. With assistance, I may buy a good place. If not, I should live in a basement or a small room with a lot of stuff. If I go out here, I’ll need many things. That’s my biggest concern. - Participant 4

Economic problems exert significant influence on the process of self-reliance. Living well in unfamiliar Korea with children requires a stable job. Therefore, Didimteo also organizes an educational manual to ensure they get appropriate work. Participants are well aware that it is a “great advantage” (participant 4) to stay at an establishment such as a Didimteo. They are afraid to become ‘adventurers’ again, but their experience at Didimteo has become a force for the new future. Divorced migrant women regain their own names and prepare to take a new position.

The best part is that people call me by my name. Since coming here, I have been getting better, and my thinking has grown a lot. If I lived with my husband, I would not know the Korean language and be forced to stay home. But here, I’m doing everything myself, so it somewhat encourages me. - Participant 2

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the meaning of the self-reliance process for divorced migrant women in Didimteo, victims of spousal abuse. As a consequence of the research, it determined Recovery of affirmative, Rediscovery of ‘becoming,’ and Empowerment for the future.

If we describe the experience of self-reliance education of divorced migrant women based on the content presented in the research results, it may be defined as the process of becoming an ‘adventurer for economic self-reliance.’ “Financial issues” are central to experiences such as the recovery of affirmative, rediscovery of ‘becoming,’ and empowerment for the future. Kim and Wang (2021) stated that psychological and socio-cultural self-reliance is achieved when economic self-reliance is supported, implying that the financial aspect is critical in self-reliance. However, simply achieving ‘economic self-reliance’ does not change the social reality that participants will face double discrimination against multiculturalism and limited opportunities to participate in various education (Kim, H. J., 2018).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that self-reliance education in a space called Didimteo provides an alternative possibility to change the social reality. Didimteo is a community where divorced migrant women can learn to change their lives, free from the yoke of ‘divorce.’ Park (2011) stated that migrant women naturally form a ‘divorce network’ through institutions such as Didimteo and shelters after divorce. Based on this, divorced migrant women can create a support system and take charge of the functions of the social family. The

community of migrant women not only becomes a personal dimension as emotional support in the form of a 'divorce network' (Kim, Y. O., 2010) but can also play a role in the social dimension with the potential for social participation (Kim, S. H., 2019). Thus, Didimteo requires continually developing as an educational community and social network for the self-reliance of migrant women who have experienced life changes due to divorce.

This study is significant because it explored the point where divorced migrant women living in Didimteo are reconstituted as 'adventurers' and grasped the limits. Based on the self-reliance education process of the participants, it examined the meaning and confirmed the influence of the community environment called Didimteo and the prevailing norms of Korean society. Still, in terms of data collection, since it was a secondary study using existing data, there was a limitation in that it could not capture the vivid interaction between the participants and the Didimteo. Therefore, future research is required to conduct to capture substantial interactions. Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss in detail what kind of social practice can move forward with Didimteo, a self-reliance education community, and its possibilities.

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AUTHORS' INFORMATION

Full name: Sooan Choi

Institutional affiliation: Dept. of Multicultural Education, Inha University

Institutional address: 100, Inha-ro, Michuhol-gu, Incheon 22212, South Korea

Short biographical sketch: Sooan Choi is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program in the Department of Multicultural Education at Inha University. She worked as a lecturer in a social integration program for migrants. After finding the marriage migrant women faced many challenges in South Korea, she began researching the issues. Her research interests are in qualitative research, marriage migrant women's community and self-help group.

Full name: Youngsoon Kim

Institutional affiliation: Dept. of Multicultural Education, Inha University

Institutional address: 100, Inha-ro, Michuhol-gu, Incheon 22212, South Korea

Short biographical sketch: Youngsoon Kim received Ph.D. in cultural studies from the Free University of Berlin. He is a professor in the Department of Multicultural Education at Inha University. As a research head, he has led the Convergence Institute of Multicultural Studies and national research projects and teams. His research interests are in qualitative research, multicultural education, local culture, and ethnography.

ⁱ According to the "long-term stay qualification" in Table 1-2 of the Enforcement Decree of the Immigration Act (Enforcement Decree as of 2021. 10. 26), a person with a marriage migrant visa (F-6) is referred to as a "spouse of the people." In other words, 'spouse of the people' refers to a foreign spouse who maintains a marriage relationship with a Korean citizen. In this paper, this term was used to emphasize that divorced migrant women are out of the boundaries of Korean law.

ⁱⁱ 'Didimteo' is a Korean word, meaning a place that becomes a steppingstone.

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^{iv} From March 2021 to June 2021, the research contents were presented three times at the graduate school seminar to which the co-researcher belongs, and the research results were discussed with peer researchers.

^v On June 12, 2021, the research results were announced by participating in the workshop of the Inha University Multicultural Education Policy Lab, and the research was revised and supplemented by receiving comments from two external experts.