

KOREAN DIVORCED MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES OF PARENTING  
AFTER DIVORCE

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KATHRYN D. RETTIG, PH.D., ADVISER

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore how Korean divorced mothers experience parenting after divorce. The data were collected from 17 Korean divorced mothers who were divorced between the years of 2004 and 2009 and were raising at least one minor child. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and September of 2009 in Seoul and its satellite cities in South Korea. Data were analyzed based on the phenomenological data analysis method.

Most of the Korean divorced mothers had difficulties establishing cooperative relationships with the children's fathers, and the fathers' involvement with their children after the divorce was very limited even though most mothers wanted the fathers to voluntarily be involved in their children's lives. Regarding postdivorce parenting agreements including custody, child support, and visitation, most of the mothers decided to raise their children themselves since they believed that they were more appropriate parents compared to the fathers considering the well-being of the children. Out of the 17 mothers, 14 agreed to receive child support from the children's fathers at the time of the divorce. However, only five mothers received child support from the fathers at the time of the interviews. In addition, only the children of nine mothers had contact with their fathers at the time of the interviews.

The 2007 civil law modification that requires Korean divorcing parents to develop parenting agreements prior to divorce might not have much influence on the divorced parents' decision-making process of parenting after the divorce based on the mothers' experiences of this study. Most of the Korean divorced parents did not have many conversations about their anticipated parental roles and parental relationships at the time of the divorce. As a result, most of the divorced parents had lack of consensus on postdivorce parental roles and responsibilities, and they often experienced conflict over the fathers' involvement after the divorce. These mothers'

experiences were very similar regardless of when their divorces were finalized, either before or after the 2007 civil law modification. This finding suggests that the divorce policy in Korea needs to help divorced parents understand their new roles and responsibilities after divorce and establish cooperative coparenting relationships.

This study discusses the effectiveness of Korean divorce policy and Korean divorced parents' misunderstandings about postdivorce parental responsibilities and parenting relationships. This unprepared society and underprepared families facing divorce could contribute to a much reduced well-being of children of divorce. This study also discusses the lack of the children's best interest in divorce and the meaning of the father's role after divorce in Korea. The policy implications from the present study are (a) expanding parenting education for divorced parents, (b) improving the child support policy by introducing child support guidelines and enhancing child support collection systems, and (c) increasing social support for needy single-mother families.

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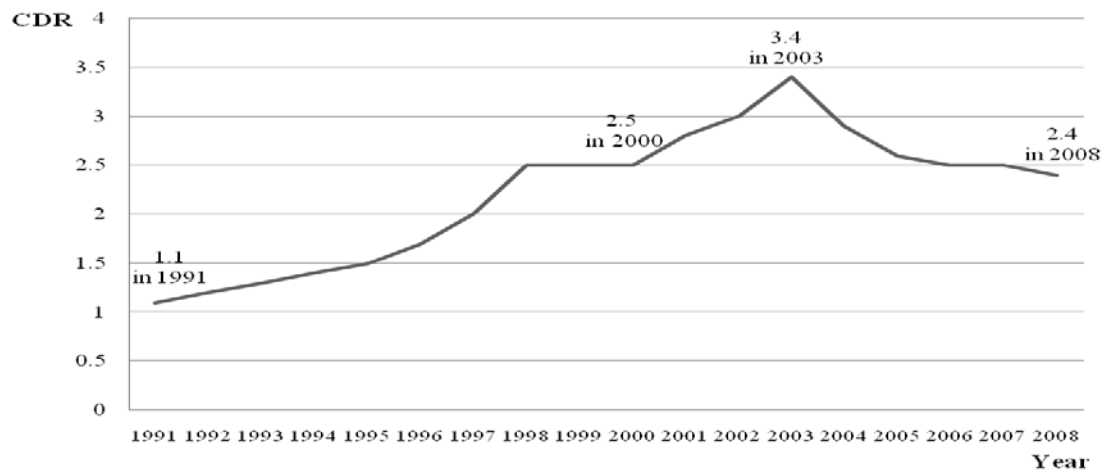
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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Korean families traditionally have strong family ties and believe that the family comes first over the well-being of individual family members (Lee, 2006). However, recent changes in families, such as an increase in the divorce rate, indicate that this collectivistic family ideology has weakened. This demographic change in family structure has increased attention to issues of divorced families and their well-being in South Korea (hereafter Korea). However, since family is regarded as a private institution and family issues are treated as personal issues, family members are expected to take care of their own family issues in Korea (Chang, 2003). Thus, changes in social systems, such as family policy and divorce law, lag behind the rapid behavioral changes in Korean families.

Divorce has rapidly increased since the late 1990s and has become a significant family and social issue in Korean society. As shown in Figure 1, the crude divorce rate (CRD), indicating the number of divorces per 1,000 people, was 2.4 in 2008 (Statistics Korea, 2009a). Compared to 1.1 in 1991, the crude divorce rate had increased to 2.5 in 2000 and then soared to 3.4 in 2003. The 2008 divorce rate declined, but it was still considerably higher than the 1990 number. Compared to neighbor countries in Asia including China and Japan, the crude divorce rate of Korea was higher than that of those two countries in 2007 (OECD/Korean Policy Centre, 2009). In 2008, 54.0% of divorced couples had at least one minor child under age 20 in Korea when they filed for divorce (Statistics Korea, 2009a). This number indicates that more than half of Korean divorced parents have to perform parental roles together with the other parent.



*Figure 1. Crude Divorce Rate (CDR) in Korea, 1991-2008*

(Source: Statistics Korea, 2009a)

Divorce is a stressful life transition, not only for couples but also for other family members, especially children. Previous studies have documented the negative consequences of divorce for adults and their children, including economic hardships, lower levels of well-being, social isolation, and children's lower educational achievement and behavior problems (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Barber & Demo, 2006; Ok & Sung, 2004a; Park, 2008a; Sun & Li, 2002).

In contrast to these negative outcomes of divorce, some studies have presented optimistic and resiliency perspectives on the consequences for children of divorce when certain conditions exist (Barber & Demo, 2006; Braver & Cookston, 2003; Kelly, 2006; Kim & Beak, 2002). They have emphasized the importance of financial support in order to protect the economic well-being of children following divorce. In addition, these studies have reported that positive parent-child relationships or cooperative parent relationships after divorce could contribute to improved well-being for children. That is, protective factors such as financial support, good parent-child relationships, and coparenting after divorce could facilitate the well-being of children. These

research outcomes highlight attention to the roles of nonresident parents<sup>1</sup> in children's lives after divorce, and many studies have been conducted through examining child support, visitation, and relation quality (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Arditti, 1995; Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Whiteside & Becker, 2000).

The marital partners' roles end when marriages dissolve. When children are involved, however, the parents still have parental roles together (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Therefore, divorced parents have to negotiate new patterns of parenting before finalizing the divorce since they will have separate households after the divorce (Day & Lamb, 2004). Research on U.S. couples indicates that this negotiation of parental roles and responsibilities is often a source of strain, so many divorced parents experience some conflict over their coparental relationship after divorce (Ahrons, 1983; Amato, 2000; Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999).

Previous research in Korea has also reported that considerable numbers of divorced parents experience difficulties in coparenting and many sever all contact with their ex-spouses after divorce (Jang & Min, 2002; Jun, 2002; Kim & Han, 2004; Yoo, 2005). These dramatic changes in relationships with nonresident fathers may influence the well-being of children of divorce in Korea. Compared to a substantial number of U.S. studies, little empirical research has examined parenting relationships between divorced parents and nonresident fathers' involvement with their children after divorce in Korea. Therefore, it is important to explore how Korean divorced parents negotiate their parenting relationships and how nonresident fathers are involved in their children's lives after divorce to help understand the well-being of divorce of children.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "nonresident parents" usually refers to nonresident fathers in the U.S. The present research was also conducted based on the resident mothers' perspectives, so either "nonresident father" or "father" was consistently used throughout the paper except for some cases that refer to both parents. However, it is important to note that the term "nonresident parents" indicates both fathers and mothers in Korea since child custody is still often granted to fathers in Korea (Yoon & Chang, 2002).

A new civil law was introduced in 2007 in Korea which requires parents to develop an agreement regarding parenting after divorce in order to reduce conflict between divorced parents and to protect the well-being of children of divorce (Seoul Family Court, 2009). Divorce law may be an important consideration in terms of parenting agreements (Gunnoe & Braver, 2001). Since the modified divorce law requires parents to submit a parenting agreement to the court, it may influence divorced parents' decision-making processes as well as their parenting after divorce. It is still unknown, however, what the divorce outcomes are after enacting this law. How do parents actually negotiate postdivorce parenting, and what are the degrees of conflict parents experience while they negotiate these parenting agreements? Previous Korean research has shown that considerable numbers of nonresident fathers do not participate in childrearing or pay child support after divorce, or even have contact with their children (Jun, 2002). Thus, it is important to examine whether the requirement of parenting agreements makes any difference in the nonresident fathers' involvement in their children's lives.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore how Korean divorced mothers experience parenting after divorce. The research questions for this study are as follows: (a) What were the parenting arrangement decisions at the time of the divorce? (b) What has been the nonresident fathers' involvement in the children's lives after the divorce? (c) How do Korean divorced mothers identify the roles of their children's fathers in the children's lives? and (d) What are Korean divorced mothers' experiences in dealing with the parenting arrangements and the nonresident fathers' involvement in the children's lives under the different divorce laws regarding parenting after the divorce? These questions are best answered using qualitative analysis methods since they are exploratory in nature.



## **Significance of the Study**

It is important to listen to Korean divorced mothers' voices and to identify how they describe their own experiences of parenting after divorce to better understand their experiences and situations due to limited research in this area in Korea. Several researchers have pointed out that the research on divorced families in Korea is still quite limited (Chung, 2008; Park, 2008b). Some of the limitations are that researchers have mostly investigated individual characteristics of divorced adults (Han, Kim, & Kang, 2004), the causes of divorce (Kong, Gu, & Cho, 2005), and adjustment after divorce (Kwon & Ok, 2005; Ok, Choi, Kwon, & Kang, 2004; Ok & Sung, 2004a; Ok & Sung, 2004b; Son & Han, 2006). Limited attention, however, has been given to the research on parenting after divorce (Jang & Min, 2002; Jun, 2002; Kim & Han, 2004; Yoo, 2005). Studying this area will advance the current state of knowledge of Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting.

This study will also contribute to the body of literature in that it reflects Korean social contexts. Compared to the substantial number of U.S. studies, little research in this area has been conducted in Korea. Many Korean researchers have relied on research findings of U.S. studies but the U.S. has different social norms and social and cultural contexts. In addition, this study will expand understanding of how the divorce policy change influences divorced mothers' experiences of parenting by comparing mothers who experienced divorced before and after the law modification. Therefore, this study will provide critical knowledge and implications for policymakers and could be used as foundational information for future family law and policy changes.

## **Research Paradigm**

The scientific paradigm for the present study is interpretivism from a phenomenological perspective to achieve an interpretive understanding of Korean divorced mothers' experiences

regarding parenting after divorce. A paradigm is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p.17 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and guides how researchers understand a person and the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A paradigm consists of several premises including ontological, epistemological, and methodological (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The definitions of these premises are as follows: (a) ontology refers to “What is the nature of reality?” (b) epistemology indicates, “What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?” and (c) methodology means, “How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22).

The ontology of interpretivism is relativism (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Interpretivism assumes that individuals construct shared meanings regarding their activities, language, and cultural symbols (Daly, 2007). Since they develop subjective meanings according to their own realities, a particular phenomenon could be represented in different ways (Daly, 2007). Moreover, these subjective meanings are built socially and historically (Creswell, 2007). These assumptions of interpretivism underline the importance of understanding how individuals, who have the same experience, develop their shared meanings in their context by taking into account the historical and sociocultural norms in a society (Creswell, 2007).

From an epistemology perspective, interpretivism is a subjectivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Interpretivism assumes that the researcher participates in the construction of realities along with the research participants (Daly, 2007). Participants can build shared meanings of their realities through interaction processes with others including the researchers (Creswell, 2007). The researchers’ values and experiences regarding the research questions need to be addressed since the researchers’ backgrounds including personal, cultural, and historical experiences could influence their interpretations of research participants’ experiences (Cresswell,

2007). Methodologically, hermeneutical<sup>2</sup> or dialectical methods can be utilized (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Under this research paradigm, the present study investigates how Korean divorced mothers explain their own realities of parenting after divorce from a phenomenological perspective.

Schwandt (2003) suggested distinguishing among interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism paradigms even though some researchers did not separate them. Many researchers labeled them interchangeably including constructionism (Cresswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and social constructionism/interpretivism (Daly, 2007). To make it clear, the research paradigm for the present research is labeled interpretivism as described above, but based on the Schwandt's classification, the present study is inclined toward hermeneutics. The assumptions of hermeneutics are discussed in the following methods chapter.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. This chapter has provided an overview of the study. In chapter two, a general background of Korean social and cultural contexts and relevant divorce research literature are discussed. In chapter three, the methods employed in this study are discussed. Findings that emerged from the Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting are presented in chapter four. Conclusions of the present study, implications for Korean divorced families, policy, and future studies, and limitations of the present study are discussed in chapter five.

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<sup>2</sup> Hermeneutics is a type of analysis that emphasizes how prior understandings and knowledge influence the interpretive process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

## **Chapter 2. Background**

This chapter provides contextual information about Korean society and relevant literature to help understand the experiences of Korean divorced families. The contexts of Korean society include legal contexts of divorce as well as social and family contexts. Research on parenting after divorce is discussed including nonresident fathers' involvement with children and coparental relationships.

### **Contexts of Korean Society**

#### **Legal contexts of divorce in Korea**

*Modification of the civil law.* A rapid increase in the divorce rate within a decade as well as research revealing negative outcomes of divorce led the Korean government to introduce a new civil law about divorce which was enacted in 2007. This new civil law includes the following requirements: a “cooling off” period and required agreements between the parents regarding custody, child support, and nonresident parent visitation (Seoul Family Court, 2009). This modification went into effect in June 2008. The cooling off period requires parents with a minor child to wait for three months to finalize their divorce. In addition, parents with a minor child are required to submit a parenting agreement to the court<sup>3</sup> regarding legal and physical custody, child support payments, and nonresident parent visitation.

The purpose of parenting agreements is to provide important opportunities for parents who want to divorce to discuss parental relationships following divorce and to avoid anticipated conflict over parenting between divorced parents after divorce (Chin, Park, & Chung, 2008). Before the civil law modification in 2007, parents were only required to decide who would have

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<sup>3</sup> Divorces are handled in three types of courts including district court, branch court, and family court in Korea. There is only one family court in Seoul.

legal custody of their children when they filed for divorce. Since the civil law did not require parents to decide on parenting plans regarding physical custody, child support, or visitation, little reliable information exists about divorced Korean families' postdivorce living arrangements and parenting (Jeong, 2005). In addition, at the time of divorce, parents were less likely to talk about parenting issues after the divorce was final compared to other issues such as feasibility of divorce or property division (Lee, 2001).

One study completed before the new law reported that divorced parents experienced some conflict reaching an agreement at the time of divorce about custody and child support, but they did not have much difficulty with visitation agreements (Kim, 2003). However, Korean divorced parents would often experience conflict after divorce concerning physical custody, child support, or visitation because they had not made such agreements or arrangements beforehand (Chin et al., 2008). Park and Jun (2003) provided more evidence for this concern and reported that the most frequently asked questions from divorced parents in online counseling concerned issues related to contact with the nonresident parents.

Based on the 2007 civil law modification, divorcing parents are now required to fill out the parenting agreement form provided by the court. The parenting agreement form lists some fairly vague guidelines for parents to develop parenting agreements regarding child support and visitation. In terms of child support, the guidelines state that parents have legal responsibility to take care of the child even if they do not have either legal and/or physical custody. Parents need to negotiate an appropriate amount of child support based on the age of the child(ren), number of children, and the parents' financial status. Regarding visitation, nonresident parents and their children have the right to visit each other, and visitation is necessary for the children to ensure that they receive adequate love from both parents and grow up properly. It would help the children if the parents decide regular visitations based on the child's schedules. Detailed visitation

plans including time, place, and other notes would also be helpful to avoid conflict in the future. This is the only information that divorcing parents receive to develop parenting agreements.

**Custody.** Legal custody of children was granted to mothers in 1990 after a civil law modification (Cha, 2006). However, a substantial number of child custody cases are still granted to fathers in Korea, compared to the U.S., where mothers usually have custody of their children (Park, 2008a). Parents who have legal custody have the legal authority to make decisions about the children, and parents who have physical custody primarily live with the children (Chin et al., 2008). In terms of contested divorce cases, according to a study by Yoon and Chang (2002), out of 200 legal custody dispute cases, 132 cases (66%) were granted to mothers, while 64 cases (32%) were granted to fathers, and four cases (2%) were split custody<sup>4</sup>. Sung, Song, Jung, Han, and Kim's (2001) study also reported a similar proportion of living arrangements after divorce including both legal and physical custody for contested divorce cases. Moreover, the concept of joint custody<sup>5</sup> was only recently introduced, so joint custody rarely exists in Korea (Park, 2008a).

**Child support.** The child support policy has improved to protect the well-being of children of divorce. In addition to the parenting agreement requirement based on the 2007 civil law modification, a child-support direct payment order went into effect in November 2009<sup>6</sup> (Family Procedure Rules, 2009). This order is similar to a child-support, income-withholding order in the U.S. According to the provisions of child-support direct payments, if nonresident parents do not pay child support more than twice without reasonable cause, the resident parents could request a child-support direct payment order from the court, and then child support

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<sup>4</sup> Split custody refers to when some of the children of divorce live with one parent while the other children live with the other parent.

<sup>5</sup> Joint custody refers to when children of divorce live about an equal amount of time with each parent (Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> This policy was not effective when the research was conducted.

payments can be regularly withdrawn from the nonresident parent's income. In terms of the amount of child support payments, there are no available child support guidelines in Korea yet. The usual amount of child support set in the court was between KRW 300,000 (US \$262) and 500,000 (US \$436) per month in 2006 (Cha, 2006).

### **Divorce law and nonresident fathers' involvement with children**

The effectiveness of the 2007 modified civil law is questionable since there are no specific guidelines or compulsory execution to help parents make decisions about child support payments and visitation, or to follow up on their agreements (Chin et al., 2008). Changes in the civil law related to family policy, however, could improve contextual factors that influence nonresident fathers' involvement in children's lives (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). The new civil law identifies the fundamental needs of children and parents including emotional, financial, physical, and social needs by requiring child support payments and visitation schedules. This law also outlines the responsibilities and rights of divorced parents and their children so that divorced parents will become more aware of their obligations for financial support of their children and their rights to regularly visit their children. Seltzer (1998) claims that recognition of nonresident fathers' rights and responsibilities could increase their involvement in the children's lives. Therefore, the parenting agreements may encourage parents to plan their parenting strategies after divorce and facilitate the involvement of nonresident fathers in the children's lives.

Parents must negotiate legal and physical custody, child support, and visitation at the time of divorce under the current divorce law. These legal obligations reduce possible conflicts after divorce regarding child support and visitation. As Kruk (2005) indicated, the legal expectation for the parenting plan is that parents develop their own plan through direct negotiation, which could reduce the harm to divorced families. By identifying the fundamental

needs of each family member and planning for parenting arrangements before divorce, families can go forward with a healthier outlook for their futures.

### **Social and family contexts in Korea**

*Gender ideology and parenting.* Traditionally, divided gender roles for husbands and wives based on a patriarchal system are still a commonly shared norm in Korean society (Kim, Jang, & Kim, 2006). According to the “intensive mothering” ideology, society expects mothers to be the primary caregiver for their children even if they work outside the home (Dillaway & Paré, 2008, p. 441). Previous studies have reported persistent gender role ideology and gender inequality in Korean families. Within dual-earner families, employed mothers perceived themselves as primary caregivers for their children and secondary breadwinners (Yoo, 2009). According to Statistics Korea (2007), employed wives spent 3 hours 28 minutes a day on household chores while employed husbands only spent 32 minutes a day. In addition, there is no difference in time spent on household chores between husbands with employed wives and unemployed wives.

Several studies have also documented that Korean fathers are less likely to participate in childrearing (Jang et al., 2006; Kim, Hwang, Sun, & Kim, 2008). Kim and colleagues (2008) studied Korean parents’ perception on fatherhood and fathers’ participation in parenting with 900 fathers and 900 mothers whose first child was under age 20. This study found that most Korean fathers had traditional gender role attitudes toward parenting regardless of the employment status of their wives. Most fathers perceived themselves as family breadwinners and spent considerable time in their workplaces. They left most of the parenting responsibilities to their wives and perceived most areas of parenting as the mother’s role including bathing, preparing meals, feeding, and getting a child to sleep.



The fathers did participate in parenting by playing with their children, paying for the children's private lessons or education fees, or showing affection to their children by giving a hug or complimenting their children (Kim et al., 2008). However, they thought that mothers perform more effective parenting roles than themselves. When asked about their perception of an ideal father figure, Korean husbands as compared to wives reported different images of the ideal father figure. Husband described fathers who have enough financial capability as ideal fathers while wives regarded more nurturing fathers as ideal fathers.

*Divorced families in Korea.* Social norms regarding changing roles after divorce are not yet well defined in Korea (Han & Kim, 1994) since the stigma of being divorced is prevalent in Korean society (Noh, 2001; Park, 2008a; Yang, 2003). Previous research has reported gender differences in terms of barriers to divorce or problems after divorce in Korea (Ok & Sung, 2004a; Ok & Sung, 2004b; Son & Han, 2006). In particular, economic hardship after divorce was identified as one of the main barriers to divorce for women in Korea while men were more concerned about emotional aspects after divorce and social norms regarding a normal family (Han et al., 2004).

Divorced parents may also have different experiences in the family after divorce depending on their gender. Many resident fathers, for example, undergo difficulties in being the primary caregivers for their children (Cheon & Choi, 2001; Kim et al., 2006; Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993). According to Ok and Sung's (2004b) study, many divorced men receive support from their mothers to help with housework (46.5%) or to take care of the children when the fathers are not available (66.7%). Park and Jun (2003) also found that grandmothers or relatives often become the primary caregivers for children instead of the fathers in some single father-headed households. Unlike the fathers, few divorced mothers receive help

from their own mothers, and resident mothers usually report difficulties in becoming the primary economic provider in Korea (Han et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2006).

*Women in poverty after divorce.* Most single parents experience financial difficulties after divorce, especially single mothers (Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006; Rettig & Kriener-Althen, 2003). Bartfeld (2000) explained that mothers take care of childrearing responsibilities during marriage which results in reduced earning capacity of mothers. This is particularly true in Korea which has a long history of traditional gender roles. In addition, after divorce mothers with minor children usually experience child care barriers to employment as well as a reduced earning capacity. Thus, Korean divorced mothers point out that economic issues are the most difficult experiences after divorce (Kim et al., 2006; Son & Han, 2006; Yoo, 2005). According to Ko and Kim's (2009) research, 19% of single-parent households live in poverty in Korea. The poverty rate of single-mother households as 20.7% was much higher than the poverty rate of single-father households at 13.7%.

Women's employment structure in Korea also contributes to women's poverty after divorce. In Korea, a substantial number of women discontinue their employment after marriage even though recently more women overall have begun to participate in the labor force. Statistics Korea (2009c) reported a women's employment pattern following an M-shaped curve with the following female employment statistics: 69.3% of women between age 25-29, 53.3% of women between age 30-34, 58.5% of women between 35-39, and 65.9% of women between age 40-44. That is, many Korean women quit their jobs after marriage or childbirth. In addition, even if the woman works, the employment structure in Korea still is based on the male-breadwinner model (Jeong, 2005; Park, 2008a), so there is a significant gender wage gap. For example, the average monthly income of female employees was 66.4% that of male employees in 2007 (Ministry of Labor, 2008). Furthermore, Byun and colleagues (2006) claimed that whether or not these

mothers participate in the workforce before or after divorce does not explain the strong trend of divorced women in poverty since available jobs to women in Korea are not typically good enough to support a household.

### **Overview of Research on Nonresident Parents' Involvement with Children**

More recent research has emphasized the benefits to children when both parents have continuous involvement in their children's lives following divorce, except when nonresident fathers are abusive or incompetent (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Braver, Hipke, Ellman, & Sandler, 2003; Maccoby et al., 1993; Walker, 2003). Many studies have demonstrated that nonresident fathers' involvement and cooperative parenting after divorce influence the well-being of children as well as the well-being of both parents (Amato, 2000; Amato & Dorius, 2010; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Simons, Whitebeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994). Nonresident fathers' involvement is usually assessed by child support payments, frequency of contact, the quality of the nonresident father-child relationship (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Simons et al., 1994; Sobolewski & King, 2005; Whiteside & Becker, 2000).

#### **Child support**

Child support from nonresident fathers is an important financial resource for children of divorce and their resident mothers who often have lower incomes than the fathers (Case, Lin, & McLanahan, 2003). Financial inadequacy after divorce may contribute to negative child outcomes including low academic performance in school and psychological and behavioral problems (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Argys et al., 1998; Kim & Beak, 2007; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thomson, 1994; Sun & Li, 2002). Some researchers claim that child support income is more helpful for the well-being of children than other types of income sources such as government transfers or financial contributions from a resident parent or stepparent (Argys et al., 1998).

Furthermore, child support from nonresident fathers reduces the relative financial burdens of resident mothers (Garrison, 1999).

Little research exists on child support in Korea except for descriptive studies. These studies have described the reality of child support payments in Korea by asking whether resident parents receive child support or by asking about the specific amount of child support they received (Jang & Min, 2002; Sung et al., 2001). According to a report from the Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations (2008), approximately 40% of parents did not talk about child support at the time of divorce. Even if they made an agreement, only 12% of custodial parents received child support from the noncustodial parents. Jang and Min (2002) reported that of the 200 divorced mothers they studied, 78% of mothers did not receive any child support from the nonresident fathers and more than 50% of the mothers were not aware that they could argue for child support. Kim and colleagues' (2006) study also reported that of 76 fathers, none of the resident fathers received child support from the children's mothers, and only 15.3% of resident mothers received child support from the fathers.

Another study investigated 478 contested divorce cases and reported that only 47 out of 478 cases contested child support payments (Sung et al., 2001). The other cases contested legal and physical custody, property division, or alimony. As these Korean studies show, unlike in the U.S. where child support has been recognized as an important income source for divorced single-parent households, only a small number of Korean divorced families benefit from child support.

### **Frequency of contact**

Nonresident fathers' contact with children is positively related to their child support payments and a quality relationship between nonresident fathers and their children. Research has reported that nonresident fathers who pay child support, compared to those who do not pay, are more likely to visit their children (Fox & Blanton, 1995; Huang, 2009; Kim et al., 2006). In

addition, the current frequency of visits of nonresident fathers is related to the quality of the relationship between nonresident fathers and their children (Arditti, 1995; Whiteside & Becker, 2000).

Nonresident parents' contact with their children is typically limited in Korea (Jang & Min, 2002; Kim et al., 2006; Kim & Han, 2004). These studies reported that approximately 50% to 60% of resident parents rarely have contact with the nonresident parents. Limited contact with nonresident parents could reduce the opportunities to develop a quality parent-child relationship and result in diminishing the emotional, financial, physical, and social well-being of their children.

One reason for limited contact with nonresident parents in Korea could be due to the lack of awareness of visitation rights. According to a report from the Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations (2008), 35.1% of nonresident parents and 47.4% of resident parents were not aware of the child visitation rights of nonresident parents. Substantial numbers of nonresident parents, approximately 40% to 50%, did not visit their children, and more than 50% of nonresident parents reported that they had experienced prevention of their visitation rights by the resident parent. This report also described a substantial number of divorced parents who did not discuss or even know about child support or child visitation at the time of divorce.

### **Quality of the relationship between nonresident fathers and children**

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of the quality of the parent-child relationship (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Velez, 2010). In terms of frequency of contact, however, there are mixed results concerning the relationship between the frequency of contact and child outcomes (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Amato & Rezac, 1994). Some researchers have claimed that children would benefit more from the quality of the nonresident father-child relationship including authoritative parenting and closeness than from frequent

contact with the fathers who only engage in leisure activities with their children (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Sobolewski & King, 2005). However, Sobolewski and King (2005) claimed that frequent contact with both parents is an important advantage since a quality parent-child relationship and positive parenting is more likely to develop when the nonresident fathers and the children have more frequent contact.

A better understanding of the conceptualization of paternal involvement would help identify the quality of the nonresident father-child relationship. However, there is no agreement on the dimensions of quality for fathers' involvement with their children even though researchers are interested in quality paternal involvement (Argys et al., 2007). The major drawback is that existing research studies that examined the quality of the relationship between nonresident fathers and their children have not developed measures based on any theory of paternal involvement (Fabricius et al., 2010). Instead, they have measured different constructs of assumed quality of father involvement (Fabricius et al., 2010). Therefore, Fabricius and colleagues suggested that researchers evaluate the quality of the father-child relationship with three dimensions: interaction between the father and child, responsiveness of the father, and emotional quality of the relationship.

Pleck's (2010) recent work presented a more detailed perspective regarding general paternal involvement. Pleck's conceptualization of paternal involvement would be useful to consider the quality of nonresident fathers' involvement with their children. Pleck conceptualized paternal involvement with three primary components and two auxiliary domains. The three primary components are as follows: "(a) positive engagement activities, interaction with the child of the more intensive kind likely to promote development; (b) warmth and responsiveness; and (c) control, particularly monitoring and decision making" (p. 67). The two auxiliary domains are "(d) indirect care, activities done for the child that do not entail interaction with the child, in the

forms of material indirect care (purchasing and arranging goods and services for the child) as well as social indirect care (fostering community connections with peers and institutions), but excluding breadwinning; and (e) process responsibility, referring to a father's monitoring that his child's needs for extent to which the father meets those needs himself" (p. 67).

### **Coparental relationships**

Coparenting is defined as the relationship between divorced parents who are continuously involved in their children's lives (Ahrons, 1981). Two dimensions of the coparental relationship are cooperative parenting and coparenting conflict. Ahrons notes that when nonresident fathers experience low interparental conflict and high cooperative parenting, they are more likely to become involved in their children's lives after divorce (Ahrons, 1983). A positive coparental relationship is associated with less conflict during divorce proceedings, satisfaction with financial support, and satisfactory custody arrangements (Madden-Derdich & Arditti, 1999).

Few studies on the coparental relationship have been conducted in Korea (Kim & Han, 2004; Yoo, 2005). One of the reasons the quality of the coparental relationship is at a very low level in Korea is because a considerable number of divorced parents sever their relationships with their ex-spouses after divorce. These studies also found that the level of attachment to the ex-spouse is positively associated with the coparental relationship (Kim & Han, 2004; Yoo, 2005) while parental role reward is negatively related to the coparental relationship (Kim & Han, 2004). This is because most resident parents are more likely to contact the nonresident parent when their children worry them or when the resident parent is not satisfied with parenting issues (Kim & Han, 2004) instead of contacting the nonresident parent to share good news about the children.

### **Summary**

This chapter has provided the background contexts of divorce and family relationships in Korea. There are very few studies in Korea regarding nonresident fathers' involvement in

children's lives after divorce compared to the considerable number of U.S. studies. However, both U.S. and Korean research studies have consistently reported that increasing the quality of nonresident fathers' involvement and the coparental relationship would benefit the well-being of children of divorce.

In terms of family and social contexts, Korean families still maintain a traditional gender ideology, so fathers often do not actively engage in parenting in two-parent families. In addition, many mothers discontinue their employment after marriage and childbirth. Even if mothers maintain their employment, they are likely to perceive their income as supplementary to their husband's income. Therefore, women are more likely to experience economic hardship after divorce.

The number of divorces has only recently increased in Korea, so divorce law has not yet been properly established to protect the well-being of divorced parents and their children. However, divorce law has improved by requiring parenting agreements and introducing a child-support direct payment order if the nonresident fathers do not make the agreed payment.



### **Chapter 3. Methods**

This chapter discusses the method employed in the study. The present study used phenomenology as the method of analysis<sup>7</sup> to understand Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting after divorce. Basic features of phenomenology and the unique standards of hermeneutic phenomenology are discussed. The description of phenomenology, data collection, and data analysis are described.

#### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology assumes that an individual's experience is not constructed by an outside observer, but is an intrinsic structural constituent of the experience itself (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology processes explore how individuals understand their lived experiences, and how they are transformed into a description of the universal essences (Creswell, 2007). Thus, phenomenology aims at describing individuals' lived experiences and finding deeper understandings of the meanings of their lived experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology has different traditions including hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger and transcendental phenomenology of Husserl (Creswell, 2007). Both traditions have focused on the lived experiences of humans, but the methods of exploration are different. That is, hermeneutic phenomenology claims that an interpretive process is essential along with the description of the experience, while transcendental phenomenology focuses more on pure description of the conscious lived experience (Osborne, 1994).

This current study utilized the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology to analyze transcribed interviews with Korean divorced mothers. Hermeneutic phenomenology is interested

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<sup>7</sup> Phenomenological methodology was not followed for data collection of the present study. However, the present study used phenomenology as the method of analysis.

in “the situated meaning of a human in the world” (Lavery, 2003, p. 7). Through this method, Korean divorced mothers’ experiences of parenting after divorce can be deeply understood within the Korean social and cultural contexts in which the Korean divorced mothers live.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology helps researchers access meanings of phenomena which are not immediately understood (Spiegelberg, 1975). Van Manen (1990) also claimed that “human science is the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings” (p. 181). Van Manen explained hermeneutic phenomenology as follows:

*Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) “facts” of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the “facts” of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process (pp. 180-181).*

There are two essential aspects of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology including the historicity of understanding and the hermeneutic circle (Koch, 1995).

#### **Historicity of understanding**

The historicity of understanding consists of background, pre-understanding, co-constitution, and interpretation. Understanding a person’s background decides what is “real” for the person since “a person’s history or background is what culture gives a person from birth”

(Koch, 1995, p. 831). In addition, it represents a way of understanding the world. Pre-understanding is “the meaning and organization of a culture (including language and practices)” which already exist in the world before people perceive it. Thus, people cannot bracket<sup>8</sup> it. The person and the world are an indissoluble unity as co-constituting each other (Koch, 1995). That is, individuals construct the world based on their own background and pre-understanding, and the meanings are also established by the world where individuals live. Based on the person’s background and pre-understanding, thus, every phenomenon can be interpreted.

### **Hermeneutic circle**

The hermeneutic circle refers to the repetitive process of interpretation of meaning between the parts and the whole (Kvale, 1996). The hermeneutic circle starts with “an often vague and intuitive understanding of the text as a whole, its different parts are interpreted, and out of these interpretations the parts are again related to the totality, and so on” (Kvale, 1996, p. 48). The understanding of meaning is continuously rich and deepened through this iterative process. Interpretation emerges from pre-understanding and a dialectical process between the parts and the whole.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is important for hermeneutic phenomenology because the researcher and the participants cooperate to make sense of their experiences, and they co-construct their meanings (Daly, 2007). In addition, understanding and interpretation come from the pre-understanding of the researchers, the participants, and the context, along with the process of the hermeneutic circle (Lavery, 2003).

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<sup>8</sup> Bracket indicates that individuals’ prejudgments and knowledge are set aside (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher in the present study was born and raised in Korea. On the one hand, the researcher is well aware of Korean culture and social norms regarding divorce and parenting. On the other hand, since the researcher has never been married and has no children, this researcher's position provides a more neutral perspective on divorce and the mothers' experiences.

## **Data Collection**

### **Recruitment**

The participants were limited to those who had experienced the phenomenon of interest: divorced Korean parents. The criteria for participants were the divorced parents who had experienced a divorce within five years and raised at least one minor child in their household. In addition, the parents had to live in Seoul, South Korea or its satellite cities. The proposal for the current study was approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board prior to recruitment (Approval 0905P66163).

The researcher initially distributed and collected written surveys from divorced parents through self-support groups of several Internet websites, healthy family support centers, and social service agencies. The researcher first distributed the survey questionnaire with an enclosed letter of solicitation to recruit potential interview participants. Some of these divorced mothers who completed the surveys agreed to participate in the interviews. They left their contact information and were directly contacted by the researcher. Additional participants were identified by other participants who voluntarily introduced their friends to the researcher after their own interviews. Of the 17 participants, 12 divorced mothers were recruited directly from the research advertisement and five mothers were referred by other participants. In addition to the mothers, the researcher attempted to include divorced fathers in the study, but only two resident fathers agreed to participate in the study. Thus, the fathers were excluded in the analysis due to the small sample size.

## Participants

The participants of this study included 17 divorced mothers who were divorced between the years of 2004 and 2009. Thirteen mothers (75%) had uncontested divorces, while four mothers (25%) had contested divorces. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants. As shown in table 1, the average age of the divorced mothers was 38 with a range of 27 to 47 years at the time of the interviews. In terms of the mothers' education level, all of the mothers had at least a high school degree and four mothers (23.5%) had a 2-year or 4-year college degrees. The mothers' median monthly household income was KRW 1,000,000 (approximately US \$873) with a range of KRW 500,000 to KRW 3,000,000 (approximately US \$436 - \$2,619).<sup>9</sup> Based on the 2009 Korean poverty guidelines, these mothers were relatively low-income. Of the 17 mothers, six mothers (35%) received welfare at the time of the interview (ID 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, & 17). These mothers, however, were not on welfare<sup>10</sup> before the divorce except for one mother. The average number of children they had was two with a range of one to three.

The parenting agreements after divorce indicated that 14 of the mothers (82%) had legal and physical custody of their children at the time of the divorce. One mother had only physical custody since the father claimed his rights to legal custody and the mother wanted the father to take some responsibility for his children by having legal custody (ID 8). In two cases, the fathers had both legal and physical custody of the children at the time of divorce. One of these fathers had physical and legal custody (ID 12), and the other father had split physical and legal custody

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<sup>9</sup> The 2009 Korean poverty guidelines are KRW 835,763 (US \$730) for a 2-person family, KRW 1,081,186 (US \$944) for a 3-person family, and KRW 1,326,609 (US \$1,158) for a four-person family units (Ministry of Health & Welfare, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> The welfare program provides assistance to individuals a) whose household incomes are below Korean poverty guidelines, b) whose assets are under welfare asset limits, and c) who do not have any other available caregivers to provide income assistance, medical assistance, education fees for junior high and high school, loans, housing, or job training in Korea.

of his first two children and the mother had physical and legal custody of the third child (ID 16). Both of these fathers, however, took the children back to live with their mothers because they experienced difficulties raising their children by themselves. One mother with physical custody of the children but not legal custody made additional changes to take back legal custody from the father (ID 16), and the other mother was in the process of changing legal custody from the father to herself (ID 12). Therefore, at the time of the interviews, 15 mothers (88%) had both legal and physical custody of the children and two mothers had only physical custody.

Fourteen mothers (82%) agreed to receive child support with a range of KRW 200,000 to KRW 2,000,000 (approximately US \$175 - \$1,746) per month at the time of the divorce. In spite of these agreements, however, only five mothers (30%) received child support from the children's fathers at the time of the interviews. These mothers' divorce dates varied from March 2004 to June 2009. One mother received a lump sum for child support from the father through a lawsuit (ID 4). Regarding the fathers' visitation, most mothers agreed that the fathers could visit their children after the divorce. Nine mothers (53%) discussed the fathers' visitation rights with the fathers, but eight mothers (47%) did not talk about it. At the time of the interviews, only the children of nine mothers (53%) had contact with their fathers.

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

ID	Age	Education	Job/ Income	Children	Marriage Duration	Divorce Date	Parenting Agreement Child support/Visitation	Child Support	Father-Child Contact
1	47	High school	Sales/ KRW 1,200,000 (\$1,048)	Son 18 Daughter 17	20 years	July 2009	Yes/ Official agreement - KRW 200,000 (\$175) - Anytime	No	Yes
2	39	4-year college	Teacher/ KRW 2,000,000 (\$1,746)	Daughter 14 Son 12	13 years	December 2008	Yes/ Official agreement - KRW 1,500,000 (\$1,309) - Once a month	No	Yes
3	38	4-year college	Child care/ KRW 800,000 (\$698)	Son 6	2 years	March 2006	Yes/ Contested divorce - KRW 500,000 (\$436) - Twice a month	Yes	Yes Irregular visitation
4	35	High school	Self-sufficiency program <sup>11</sup> / KRW 700,000 (\$611)	Daughter 7	1 year 8 months	December 2004	Yes/ Contested divorce - KRW 300,000 (\$262) - No visitation agreement	Yes/ Lump sum	No
5	39	High school	Self-sufficiency program/ KRW 1,000,000 (\$873)	Son 8 Son 6	4 years	June 2004	Yes/ Verbal agreement - KRW 500,000 (\$436) - Once a month	No	Yes Irregular visitation
6	36	2-year college	Tutor/ KRW 1,500,000 (\$1,309)	Son 10 Son 8	4 years 5 months	March 2006	No	No	No

<sup>11</sup> The self-sufficiency program is an employment program for low-income families who are on welfare.

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

ID	Age	Education	Job/ Income	Children	Marriage Duration	Divorce Date	Parenting Agreement Child support/Visitation	Child Support	Father-Child Contact
7	36	High school	Self-sufficiency program/ KRW 1,000,000 (\$873)	Daughter 10 Son 9	9 years 8 months	January 2007	Yes/ Contested divorce - No specific agreement on child support - Once a month	No	Yes Irregular visitation
8	39	4-year college	Violin Instructor/ KRW 1,750,000 (\$1,528)	Daughter 14 Daughter 10	14 years	March 2008	Yes/ Official agreement - KRW 2,000,000 (\$1,746) - Twice a month	Yes	Yes
9	43	High school	Cleaner/ KRW 1,000,000 (\$873)	Son 18 Son 15	17 years 1 month	December 2008	Yes/ Official agreement - KRW 500,000 (\$436) - Vacation	No	No
10	47	High school	Sales/ KRW 650,000 (\$567)	Son 12	2 years <sup>12</sup> 8 months	August 2006	Yes/ Contested divorce - KRW 300,000 (\$262) - No visitation agreement	No	No
11	30	High school	Part-time worker/ KRW 800,000 (\$698)	Daughter 8	2 years	May 2004	No	No	No
12	35	High school	Call center/ KRW 1,260,000 (\$1,100)	Son 11 Son 9	5 years	February 2004	Yes/ Verbal agreement - KRW 250,000 (\$218) - Anytime	No	No

<sup>12</sup> ID 10 was separated from her ex-husband after two years and eight months of marriage.



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

ID	Age	Education	Job/ Income	Children	Marriage Duration	Divorce Date	Parenting Agreement Child support/Visitation	Child Support	Father-Child Contact
13	27	High school	Nurse aide/ KRW 1,200,000 (\$1,048)	Son 5	2 years 6 months	March 2006	No	No	No
14	27	High school	Office assistance/ KRW 950,000 (\$829)	Son 6 Son 3	6 years	June 2009	Yes/ Official agreement - KRW 1,500,000 (\$1,309) - Once a week	Yes	Yes
15	40	High school	Sales/ KRW 500,000 (\$436)	Son 15 Son 9	11 years 2 months	March 2006	No	No/ Owned a house	Yes Irregular visitation
16	39	High school	Part-time worker/ KRW 3,000,000 (\$2,619)	Son 12 Daughter 9 Daughter 7	8 years	February 2004	Yes/ Verbal agreement - KRW 1,200,000 (\$1,048) - No visitation agreement	No	No
17	45	High school	Sewing worker/ KRW 1,200,000 (\$1,048)	Daughter 12 Son 7	7 years	March 2004	No	Yes Irregular	Yes Irregular visitation

## **Interviews**

One-on-one interviews were used to help understand Korean divorced mothers' experiences and to develop richer and deeper meanings of the experiences (van Manen, 1990). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 17 participating divorced mothers between July and September of 2009 in Seoul or a satellite city in South Korea. The duration of each interview was approximately one and a half hours to two hours. Interviews took place at the participants' homes or coffee shops near the participants' homes depending upon each participant's preference. Participants were informed before the interview of the purpose of the study, possible risks and benefits of participation, the protection of privacy and confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study (see Appendix A for the consent form).

All interviews were conducted in the Korean language and were recorded with permission from the participants. Each participant received a gift card valued at KRW 30,000 (US \$26) for participating in the study. Interviews were conducted based on the active interview method. In an active interview, the researcher and the research participants co-construct the meanings and perspectives of a phenomenon (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interviews started by asking general questions about their experiences of divorce (See Appendix B for more interview questions). Demographic information was gathered through a separate survey questionnaire.

The researcher initially covered the prepared questions during the interviews, but the questions were expanded throughout the interviews. Whenever the participants brought up issues that were not covered in the prepared questions, the researcher let the participant develop the issues freely. These issues were then asked to the following participants, and the interview protocol was modified for future interviews. This process helped the researcher understand the participants' perspectives and interests as they related to their experiences. In this manner, the researcher involved the research participants in this study. The interviews covered broad issues but the parenting-related segments were pre-selected for the present research.

## **Analysis**

The present study did not have a phenomenology design, even though some of the approaches of phenomenology were used in the analysis processes. In addition, an in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol was used for the data collection of the present study, so some of the questions were determined prior to the interview. Unlike a phenomenology study, however, the meanings of Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences after divorce did not emerge from the research participants. Instead, the meanings of the mothers' experiences were derived by the researcher from the participants' experiences and their own words using the data analysis method of phenomenology. As described in the interview section, however, the researcher tried to include issues that were brought up by the research participants to reflect their realities.

The phenomenological data analysis method was utilized despite the incongruous research design because the researcher was interested in Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting after divorce in the context of Korean society. As described above, the hermeneutic phenomenology method helps understand a phenomenon from "the situated meaning of a human in the world" (Laverly, 2003, p. 7). Therefore, a phenomenological perspective and method would help understand the parenting experiences of Korean divorced mothers in the Korean social and cultural contexts.

### **Data preparation**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Completed interviews were transcribed while another interview was being conducted. Therefore, the researcher interviewed, listened to the interviews, transcribed, and verified the transcription so the researcher went through each interview several times. In addition, the researcher read each transcription independently and then compared the transcriptions across the cases. These processes helped the researcher get a sense of the interview as a whole. The interviews were analyzed in Korean prior to the first translation to English for the current research project. The researcher translated the

quotes first and then a bilingual speaker of Korean and English checked the accuracy of the translations.

### **Data analysis**

The present study followed Spiegelberg's (1960) steps of the phenomenological analysis method including the following order: (1) investigating the particular phenomenon, (2) investigating general essences, (3) apprehending essential relationships among essences, (4) watching modes of appearing, (5) watching the constitution of phenomenon in consciousness, (6) suspending belief in the existence of the phenomenon, and (7) interpreting the meaning of phenomenon. Of these seven steps, five steps were used based on the assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Based on the hermeneutic phenomenological assumptions, two steps of Spiegelberg (1960) were removed from the analysis procedure: watching the constitution of phenomenon in consciousness and suspending belief in the existence of the phenomenon. These two steps are important aspects for transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology, however, has different philosophical assumptions such as the historicity of understanding. With hermeneutic phenomenology, consciousness cannot be distinguished from the world since understanding arises in the historical contexts (Lavery, 2003). It also has acknowledged that bracketing personal experiences and phenomenology reduction may be difficult to implement (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, researchers can incorporate their presuppositions or knowledge into their interpretive process instead of bracketing (Lavery, 2003).

The analysis procedures were divided into each step, but it was necessary to go back and forth among the steps to achieve the hermeneutic circle. These analysis procedures were facilitated by using the qualitative data analysis software, MAXqda2. The major procedures are outlined below.

***Investigating particular phenomenon.*** The first step of investigating particular phenomenon consisted of three operations including phenomenological intuiting, phenomenological analyzing, and phenomenological describing (Spiegelberg, 1960).

*Phenomenological intuiting.* The phenomenon is intuited. The uniqueness of specific phenomenon can be gained by comparing the phenomenon with adjacent phenomenon.

*Phenomenological analyzing.* The components and the structure of the phenomenon gained by intuiting can be analyzed in this process. It examines the structure of the phenomenon and the relations among their elements and also explores relations between the phenomenon and related phenomenon.

*Phenomenological describing.* Phenomenological describing is categorizing the phenomenon. The proper phenomenological description can be obtained after appropriately exploring the phenomenon intuitively and analytically.

The researcher read and reread the transcriptions several times until the predominant themes emerged. A coding scheme was developed after reading across cases. The researcher started rough coding with one case and then modified the codes through other cases. If a new code came up, the researcher returned to the first interview transcript to insert the code and then moved to the next groups. This iterative process was conducted to develop the final codes. The researcher then structured the final codes and labeled them. The code system is presented in Appendix C.

***Investigating general essences.*** The general essences can be apprehended when the structural affinities of particulars are understood (Spiegelberg, 1960). “Essence is that what makes a thing what it is; that what makes a thing what it is rather than its being or becoming something else” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). In other words, “the essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Thus, the general essences cannot be attained without appropriate intuiting particulars.

In this step, the researcher uncovered the central meanings of the phenomenon prior to investigating the general essences because the general essences would be more visible by uncovering central meanings of the phenomenon. These central meanings emerged across the cases. After identifying the central meanings, the general essences were revealed.

***Apprehending essential relationships among essences.*** Apprehending essential relationships among essences can be achieved by identifying two types of essential relationships: relationships within a single essence and relationships between several essences (Spiegelberg, 1960). The internal relationships within one essence related to whether its elements are essential or incidental to the phenomenon. In the same way, essential relationships between several essences are determined. The relationships, whether these are essential or incidental to the phenomenon, can be identified by the process of free imaginative variation (van Manen, 1990). Imaginative variation is used to describe the essential structure of the phenomenon by identifying possible meanings. In the imaginative variation process, the researcher freely takes any possible perspectives of the phenomenon and examines various potential meanings in order to reveal the essences. The structures of the experiences are obtained throughout this reflective process (Moustakas, 1994).

The essential relationships among essences were recognized from a holistic perspective. The researcher reflected an essence in relation to other essences and tried to identify deeper meanings and more general descriptions from the relationships among essences.

***Watching modes of appearing.*** Phenomenology explores how something appears (hows) as well as the apprehensions of what appears whether particulars or essences (whats) (Spiegelberg, 1960). “It is centered in both how people methodically construct their experiences and their worlds, and in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activity” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005, p. 484). Identifying different modes of appearing helps researchers explain questions of direct or indirect verification.

The researcher paid attention to how the phenomenon was described and explained by the participants to determine the way in which they appeared. In addition, patterns from the participants' experiences were identified.

*Interpreting the meaning of phenomenon.* Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to interpret meanings of experiences which are not immediately accessible (Spiegelberg, 1960). It goes beyond descriptive phenomenology. The interpretive process can be end when a researcher reaches “a sensible meaning, a valid unity meaning, or freedom of inner contradiction” (Kvale, 1996, p. 47).

The data analysis was conducted by reading the transcriptions, investigating a particular phenomenon and central meanings, finding general essences, apprehending essential relationships among the essences, identifying the modes in which they appeared, and comparing the transcriptions and relationships back and forth during the process. The meanings that were uncovered through this process were interpreted in the Korean social and cultural contexts since hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the shared meanings in the contexts. Finally, interpreting the meanings of the phenomenon was identified.

### **Trustworthiness of the Research Process**

Researchers have suggested using appropriate labels and terms for qualitative research in relation to trustworthiness instead of using terms from quantitative research such as internal and external validity, and reliability (Creswell, 2007; Lincon & Guba, 1985). However, researchers have different perspectives about how to establish the trustworthiness of a study including trustworthiness (Lincon & Guba, 1985), validation (Creswell, 2007), and credibility (Eisner, 1991, as cited in Creswell, 2007). This study uses the term of trustworthiness following Lincon and Guba (1985).

Lincon and Guba (1985) used four criteria to establish the trustworthiness of research including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For trustworthiness, Lincon and Guba suggested eight techniques including the following: (a) for credibility, increased

activities in the field including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks; (b) for transferability, thick description; (c) for dependability, a dependability audit; and (d) for confirmability, a confirmability audit (p. 328). In addition to these techniques, a reflexive journal is useful for the four criteria. Of these techniques, Creswell recommended using at least two techniques.

There are two techniques of trustworthiness adopted in this study. For credibility, the technique of triangulation was used by including multiple respondents to support the findings. The researcher also had peer debriefing sessions where the research procedures and findings were examined with other colleagues. These colleagues raised questions and made comments so the researcher could consider the questions and comments and respond to them. In addition, since the colleagues had different cultural backgrounds, the peer debriefing sessions helped the researcher probe personal biases and clarify meanings that were not explicitly explained to audiences from different cultures but unconsciously interpreted.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the methods utilized for the present study were discussed. This study used a hermeneutic phenomenology to explore Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting. Data collection including recruitment and interviews, data analyses, and validation of the research process were addressed. In addition, characteristics of the 17 participants were described.



## **Chapter 4. Results**

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Korean divorced mothers regarding parenting after divorce. The four goals for this study were to (a) describe the parenting arrangement decisions at the time of the divorce, (b) uncover the nonresident fathers' involvement in the children's lives after the divorce, (c) identify Korean divorced mothers' perceptions regarding the roles of their children's fathers in the children's lives, and (d) distinguish Korean divorced mothers' experiences in dealing with the parenting arrangements and the nonresident fathers' involvement in the children's lives under the different divorce laws regarding parenting after divorce. The present study further recognized Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences in Korean social and legal contexts.

In this chapter, findings are presented based on the data analysis steps that were presented in the previous chapter. The results are presented following the five analysis steps including (1) describing the phenomenon of Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences, (2) uncovering central meanings, (3) apprehending essential relationships among essences, (4) watching modes of appearing, and (5) interpreting the meaning of phenomenon. The processes of qualitative data analysis, however, were not mutually exclusive but iterative. The researcher went back and forth among these steps.

### **Describing the Phenomenon**

The first step in this phenomenological analysis was to describe Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences by identifying the dominant meanings. Meaning refers to the way a person experiences or understands the phenomenon (van Manen, 2002). Korean divorced mothers' decisions on postdivorce parenting arrangements at the time of their divorce were described. The parental involvement of divorced fathers and parental relationships between the divorced parents after the divorce were described from the perspectives of the mothers. These

mothers' expectations of the fathers' role in the children's lives were then addressed. Finally, the mothers' experiences and perceptions on divorce policy were uncovered.

### **Decisions on Parenting after Divorce**

Decisions on parenting after divorce included: the mothers' reasons for having custody; decisions regarding child support; and decisions on visitation. Overall, the Korean divorced mothers did not experience much conflict with the fathers regarding parenting arrangements including custody, child support, and visitation at the time of the divorce since the Korean divorced parents did not talk much about postdivorce parenting arrangements at the time of the divorce.

#### **Reasons for having custody**

The mothers identified three reasons they had custody of the children after the divorce: (a) They believed raising children was the natural duty of mothers, (b) They mistrusted the fathers' competency, or (c) The fathers gave up custody. Some mothers also mentioned that they had two combined reasons for taking custody of their children: natural duty of mothers and mistrust of the fathers.

*Natural duty of mothers.* Seven mothers (41%) believed that child rearing was a natural duty of mothers, and they could provide more careful parenting for children compared to the fathers (ID 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 13, & 14). For these reasons, these mothers decided to have custody. These mothers often mentioned that "children should be raised by mothers." Since the mothers were likely to have been the primary caregivers while the parents lived together, the mothers were naturally awarded custody when they had to make decisions regarding custody. These mothers experienced little conflict when they asked for physical and legal custody since most fathers willingly granted them custody. One mother told her ex-husband:

He did not strongly claim it. I firmly insisted that I will raise [child's name] and have legal and physical custody. I told him that under that condition I will divorce him.... He also believed that children should be raised by mothers (ID 13).

The mothers believed they would be better parents than the fathers regarding careful parenting in everyday life. One mother struggled with the idea of having full custody of her children, but realized it was her maternal responsibility and that she would do a better job than the father. This mother said:

I sometimes thought, "What if I leave these children. It would be very convenient for me." I had in my mind to leave the<sup>13</sup> children. Then, I thought that I had to take this responsibility. If I left the children, their father would do his best for the children and work either full-time or part-time. However, what a father can do is not as much as what a mother can do to take care of her children. While I am working outside the home, I can call the children to ask them to do their homework and I can take care of them. But fathers cannot do that (ID 1).

Other mothers also struggled with the difficulty of raising the children on their own, but understood that they would do a better job since the fathers were not actively engaged in parenting during the marriage. ID 8 realized that, "It is very complicated [for the father] to educate children," and ID 13 noted that "He was tired due to his work so he did not know how to play with the child and read books." ID 14 also reflected the same doubt about the father's ability to raise the children:

If I send the children to their father, how would he raise these children? It is difficult enough for me as a woman to raise these children, but how would a man raise these two

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<sup>13</sup> During the translation process, the author faced an issue of whether or not to use either an article or possessive determiner. Although there is no concept of articles in the Korean language, in English, it would be natural to use a possessive determiner like "my child" or "my son." The author unconsciously translated "my child(ren)" when the mothers referred to their children except for when they said "our." When a possessive determiner was used, either "our" or "my," could provide meaningful information. For example, if a mother said "my child," she could have intended to claim her rights toward her child to separate the child from the child's father. To reduce this misinterpretation, the author decided to use a definite article "the" except for when the mothers specifically mentioned "my" or "our" as in "my child(ren)" or "our child(ren)."

children? The children would not be neat and wear appropriate clothes. If they [in-laws] took care of these children, they would become stupid. They [the in-laws] do not care about the children's education<sup>14</sup> and would just let them play. This is the kind of environment they would provide (ID 14).

*Mistrust of the fathers' competency.* The mothers commented on the fact that they were the most appropriate one to raise the children rather than the fathers. Ten mothers (59%) did not trust the children's fathers since they had been disappointed with the fathers during their marriages because of the fathers' incompetence, personality, affair, domestic violence, or their extended family environments (ID 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15, & 17). The reasons for divorce were also related to these mothers' decisions to have custody of the children. Thus, the mothers thought that it was not appropriate for the fathers to raise their children well.

Some of the mothers were not only concerned about the fathers' ability to raise the children but also about the example of attitudes the fathers would give their children.

I was getting tired of their father who was easygoing and incompetent for a long time, and I really hated the children seeing their father's attitudes. So I always tell our son that he should become a diligent and responsible man regardless of how much money he can make. I emphasize that.... I was really concerned about what the children were taught from their father's attitudes. This is one reason why I am keeping these children with me instead of sending them to their father (ID 1).

It was not because I could make more money than him. I have constantly worked as a lecturer in a private institute, a private tutor, or part-time teacher at school. I have never stopped working. But the children's father had changed jobs several times and had unstable income. Since he sometimes did not make any money, he did not contribute to

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note the importance of education for Korean families. Children's education is the most important issue for Korean parents (Lee, 2002). According to Statistics Korea (2009b), Korean parents spent 13.5% of their annual expenditures on education in 2009. In addition, 77.2% of Korean parents reported that educational costs were somewhat burdensome for them. The mothers in the present study usually meant private tutoring or courses offered by private educational companies (similar to Kaplan or Sylvan in the US) when they referred to education expenses. As revealed by these statistics, most Korean parents put a high priority on these private tutoring or education opportunities and spend a considerable amount of money on this type of education.

the family at all. I had seen this for a long time. How could he raise [the children]? I would be better than him. I also do not make a lot of money but he had an affair for a long time. He kept telling me that he would end the relationship but it lasted for four or five years. I found that he was still in the relationship just two years ago. I would never let someone, who has this personality, raise the children (ID 2).

One mother noted that she had received criticism or social pressure to give custody to the father since the father was financially better off, but her key criteria was still the competency of the father. She got divorced from her ex-husband because of domestic violence and said:

Some people told me that the children would grow up well and benefit from their father if they lived with him and I'm being selfish to want to keep them. I think that those people who do not know about him can say that. I could give the children to him if I thought he was capable of raising them. I insisted on having the children with me not because of my strong maternal love but because of his incapability. If he harassed me alone, I would send them to him. But he will not sacrifice or inconvenience himself for the children to live with them. Since I know his personality, I would not send the children to him (ID 7).

One mother with two children had no choice about who would take care of the children since the father experienced economic hardship at the time of her divorce. She explained the situation:

We did not have any other option. Since he was facing tremendous financial difficulties, we were not able to talk about who would take care of the children. I was the only person who could take the responsibility for the children. I had no choice (ID 17).

Some of the mothers talked about the environment of the fathers' extended families which they felt was inappropriate for raising their children since the children's grandmothers or female relatives would likely be the primary care providers for the children instead of the fathers (ID 6, 10, & 14). ID 6 also did not trust the father's competence as well as the environment of his extended family.

The [in-laws'] environment was inappropriate for taking care of the children. In addition, they were not those kinds of people who could raise the children. (Interviewer: What do you mean by inappropriate environment?) The father is that kind of person [incompetent]. And since his parents have run their family business in the market for a long time, they

are not able to take care of the children properly.... Their father has to change his attitudes in life [to be a good father]. I had tried to change his attitudes by all means, but he never changed. This was the most critical (ID 6).

*Fathers giving up custody.* Three mothers (18%) had custody since the fathers gave up their custody rights. These three fathers initially decided to have physical custody, but they took the children back to the mothers after experiencing difficulties in child care. For two of these mothers, the fathers had had legal and physical custody or split legal and physical custody at the time of their divorce (ID 12 & 16).

My parents were against me raising the children after the divorce.... He [the father] took care of the children for six months and sent them to an orphanage because he was not able to raise them by himself. After six months, he took them back to live with him for a year. After he broke up with his second wife, he was not able to take care of the children by himself and there was no place to take care of them. He called and asked me to take them back (ID 12).

We decided that he would raise the eldest son and the second daughter and I would raise the youngest daughter. He gave me legal custody of the youngest daughter and he remained the legal custodian of the other two children. After a month, he suddenly brought the two children to me saying he was not able to take care of them.... He left them in front of my house and he was gone (ID 16).

One father took care of the children on his own since the mother left her child with him before their divorce (ID 3). This mother explained why her settlement regarding parenting agreements went smoothly:

We agreed that I had legal and physical custody of the child and received KRW 500,000 (US \$436) a month.... My ex-husband agreed to what I suggested. The reason he immediately accepted my offer was that I had left the child with him for some time, so it was urgent for him to send the child back to me.... He had trouble trying to take care of the child for a month. One day he had to bring the child to his workplace because he was not able to find child care.... That's why the settlement went smoothly since he was not able to take care of the child (ID 3).

### **Decisions on child support**

Out of the 17 Korean divorced mothers in this study, 14 mothers (82%) agreed on receiving child support, and three mothers agreed on not receiving child support from the fathers at the time of their divorce. Out of the 14 mothers who agreed to receive child support, 11 mothers (79%) decided the specific amount of child support, while three mothers did not decide the amount. These mothers determined child support payments in four ways: (a) reflecting the parents' financial or parenting situation, (b) agreeing to the father's arbitrary decision, (c) agreeing to the usual amount of child support set in the court, or (d) not receiving child support.

*Reflecting the parents' financial or parenting situation.* Six mothers (35%) said that they decided the amount of child support based on both the mother's or father's economic and parenting situations (ID 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, & 16). One mother with two daughters said that she mostly determined the support payments based on the cost of raising children and the father's income.

I asked him to pay KRW 2,000,000 (US \$1,746) [per month] for child support and he accepted it. I considered the cost for the children's education, food, clothing, things like that.... (Interviewer: Do you think this amount is appropriate considering his income?) Yes, he makes enough money to pay it (ID 8).

Another mother with two children explained that she determined the amount based on how much the father could pay. She said "When he sent the children back to me, I asked for more money since costs for raising children were considerable. But since he had limited ability to pay it, he wanted to pay KRW 250,000 (US \$218) per month" (ID 12). ID 5 explained their decision on the amount of child support payments that was determined based on her income capacity.

One mother with two young children experienced some conflict when determining the amount of child support since the father did not understand the necessary expenses for raising

children. This mother developed an official parenting agreement and submitted the decision regarding child support to the court based on the new divorce law.

I asked him for KRW 1,500,000 (US \$1,310) [a month for child support] because I lived in this house with monthly rent and private education was very expensive these days. In addition to education expenses, I had to buy clothes for the children and to pay child care for the two children. So I needed at least that amount of money for raising these children. He questioned why I needed that much money. I responded by asking him to think about the total costs for raising children.... I also told him that I only asked him to pay KRW 1,500,000 (US \$1,310) after considering his economic condition. If he asked me why I needed that much, I was not able to give any answers to him (ID 14).

***Agreeing to the father's arbitrary decision.*** Five mothers (29%) left the decisions about what to pay to the fathers (ID 1, 2, 6, 7, & 17) since they thought if the fathers cared about their children, the fathers would be willing to pay child support at their own discretion regardless of having specified agreements on child support. Two mothers who developed official parenting agreements under the new divorce law said that they determined the child support payments based on the fathers' arbitrary decisions about what to pay (ID 1 & 2). These mothers, however, acknowledged that they decided the amount for child support only for the purpose of filing the parenting agreement forms with the court and did not expect the father to pay it. Some fathers may have even wanted to "save face" or to simply comply with the paperwork requirement by promising the mothers that they would pay an unrealistic amount of child support considering their ability. One mother said that the paperwork did not reflect any real amount she expected to receive:

If he had enough financial ability, I would ask him to pay child support. However, in my case, since he was poor, I asked him to arbitrarily write an amount of child support in the parenting agreement document. Then he said that he would pay either KRW 200,000 (US \$175) or KRW 300,000 (US \$262) a month. We easily did the paperwork, but I have not received any money from him after the divorce.... I told him that child support was not for me but for his children. If he sent that money to me, I would appreciate it. However, since this parenting agreement form was just a perfunctory piece of paperwork to get



divorced, he just wrote down the amount that he wanted to pay. He wrote the amount by himself. I did not ask him how much he could pay (ID 1).

ID 2 provided a long discussion about the difference between the paperwork and the amount the father actually paid. However, she thought that the unrealistic amount of child support the father wrote in the parenting agreements reflected how much he loved his children regardless of whether he paid the actual amount:

The paperwork was not difficult at all. He told me that he would do whatever I wanted. But that was all he did. It was not difficult to write that document. He wrote that he would pay KRW 1,500,000 (US \$1,310) [per month] for child support.... (Interviewer: Did you think that you would receive that amount of child support from the father?) I half doubted at that time since the amount he wrote was more than I expected.... I asked him how sure he was that he would be able to pay, and he assured me that he would pay that amount of child support. From my perspective, I tried to understand it as his way of showing love toward our children. And I didn't intend to take any legal steps even if he didn't pay the exact amount of money. When we worked on the document, I thought that I would be fine, even if I wouldn't receive the exact amount for child support that he wrote in the document, if he did his best for the children (ID 2).

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

When we negotiated child support, he claimed that he would not pay child support. He told me that his business was not settled at that point and what if he was not able to pay it even though he promised to pay it. He also said that since he was the children's father, if he had capacity to pay it, he would be willing to pay it voluntarily. In addition, my lawyer recommended that even if I took more time to negotiate child support with him, there was no means to receive it if the father did not pay it. In order to receive it, I had to do another law suit or seize his property. So the lawyer persuaded me to agree to consent to divorce without fixing the amount of child support, and I followed his recommendation (ID 7).

***Agreeing to the usual amount of child support set in the court.*** Three mothers (18%) went through contested divorces and the court or parental divorce lawyers suggested that they should simply take the usual amount of child support (ID 3, 4, & 10). ID 4 said, “A court ordered him to pay KRW 300,000 (US \$262) a month in child support until my child becomes 20 years old” (ID 4). Another mother received KRW 500,000 (US \$436) that was somewhat more than the usual amount of child support the court suggested. She described her situation:

My lawyer recommended that the average child support was KRW 200,000 (US \$175). Since this amount was fixed a long time ago, I just asked the child’s father for KRW 500,000 (US \$436) taking inflation into account. The lawyer also told me that negotiating child support may be brought to the court if the written amount doesn’t meet the needs of each side. My lawyer told me that if the father suggested KRW 300,000 (US \$262), I should accept that offer.... [But] My ex-husband agreed on what I suggested (ID 3).

***Not receiving child support.*** Three mothers (18%) decided not to receive any child support from the fathers since these mothers did not want to have any contact with them anymore (ID 11, 13, & 15). In addition, one father tried to deal with child support and custody at the time of the divorce but kept changing his mind.

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

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

For this mother, child support was not voluntarily paid by the father, but she had to ask for each payment.

I had custody of the children with the condition that I didn't expect child support. Because of my dignity, I did not want to ask him to pay child support at that time. These days, I wonder about it, realizing that receiving child support would not be related to my pride. But at that time, I thought that way and did not want to receive it from him. I also thought that if I received the money, I had to let the child see him. I did not want any more contact with him. If the child was old enough, I would send her to see him alone. But because she was young, I had to go with her or he had to come over to my house. I was uncomfortable with that... He told me that he would take the child from me if I asked him for child support. He said that I shouldn't ask for child support because I wanted to raise her not because he did not want to have her. In addition, the father's parenting environment was actually better than mine. He claimed that I was being selfish if I insisted on having her with me despite this situation. He told me that I was selfish to ask him to pay child support and give up custody.... So I did not ask for either alimony or child support and only asked him to agree that I had legal and physical custody of her (ID 11).

#### **Nonresident fathers' visitation arrangements**

Most mothers agreed at the time of the divorce that the fathers could visit their children after the divorce, but the parents were flexible on a visitation plan. Nine mothers (53%) discussed the fathers' visitation arrangements with the fathers (ID 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, & 14), but eight mothers (47%) did not talk about it (ID 4, 6, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, & 17). Four types of visitation arrangements were identified: (a) a fixed visitation plan, (b) a flexible visitation plan, (c) no visitation plan but a tacit agreement on the on-going relationship, or (d) no visitation plan and no relationship.

***Fixed visitation plan.*** Out of nine mothers who had discussions about the fathers' visitation arrangement, six mothers decided on the frequency of visitation in the visitation plan (ID 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, & 14). These mothers who had a fixed visitation plan divorce either after the divorce law modification (ID 2 & 14) or had lawyers (ID 3, 7, & 8) except for one case (ID 5) Although the mothers set the frequency of visitations, they did not fix the days or times of

visitation except for one mother. One mother said “We decided that he could visit the children twice a month.... We didn’t indicate a specific day and time of the visits. School is closed every other Saturday, so the children go out to have dinner with their father” (ID 8). Another mother who had a contested divorce with a lawyer determined the specific visitation plan.

Then we negotiated his visitation rights. Since elementary school is closed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays, I suggested that he visit the child on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> weekends. But he unconditionally disagreed with my idea for no reason, and he told me that he preferred to visit the child on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> weekends. Moreover, I suggested that he visit the child from 9 am on Saturday to 6 pm on Sunday, but he said no. He wanted to see him earlier than 9 am on Saturday and have the child stay with him until 9 or 10 pm on Sunday. I thought that he made a ridiculous proposal since the child was only 18 months old. How would he play with him for that long since he had to sleep at least half a day at home? But, I told him that this was just a paper. If he wanted to see the child every day, I would let him visit the child. In the end, I am disappointed that he does not come to see him (ID 3).

One mother explained her experience of deciding the visitation arrangement under the modified divorce law:

Honestly, I did not want him to visit the children. I saw the possibility that I could lose custody if I didn’t allow the father see the children when visitation rights laws are in effect. So I unwillingly let him visit the children. After the law changed, we had to go to court together and filed a document in the office. The officer only asked the father’s opinion regarding how often he wanted to visit the children and let him write it down without asking about my opinion. He wrote that he would visit the children once a week (ID 14).

***Flexible visitation plan.*** Three mothers talked about the fathers’ visitation at the time of the divorce, but they did not specify the visitation plan (ID 1, 9, & 12). Two mothers decided on flexible visitation plans since the children were teenagers and were able to contact the fathers without the mothers’ arrangements. These two mothers had to discuss the visitation issues with the fathers since they got divorced after the divorce law modification. One of the mothers talked about the visitation schedules referring to the ages of the children. She said, “Anyway, since the

children were old enough I did not care much about it. I did not oppose their meeting with their father, but I did not arrange their visitation schedule either” (ID 1).

One mother explained her trouble visiting her children when the father had physical custody at the time of the divorce. She said:

When he raised the children, he told me that I could see the children whenever I wanted.... Since they attended kindergarten at that time, he told me that he would let me know which kindergarten they attended and I could visit the children whenever I wanted to see them. (Interviewer: Did you agree to it verbally?) Yes, I did since there was no document to write down specifically like there is today. So we did it arbitrarily.... I kept calling him but he didn't take my calls and once he sent a text message saying that he didn't want me to call anymore.... I only saw them twice for two years when they lived with their father (ID 12).

*No visitation plan but a tacit agreement on the on-going relationship.* Five mothers did not specifically talk about the fathers' visitation rights, but they had a tacit agreement that the fathers would visit their children after the divorce (ID 6, 10, 15, 16, &17). One mother said, “We did not talk about a visitation plan.... [but] I continuously contacted the father after the divorce” (ID 6). Two mothers who had contested divorces also did not talk about visitation since the court did not ask them to decide on it or order it, but they had contact with the fathers for a while after the divorce. One mother said, “The judge did not even talk about it [the father's visitation]. He only ordered KRW 20,000,000 (\$17,460) for my alimony and KRW 300,000 (\$262) for child support [per month]” (ID 10).

*No visitation plan and no relationship.* Three mothers with young children said that they did not talk about the fathers' visitation since they did not want to have contact with the fathers (ID 4, 11, & 13). One mother with a two-year old son at the time of the divorce said, “We didn't talk about a visitation plan. At first, I didn't want the child to see him.... I would have to go with the child because he was young” (ID 13). Another mother who had a contested divorce said:

The court's decree mentioned visitation rights, but he [the father] did not bring it up at in court, and I also didn't [bring it up either because I didn't] want him to have visitation rights.... They informed us that the father had visitation rights, but all the decisions were left to our discretion. They only ordered the father to pay child support (ID 4).

### **Summary**

Korean divorced parents' decisions on parenting after divorce were described including why the Korean divorced mothers decided to have custody, how the Korean divorced parents determined child support payments, and how the parents discussed nonresident fathers' visitations.

### **Fathers' Involvement in the Children's Lives after the Divorce**

Of the 17 mothers, the children of nine mothers (53%) had contact with the fathers at the time of the interview, while eight mothers (47%) had severed their relationships with the fathers. The mothers reported on the fathers' involvement with the children after the divorce and their involvement was categorized as (a) a satisfactory on-going relationship; (b) a dissatisfactory on-going relationship; or (c) a discontinued relationship. Of the nine mothers who had on-going relationships with the fathers, three mothers (33%) were satisfied with the fathers' current involvement (ID 1, 8, & 14), but six mothers (67%) were somewhat dissatisfied with it (ID 2, 3, 5, 7, 15, & 17). Of the eight mothers who had discontinued their relationship with the fathers, the children of six mothers had visited their fathers for a while after the divorce, but had then lost contact (ID 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, & 16). One mother had severed the relationship with the father after the divorce (ID 13), and in the remaining case, the relationship between the father and his children had been severed because there was a severe conflict between the children and the father, but the father contacted the mother (ID 9).

#### **Satisfactory on-going relationship**

Three mothers were satisfied with the fathers' current level of involvement in their children's lives. Two mothers with teenage children liked that the fathers had conversations with

their children and would give them advice when needed. One mother with an 18-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter explained her satisfaction with the father's involvement with the children even though she had not received any child support from him due to his financial incapability. However, the mother believed that the father made some efforts to be more involved in parenting.

It is much better for the children than before when they had no contact. They look more comfortable now. Their father visits the children now.... I asked my son what his father is doing these days. He told me that "father works part time and plans to send us some allowance even though it wouldn't be a lot of money, Mom." I just told my son not to waste his money. I thought that if their father sends at least KRW 50,000 (\$44) [per month] to the children, he would be a better person compared to the other fathers who don't.... Furthermore, when he sends an allowance to the children, he sometimes calls them and tells them what they should do - things like that. (Interviewer: Does he call the children more often these days than before when he didn't send any money?) He didn't call them at all previously because he felt guilty about [what he didn't do for] them. I told the children that they should be nice to their father when he called them (ID 1).

This mother positively acknowledged the father's involvement with the children such as sending an allowance for the children and giving advice, so she asked her son to behave well toward his father. Another mother with two daughters ages 14 and 10 years old also believed that her children's father performed the father role satisfactorily for his children. This mother thought the children's father was a relatively good divorced father since he paid child support, was warm and responsive to the children, and showed affection to his children. She said:

Their father buys something for the children, watches a movie, or they eat something together.... He's doing well. Compared to other Korean fathers, he is fulfilling his role. I think that he is like 70 or 80% of other fathers in the father role. Most of all, he pays child support. Other fathers are not likely to pay child support in Korea. But he pays it. He always has conversations with the children whenever they need to decide something. He responds to the children immediately. Furthermore, if he travels to other countries, he buys some gifts for the children. He behaves in a way that the children can feel that their father loves them. He gives the children books as gifts or buys birthday gifts. Also, if the children get in trouble, they can go to their father for advice if I am not available (ID 8).

ID 14 with two boys, ages six and three years old, was also satisfied with the father's current level of involvement in the children's lives, and the father also was paying child support regularly. Unlike the other two mothers, this mother, however, would not allow the father to have further involvement beyond just visiting the children since she thought the father was not a good father for her children during their marriage.

At this point, I wouldn't stop him from doing this because the first son is continuously looking for his father. I kept him from seeing his father at first, and he seriously suffered from it. Since he wants to see his father very frequently, I don't stop him from doing this now.... But if he were older, I would suggest that he see his father less frequently because we don't live together anymore.... Their father brings the children to the park and teaches them to ride bikes.... [But] I wish that he wouldn't interfere in how I raise the children. I want him to just do his job by visiting the children from time to time and playing with them. I don't want him to take care of the children's education or other issues. (Interviewer: Why do you think that?) Before the divorce, he had already proved that he didn't have any pride as a father by behaving that way.... He wasn't interested at all in the children's education before. I think it is ridiculous of him to be interested in those issues now. I just want him to pay child support and play with the children. That's it. Stay out of this [education] (ID 14).

### **Dissatisfactory on-going relationship**

The children of six mothers (35%) had continuous contact with their fathers, but the mothers were dissatisfied with the fathers' current involvement because of the fathers' irregular involvement or different ideas of good parenting or because they did not pay child support. The fathers in this group usually entertained the children during their visits including taking the children out for a meal or to an amusement park or buying something for the children. Among the several reasons the mothers were dissatisfied, the main reason was the fathers' irresponsibility during their visits including not following visitation schedules, not receiving calls, or breaking promises to their children. Of the six mothers, three mothers specified the fathers' visitation schedule at the time of the divorce (ID 3, 5, & 7). Two fathers (ID 3 & 5) had not contacted their



children for a while after the divorce, but they began to visit their children recently. ID 3 with a six-year-old son complained about the father who was not easily accessible and not predictable:

[My son] rarely sees his father. For a while, his father never called. Then, he called my son 8 or 9 months later.... He visited the child a month ago. He came again two weeks after that visit, but he hasn't come again. He had visited my son at two-week intervals on Saturdays. Since the child knew the days of the week, he told me on Saturday, "Mom, is it Saturday today? It is the day when my father comes." He didn't come. Since he was off every 15 days, I expected that he would come for the child last Saturday. But, the child was waiting for his father every Saturday even if he had to work on the other Saturdays. The child didn't figure it out, so he was waiting for his father because it was Saturday.... After all, he didn't come last Saturday (ID 3).

Another mother with a 10-year-old daughter and a 9-year-old son talked about the father's unfairness regarding visits. She thought the father did not perceive parenting as a shared responsibility. In addition, it was unfair from the children's perspective since only the father could decide when he visited the children but the children could not. She said:

It [visitation] wasn't regular like once a month.... I talked about the visit [with the children's father] and I told him that he had to schedule his visits regularly like either vacation or holidays. But he told me that he couldn't do that because his schedule was changing constantly. I didn't think that he really made that excuse because of his unpredictable schedule. If he really thought that parenting was a joint responsibility, he would behave differently. If he didn't think that way, I didn't want to keep telling him about what he had to do for the children. So I didn't talk about it with him. If he asked me to send the children to his family and the situation was acceptable, I would let them visit his family, but if the situation wasn't good, I would say no. I told my daughter, "This is not because I don't want you to visit your father. Your father can see you whenever he likes while you can't see him when you want. I think this is unfair. Don't you think this is unfair?" Then she told me that she also thought it was unfair (ID 7).

Another reason for dissatisfaction was the quality of the fathers' involvement. ID 5 with eight- and six-year-old boys was not satisfied with the way the father spent time with his sons even though she liked the father's increased engagement with the children after the divorce.

He often comes to see the children and cares more about them [than before].... [But] I didn't like what the father was doing with [my first son]. In fact, the father didn't play

[with my son] but would take him to his workplace. The child just saw what his father was doing. My son played alone while his father worked. They just slept and ate together. I really don't like that. They just stayed together. I don't understand why his father brought the child to his place [to just be at a same place not spending time together]. That might be his way of expression. He does the same thing when he is off work. I wish he would play enthusiastically with the children over the weekends, but he doesn't. He came over to my place and stared at them like a staring contest. If the children asked him to play, then he played with them.... But their father didn't know how to play with the children since he hadn't seen the children since they were babies (ID 5).

The other mother was concerned that the father's indulgent attitudes spoiled the children and did not discipline them appropriately. The mother expected the father to provide appropriate control and monitoring for their children as well as to be accessible.

I don't think that their father is fulfilling his role if all he does is buy a pair of shoes and give them some allowance when he visits the children. Because of these gifts, the children become spoiled. They love to visit their father because they get new shoes immediately. My daughter said, "When I see my father, I will ask him to buy jeans"—things like that. Getting things they want might be good for the children for the time being, but there is no real presence as a father for the children. In this aspect, nobody is taking charge of the authoritative role in this family. Although the children haven't entered the adolescent period yet, if they go astray, the adult who should discipline them is absent. I think that role is for fathers, men. Their father sometimes doesn't call the children but also doesn't answer the children's calls for a couple of months. When he answers the children's call and they ask him when he is going to visit them, he tells them that he is busy. He sometimes doesn't even visit the children for six or seven months if he is in a very bad financial situation. So he wants to buy everything for the children when he visits them. In the meantime, they grow much taller. He unconditionally accepts the children's bad behavior. So now they don't seem to behave when they visit their father. I have told them that they shouldn't be disrespectful (ID 17).

One mother was dissatisfied with the father's child support payments, but she agreed with the father's ongoing relationship with his children. The father kept his visitation schedule well, but the mother complained that he did not pay child support.

(Interviewer: Do you like that your children meet with their father?) Yes, I'm fine with that. I think that is natural. I think that it would be unreasonable if I were to sever the father-children relationship. But the only thing that I don't like is that their father doesn't

fulfill his parental role as he is supposed to [paying child support]. I would feel bad if the father didn't do this [regular visits] (ID 2).

### **Discontinued relationship**

Five mothers (29%) had had a relationship with the fathers for some time after the divorce, but they experienced conflicts with the fathers including the fathers' irregular visits, the fathers' lack of attention to their children, bad examples for the children, not paying child support, or conflicts between the parents. Thus, the mothers ended up not allowing the fathers to visit their children. One mother said that she experienced the same problem with the father during his visitation that led them to get divorced. She said:

I had continuously contacted the children's father after our divorce. However, since he was not a good person at the time of the divorce, [I thought] he wouldn't be a good person after the divorce.... Our children didn't know about our divorce, so he naturally slept with the children when he visited. (Interviewer: How often do your children see their father?) They haven't seen him for a while. We had some issues like domestic violence, so I asked him to stop visiting us two years ago. He doesn't have contact with us except for when I call him.... Previously, visiting was natural. He naturally came and went and he sometimes slept with the children. We had a fundamental problem which was his attitudes. He slept until 1 pm or 2 pm, so I nagged him. The same patterns that had occurred before the divorce happened again. Anyway, the outcomes were the same (ID 6).

ID 4 had conflicts over money and sued the father over child support, so after the event the parents mutually agreed that the mother would not ask for any child support and the father would lose his visitation rights.

The judge ordered him to pay KRW 300,000 (US \$262) for child support and KRW 17,000,000 (US \$14,841) for my alimony. So I kept asking him for my alimony. Then he told me that he would give me a one-time amount of KRW 35,000,000 (US \$30,554) and told me not to ask for any more money. He also told me that I should not ask him for any future child support. I agreed because it was difficult to receive child support from him and if he moved, I would have to chase him to get the money and the legal procedure was quite complex.... In the document, the father wrote that I would not ask him for any more child support and I wrote that he would not visit me and my daughter or ask me to see my daughter anymore. We agreed on this condition and notarized the document (ID 4).

Three mothers cut off or lost the relationship with the children's father due to the fathers' lack of attention to their children (ID 11, 13, & 16). Two mothers mentioned the same phrase "out of sight, out of mind." These fathers maintained a close relationship with their children right after their divorce, but as time went by, they had paid less attention to their children. The mother wanted to protect her child's feelings. She said:

I had contact with him again for a year for the sake of the child. But I didn't want to contact him anymore, so I decided to end the relationship with him. After that I haven't contacted him at all. I told the child that she could visit her father when she grew up. It seems like out of sight, out of mind. The father was really nice to the child right after the divorce, so he asked me to get back together with him. I declined his request since I still had a bad feeling about him at that time. Then he started dating another woman. As he dated the woman, he paid less attention to my child. I thought if I let him continue the relationship with the child, she will be hurt again, so I cut off the relationship (ID 11).

The other two mothers had multiple problems simultaneously with the children's fathers. One mother pointed out the issues of the father's irregular visits, the lack of attention, and his bad example for the children. She explained:

He should have done that [visits] regularly like once a month or twice a month, but he did not consider the children's schedule but only cared about his schedule. Whenever he wanted to see them, he just came over - once every two or three months.... He broke up with his second wife and then cohabitated with another woman. It is not good for the children to see their father who has lived with different women. Because of this I don't want the children to see their father, but if they miss him, I let them contact him. But since the children know that I hate their father, they hardly talk about him to me.... Their dislike for their father is growing as he hasn't kept his promise. They think that their father doesn't love them.... It [the father-children relationship] has almost ended.... They might have a sense of distance from their father since they have lived separately from him and he wasn't a caring father who would play with the children when they lived together (ID 12).

ID 10 also complained about the father's irregular visits, not paying child support, and conflict with the extended family members. She said:

He called me last New Year's Day, so I asked him if he wanted to take his son to his parents' house.... Previously, the father wanted the child to dress up in a traditional

costume for the visit.... But the child was so stressed out when he came back home. He got so mad at me.... His father's families said negative things about me.... Then the child suffered from that visit and I also had a hard time. For this reason, I didn't want the child to visit his grandparent's house, so I asked his father not to take him there but to eat out with the child. But his father was displeased with me. He asked me why he couldn't see his son when he wanted. So I asked him "Why do you only think about your rights when you don't even fulfill your obligations?" I would understand him not paying any child support if he didn't make any money.... I couldn't ignore the father's financial support. For example, if he paid only KRW 50,000 (\$44) for child support, I would tell the child in a positive way that his father sent money even though he is also in financial trouble.... I could say that his father would be willing to pay for either after-school programs or home study materials that my son would like. Then the child would be happy not because he received money from his father, but because his father cares about him. I had expected this from him, but I have no more expectations of him now.... So I told him "Never come again to see the child. If you don't want to financially support your child, you don't even think about seeing him." He only gave a little money to my son once a year, so I asked him, "Do you think that we are beggars?" After that, he hasn't contacted us (ID 10).

This mother was disappointed with the father who did not fulfill his responsibility to his son but insisted on his own rights. From this mother's perspective, the father's financial support would be a means to explain the father's interest in the child to her. In addition, she perceived it would be demeaning if she received his little money but did not fulfill his responsibility or show any affection to his son.

### **Summary**

The Korean divorced mothers reported three types of involvement with their children from the fathers after the divorce including a satisfactory on-going relationship, a dissatisfactory on-going relationship, and a discontinued relationship. Of the 17 mothers, nine mothers had either satisfactory or dissatisfactory on-going relationships but eight mothers discontinued their relationships with the fathers.

## **Coparenting after the Divorce**

The mothers' coparenting relationships after the divorce were classified as (a) cooperative relationships, and (b) uncooperative relationships. In this study, cooperative relationships were defined as situations where the divorced parents were willing to have at least conversations about their children's issues even if they did not have direct conversations between each other.

### **Cooperative relationships in coparenting after the divorce**

Three mothers (18%) maintained cooperative relationships with the children's fathers and were willing to share their parenting issues with the fathers (ID 1, 8, & 17). These three mothers basically trusted the fathers who were relatively good fathers for their children during their marriage. After their divorce, the fathers were also responsive to the mothers when the mothers asked the fathers to be involved in their children's lives, and made efforts to support their children financially regardless of the amounts. ID 1 described the children's father: "He was really good for his children [while we lived together]. He was very careful" (ID 1). ID 17 also said "I wouldn't have married him if he was a bad person. I basically trusted him" (ID 17).

ID 1 described the situation in which she asked for the father's help to discipline the children. She was satisfied with the father's participation in discipline. She said:

I called the father once. I told him, "Your children don't listen to me." At that time, they worried me. I was upset, so I called him and said, "Take your children back." He asked me what's going on.... (Interviewer: Did your children change after having a conversation with their father?) Yes, there were some changes. They often lost their temper but they got somewhat softer with their attitudes toward me. Their father wasn't able to scold them on a phone, but he told them that he hoped that they would listen to their mother and do this and this.... So if the father called the children and had some conversation about their behavior or attitudes, I would be less concerned about them even if I worked outside the home and left them alone. I sometimes think that it would be great if he cared about the children, even if he doesn't care about me (ID 1).

Another mother wanted the father to be actively engaged in the children's daily lives. She often asked indirectly for the father's advice on the children's issues and also included him in decision making. She said:

I contact him through the first daughter's text messages. When the children have issues, for example, the first child went to camp, she sent a text to her father and asked for his opinion: "Dad, I'd like to go this camp. What do you think?" She got his consent. I rarely have to contact him directly these days. I don't talk with him about my personal issues, but only about the children's issues. I discussed what kinds of subjects the children have to be taught things like that. When I had to decide this, I asked the first daughter to ask her father's opinion. Then she told me that "Dad told me that I could go." Then I let her go to camp.... The father answered very quickly. He said "That program would be helpful for you. Have a nice time there" (ID 8).

ID 17 also explained how she engaged the father in parenting, but she was not satisfied with the father's involvement since she thought that the father spoiled the children by behaving like a Disneyland dad. To solve their conflict over parenting, however, she asked the children's father to be more authoritative instead of being an indulgent father. She said:

(Interviewer: How often do you contact the children's father?) If I need to. We aren't enemies.... Given this situation, if the children need something or if I need some money for the children, I ask him "What could you do in this situation?" If he has the capacity, he will say, "I will send that money." If not, he will say, "No," and then I have to take care of it by myself.... One day, while my daughter talked to her father impolitely over the phone. I scolded her, "You shouldn't talk that way to your father whether he lives with you or not. I wasn't there when you visited your father, but I can imagine what you did to your father. If you want to behave that way, don't visit your father." And I called her father in front of her and said that if he let her be spoiled, he shouldn't visit her. I also told him that it isn't important to buy something for her and it isn't the role of a father. I thought that it was good education for the children, and I did it that way because his actions could negatively influence the children (ID 17).

### **Uncooperative relationships in coparenting after the divorce**

Fourteen mothers (82%) experienced difficulties in establishing cooperative relationships with the fathers (ID 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, & 16). Unlike the mothers who had cooperative relationships with the fathers, these mothers did not think that the fathers were good

fathers for their children. The reasons for these uncooperative relationships were categorized in three ways: (a) the children's fathers were uncooperative; (b) the mothers did not want to associate with the children's fathers; or (c) the divorced parents had ambiguous communication regarding parenting after their divorce. Some of these mothers had more than one reason for having uncooperative relationships.

*Uncooperative fathers.* Most mothers in uncooperative relationships thought that the fathers were not cooperative in parenting including not paying child support, lack of attention to their children, or irregular visits (ID 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, & 16). These fathers' irresponsible attitudes discouraged the mothers from involving the fathers in the children's lives. One mother explained her disappointment with the father:

I've never asked him for anything so far, but the major problem is the children's education costs. I'm always sorry for the children regarding education. Someday, I thought that the children couldn't receive adequate education because of my pride, and I could be wrong that I didn't ask him anything.... So I called him to talk about the daughter's education last year. Then he said that he was willing to pay for her art lessons.... [But] I was embarrassed that he sent me KRW 100,000 (\$87).... I called him to ask whether he really understood how expensive art lessons were.... I said, "The daughter is in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and she wants to specialize in art. I fully explained to you when I asked your support. I can afford to send her to the art studio now, but I can't send her to the art studio now if she wants to study it further when she is in middle or high school, then I can't support her later. If she wants to learn it as a hobby, I could take care of it by myself. But I asked you to support her because she wants to specialize in art...." He told me that he couldn't give any more than KRW 100,000 (\$87). We talked about it several times via phone call and texts. I thought it would be demeaning.... One late night, he sent me a text and asked whether I still had any feelings left for him. Then, I realized that it was difficult for a person to change his personality. I couldn't discuss this issue with this person. After that, I never asked him anything.... I didn't want to talk about child rearing expenses since he got me wrong (ID 7).

One mother experienced difficulties in defining her role to keep the father involved in her son's lives. She said:



I requested counseling regarding the issue of contact between the child and the father. I told the counselor that if he doesn't know how to take care of the child, I think that it is my responsibility to let the father know what he has to do since I am the mother. But I don't know how to have this conversation with him. Then the counselor told me that I should just let the father and the child figure it out by themselves since it's their business. After having that conversation, I felt much more comfortable. I had felt uncomfortable before since I thought that I hadn't done my responsibility that I had to let the father know about the child (ID 3).

This mother was concerned about her role since the father was not cooperative and expressed his lowered expectation of his son after the divorce. She said:

What I talked about with the father before was.... He told me that he had given up that the child would grow up nicely. The conversation began by me asking him to come to the kindergarten class for fathers. He told me that he wouldn't come. Later he said that he felt bad when I asked him to come. In addition, last year I told him that I didn't know how I could live with the child and the child was a burden to me.... He told me that he expected this and gave up that the child would grow up nicely. He just expected the child not to go to jail or not to abuse drugs. With that, the father would be satisfied. He thinks this way, so how can I talk with him about the child's education? (ID 3)

The mother lost contact with the father for a while since they had conflicts over his visits, and he stopped visiting the child, but the father began to visit his son again recently. She still had problems with him regarding his irregular visits, but she was not able to talk about the issue with him due to her fear of losing contact again. She said:

During his second visit, I asked the father to talk with me about the child. But I ended up cancelling it because I wasn't sure whether I could talk to him in a nice manner. But my request was that the father should set a visitation schedule in advance and visit the child regularly like once a month, twice a month, or once a week. Then my son could expect when he would see his father. I'd wanted to talk about it but he, who hardly ever visits the child, had just visited him. If I asked him to visit the child regularly, he would probably refuse because he tends to dislike it whenever I ask him to do something. So I cancelled the appointment (ID 3).

***Uncooperative mothers.*** Five mothers were not willing to involve the fathers in the children's lives since they did not want to associate with the fathers anymore (ID 10, 11, 12, 13,

& 14). In addition, some mothers experienced conflict over parenting with the children's fathers after their divorce. One mother said that she did not want any contacts with the father. She also explained the reason for not receiving child support:

If I ask him to pay child support, I have to regularly check my bank account. I always check my bank account. But what I mean is if I notice that he hasn't paid child support yet, then I would have to call him to ask for it and continuously contact him because of it. I hate that. I am financially in trouble, so if I have that money, it is really helpful for me. But I have to contact him to receive it. I hate the process, so I told him if he agreed to a legal custody change, I wouldn't ask him to pay child support. I gave it up by myself.... Because of that I decided that I would not hinder him from contacting the children, but I didn't want to contact him anymore (ID 12).

Another mother thought that the father did not have a right to participate in her parenting including education since she had legal and physical custody. She only wanted him to pay child support and visit her children at the same level he did at the time of her interview. She was satisfied with the level of the father's involvement at that time, but she did not want his further participation in her parenting. She said:

I have to contact him unless he doesn't want to visit the children anymore. I also have to receive child support, so I try not to hurt his feelings.... I've called him, but I haven't discussed anything about the children with him. That is my business not his business. He wasn't against me when I claimed legal and physical custody of the children. I interpreted this as he didn't want to care for the children (ID 14).

*Ambiguous communication regarding parenting after divorce.* Three mothers who had severed their relationships with the children's fathers (ID 6, 11, & 13) and one mother who had a continuous but unsatisfactory relationship with the father (ID 7) had mixed feelings regarding the fathers' involvement and had vague communication with the fathers regarding whether they wanted the fathers to be involved in their children's lives. These mothers had a somewhat passive attitude toward the fathers since they would not initiate contact with the fathers, but they were

willing to allow the fathers to visit their children if the fathers initiated it. That is, the fathers must make the first indication of wanting to be involved in parenting.

Even though he doesn't live with me anymore, I'd like to let him contact the children since he is the children's father as long as he would do the right things. However, I stopped him from visiting the children anymore because he didn't do the right things. [But] he still knows which elementary school the children attend, so if he really wants to see them, he can see them anytime. (Interviewer: Did you explain that to him?) No, I didn't tell him specifically what's on my mind. I implicitly behaved that way so that I didn't say that he couldn't come (ID 6).

I have his contact information, but he doesn't have mine since I change my number periodically. I can contact him. Even if I don't contact him, there are many ways that he can reach me.... In that respect, I'm somewhat disappointed with him.... At first, he sent a text message on the child's birthday right after the divorce.... He made at least that kind of effort at first. But it has disappeared. Now there is no contact. I'm sometimes glad that he hasn't contacted us because he might bug me if we kept in touch. On the other hand, I feel bad about it, especially on the child's birthday. She always thinks about him. She sometimes feels hurt and wonders why her father doesn't visit her (ID 11).

### **Summary**

Of the two types of coparenting relationships, cooperative relationships and uncooperative relationships, only three mothers established cooperative relationships with the children's fathers. These mothers perceived the fathers as good fathers for their children and engaged them in parenting. However, the majority of the mothers had difficulties establishing cooperative relationships because either the fathers or the mothers did not want a relationship, or the divorced parents had ambiguous communications regarding parenting.

### **Mothers' Expectations of the Roles of the Fathers in the Children's Lives**

Most mothers acknowledged that the fathers should fulfill their roles and their responsibilities for their children even after the divorce including provider (ID 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, & 17), playmate (ID 3, 4, 5, 10, 13, 14, & 15), or principled guide (ID 1, 8, 13, 15, 16, & 17). The mothers also wanted the fathers to express their interest by showing that they were

concerned about their children and to provide emotional support to their children (ID 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, & 16) (See Appendix D).

The mothers' expectations on the roles of the fathers in the children's lives were categorized in three ways: the mothers had (a) the same expectations of the fathers as they had before the divorce, (b) lowered expectations after the divorce, and (c) no expectations after the divorce. As some fathers did not fulfill their responsibilities and roles, the mothers had lowered their expectations of the fathers or had no expectations of the fathers.

### **Same expectations**

Three mothers (18%) who had cooperative relationships with the fathers had the same expectations of the fathers, so they hoped the fathers fulfilled the same responsibilities after the divorce that they had had during their marriage (ID 1, 8, & 17). These mothers had trusted the fathers in terms of being good fathers. One mother mentioned her expectations of the father, "I hope that their father does the same things he did before the divorce even though he does not live with me. I have no more expectations. If the children want something, he could do that for them" (ID 1). Another mother with two daughters said:

The father should take responsibility for the children throughout their lives like walking them up the aisle at their weddings. I hope that being a responsible dad, he will financially support them until they grow up, and he will be supportive of them when they are in trouble emotionally (ID 8).

With this expectation, the mothers tried to involve the fathers in parenting such as asking the fathers about education decisions or the children's needs and asking the fathers to take an authoritative or discipline role.

### **Lowered expectations**

Six mothers (35%) had lowered their expectations of the fathers over time (ID 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, & 14) since (a) they were disappointed with the fathers during their marriage, (b) the fathers

did not meet the mothers' expectations after the divorce, or (c) the mothers were worried that the fathers would stop visiting if the mothers kept their high expectations. The mothers who were disappointed with the fathers during their marriage did not have high expectations of the fathers and wanted them to take at least some responsibilities. ID 14 would not allow the father to be actively involved in parenting since he did not participate in parenting during the marriage, but he had minimal involvement with the children such as visiting and playing with them. She said:

As it is in two-income families, if both parents work, they have to share parental responsibilities. One person can't take care of everything. He didn't do that. He always hung out with his friends and drank. So I wish he would become an ideal, normal dad. When I see other fathers, they play with their children well and take them to the park. That kind of dad.... I want him to just do his job by visiting the children from time to time and playing with them. I don't want him to take care of the children's education or other issues. (Interviewer: Why do you think that?) Before the divorce, he had already proved that he didn't have any pride as a father by behaving that way. It is funny how he is trying to act like a concerned father now (ID 14).

Several mothers adjusted their expectations of the fathers for their own well-being and their children's well-being. ID 2 experienced conflict with the father over child support, but she decided not to argue with him for her own emotional well-being:

Since I don't expect to receive any child support from the father, I have lowered my expectations of him and now I feel more comfortable. If I were to keep expecting more, I would be stressed and hurt. It also would be a bad influence on my children. So I've tried to lower my expectations of him and tried to empty my mind. I'm much happier these days than during the last five years when I had trouble maintaining this family with four of us (ID 2).

ID 3 talked about her previous experiences of conflict with the child's father over his parenting involvement. She had higher expectations of the father than his actual involvement, so she said, "I sent another text message to him and said, 'You and I are divorced.... but you should remember that you are the father of your child and I hope that you do your best for this child'" (ID 3). After that event, the father stopped visiting his child. He, however, just recently revisited

his son when the son called the father. Then she faced another issue, the father's irregular visits, but she did not bring up the issue to the father since she tried to maintain the relationship with him for the sake of her child:

If I asked him to visit the child regularly, the father tended to dislike whenever I requested him to do something, so I cancelled the appointment. He didn't say anything about whether he would visit the child or not [two weeks ago], but he suddenly called me so I gave the phone to my son. My son told me, "Mom, father is in the parking lot now." When he got the call, he was eating breakfast. He got so excited, so he didn't finish his meal and didn't wash his face but put on his shoes first. He was really excited. I was sorry for him (ID 3).

Another mother also described her lowered expectations of the father. She said:

If the father was just there, the children would be satisfied with that. It would be helpful for their emotions. I really hate him for not even doing this much. I have very low expectations of him.... If the children are happy with the fact that their father is there for them, I hope that at least he does that (ID 5).

These mothers accepted the fathers' involvement, even though it was sometimes irresponsible and dissatisfactory, to maintain the father-child relationship. However, the mothers' expectations of the fathers were not consistent but changed depending upon the fathers' involvement. ID 5 considered changing her parental relationship with the father to become a more cooperative relationship as the father began to show more interest in his children. This mother also planned to ask the father to pay child support if he wanted to continue to have a relationship with his children. She said:

He often comes to see the children and cares more about them [than before].... Anyway, they are our children. If it is necessary, I would compromise even though I don't want to have contact with him and I don't want to see him.... If his visits continue, I'd like to ask him to pay child support.... I'd like to say "Your first son wants to learn something. Can you pay for it? Or since you are supposed to pay KRW 500,000 (US \$436) per month, I'd like you to pay me that amount" - things like that. It seems like he has somewhat changed, so I don't think it would be a problem. So if I ask him, he will probably pay. He told me that he appreciated me raising the children well.... He also asked me to give him

opportunities to perform his father role as a father.... I'll tell him that I need KRW 500,000 (US \$436) or KRW 400,000 (US \$349). He'd like to give it to me (ID 5).

Like ID 5, ID 2 also explained that she planned to raise her expectation level of the father later since she had temporarily lowered her expectations of the father. She said:

I haven't taken any legal action yet since I know that the father's financial status is not good enough. However, if he doesn't pay any child support even when his financial status is getting better, and if he shows no sign of improvement, I will ask him to pay it. Of course, I will. I'm just waiting. I haven't given up yet. If I gave up, I wouldn't let him visit the children. If he can't and won't perform the father's role, I will live my own life. I'm just waiting because I don't want to cut off the relationship between the children and their father. What I expect is a very small thing, so if he shows any improvement, I don't want to take any legal action (ID 2).

### **No expectations**

Eight mothers (47%) said that they had no expectations since these mothers had been disappointed with the fathers and the fathers had not done anything for the children (ID 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, & 16). Two mothers still had contact with the fathers at the time of the interviews even though they talked had no expectations of the fathers (ID 7 & 15). The rest of the mothers severed their relationships with the fathers at the time of the interviews. Three mothers (ID 7, 11, & 12) believed that if the fathers would not continuously participate in their children's lives, discontinuing the relationship with the fathers would be good for themselves and their children. In addition, the mothers also thought that even if the fathers participated in the children's lives, they would not do that purely for the sake of children but for other purposes. ID 7 said:

Under the current situation, I wish I could live separately from him as a complete stranger until the children grow up and want to see their father by themselves.... Their father hasn't changed at all. Even if he paid child support and promised me something about what kind of father he would be, I don't think that he would behave that way, not because he sincerely realizes his responsibilities, but because either he wants to be reunited with me or he would just do it one time. Even if he would do something, he wouldn't do that over the long term, so I don't want to confuse them [the children] at this point (ID 7).

Five mothers said that they had waited a long time for the fathers to have minimal involvement, but they never met even their low expectations (ID 4, 10, 13, 15, & 16). These mothers were exhausted so they gave up expecting the fathers to be involved with their children. These mothers thought that not having any more expectations of the father and not thinking about the father would help the mothers and their children adjust.

I said [to my children], “Let’s forget the father and pretend we don’t have a father”.... No, I don’t have any expectations of him now. I had expectations, so I called him several times and met with him for a while to persuade him. But I haven’t contacted him for two years. I don’t have any expectations.... I have given up now, and I think the children never had a father (ID 16).

### **Summary**

The mothers had different levels of expectations about the roles of the fathers depending upon their involvement in parenting during their marriage and after the divorce. The mothers’ expectations of the fathers were categorized in three ways: the same expectations of the fathers as they had before the divorce, lowered expectations of the fathers, and no expectations of the fathers.

### **Mothers’ Experiences of Divorce Policy Contexts in Korea**

Many mothers talked about the difficulties that they had faced to receive child support from the fathers. Many of these difficulties related to the child support policy in Korea. The mothers also discussed their experiences with their parenting agreements under the modified divorce law.

#### **Ineffective child support policy**

Fourteen mothers had agreed to receive child support from the fathers at the time of their divorce, but only five of these mothers received regular or irregular child support payments from the children’s fathers at the time of the interviews. Regardless of if the mothers received child



support from the fathers at the time of the interviews, the mothers encountered several barriers to receiving child support payments under the current child support policy. The themes were categorized as follows: (a) child support as a personal issue, and (b) lack of systemic support for child support.

*Child support as a personal issue.* For some mothers, child support was an issue that they personally dealt with. They believed that child support payments depended on the fathers' sense of moral responsibility, but if the fathers did not follow their moral responsibility, the mothers had to personally deal with this issue whether they gave up receiving it or they fought with the fathers.

Two mothers who regularly received child support expressed concern that there was great uncertainty about whether the fathers' payments would end since they only relied on the fathers' sense of moral responsibility. The only preparation the mothers had for an uncertain future was to save the child support payments that they received in case the fathers stopped paying. One mother explained her concerns:

I'm worried since it is uncertain if he will stop paying it. He pays it regularly, but it is a fact that he could stop it.... I'm always concerned about this. It is very important for me to save his current child support payments while he pays since I have to support the children for high school and college. (Interviewer: Do you think that the children's father could stop paying child support anytime?) He divorced me and was cheating on me.... I don't trust him 100%.... Ultimately, I'm worried whether he's going to pay child support to the end. I only depend on his moral responsibility (ID 8).

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

He is a self-employed truck driver.... I heard that a law would be modified this time. It sounds like if nonresident parents don't pay child support, their income could be seized. Frankly speaking, since people who have obvious incomes such as company employees

have to pay social insurance<sup>15</sup>, their incomes would be clear. The law could work for them. But in terms of self-employed people, if they say “I don’t have any income” or “My business is slow,” then that’s it. I doubt the feasibility of this law.... I’m concerned about when he’s going to stop paying child support. (Interviewer: Do you think that he could stop paying it?) Yes. (Interviewer: How certain are you?) I would say 100%, if he either remarries or dates a new woman. Even if I take legal action, I can take legal action actually, but the law isn’t realistic. His income isn’t reported clearly by law.... Only when the income is clear, I could seize it. In this aspect, the law doesn’t reflect reality. So if the day comes and he stops paying child support, I think that I won’t be able to do anything [legally]. So I have to save his child support payments. Since I can’t depend on the law, then I have to deal with it by myself (ID 14).

If the fathers stopped paying or did not pay child support, the mothers could not take any legal action unless the fathers had assets under their name or clear income sources. If the fathers did not report income sources or hid their assets, these mothers had to take care of it personally.

He didn’t think about paying child support to me [during the cooling off period], but I threatened to kill him if he didn’t pay. So he paid.... It’s pathetic [to ask him for child support]. Although it’s pathetic, I couldn’t struggle with the children because of my self-esteem. I would do my best [to receive child support if the father stopped paying it] (ID 14).

ID 14 strongly insisted that she would receive child support from the father by all means if he did not want to pay. However, many mothers voluntarily gave up receiving it since they had to keep asking the fathers for child support and to argue with them. ID 12 said that she did not want to receive child support unless the father paid it voluntarily and explained their different opinions regarding receiving child support between those who were divorced and those who were not divorced. She said:

My father said that since I had a hard time, I should receive at least a small amount of money [from the father]. My father also asked me why I didn’t ask him [the father] for anything. I told him that if he [the children’s father] voluntarily gave money to me, I

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<sup>15</sup> There are four types of social insurance in Korea including health insurance, the national pension plan, employment insurance, and work injury compensation. The rates for these types of national insurance are determined based on an individual’s income.

would receive either KRW 10 (US penny) or KRW 1,000,000 (US \$873). But if he didn't, I wouldn't want to associate with him [because of money]. I also said that I had had a hard time so far even after the divorce since it seemed like we weren't separate. I didn't want to be associated with him in the future. My father told me that he's not able to understand me. But if I talk with people like me who raise children, they totally agree with me by saying, "Right, Yes, You're right." But if I talk with other people or friends around me who are not divorced, they say, "You should receive it." There are different points of view. We understand this position since we've experienced it, but they could say that I should receive it since they view it from a different angle. People don't understand my point if they don't have these experiences. If the law changes like the courts call the fathers and enforce child support payment, it would be much easier for us to receive it. But under the current situation [lack of legal support system], I don't want to ask him for money, since it's demeaning to have to ask him. And I also don't want to argue with him (ID 12).

***Lack of systemic support for child support.*** Social systems were not helpful for the divorced mothers who need to receive child support payments from the fathers. Seven mothers considered taking legal action to receive child support, but they faced barriers including no enforcement program, difficulties in receiving legal support services, having to personally verify the fathers' financial status, and a lack of social awareness of child support (ID 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, & 16).

There was no enforcement to help these mothers receive child support even if they received an official child support order from a court. One mother, ID 16 with three children, sued the father to change legal custody of the children and to receive child support payments. She had made a verbal agreement regarding child support payments with the children's father at the time of the divorce, but he had not paid it. She illustrated the recent ruling:

The decision of the court was that I couldn't receive unpaid child support from the father. I hired people to investigate [the father's income and assets]. (Interviewer: Was the decision made because the father didn't have a regular income or any assets?) Yes, he had nothing. If he ran his store register in his name, he would pay tax. Then, I could figure out his income, but he doesn't. He might expect that I would take this legal action, so he could register his car and store in another person's name. I didn't know if this was the case but there was no way to figure out either his income or assets. The only way for

me was to ask his family members, but they would never let me know that. So there was no way for me to find out his financial status.... The court ordered him to pay child support KRW 800,000 (US \$698) per month for a couple of years and KRW 600,000 (US \$524) after that. I have the decision, but [I can receive it only when] the father is willing to pay it. Although I have the decision of the court, since there is no law enforcement, I'm not able to receive it from the father (ID 16).

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

He was self-employed, so there was no way to figure out his income.... I couldn't consult with even a judicial scrivener<sup>16</sup> because of its cost. I filed the divorce suit by myself and ran around [to have free legal advice] since consultants from any free legal advice service didn't explain specifically via phone calls. I found this free lawyer, met with him, and listened to the lawyer. The lawyer told me that there was an execute order, but it was only possible when the father had a regular income. So I told him that it wasn't meaningful for me to have a court order [since I didn't know about the father's income]. But the lawyer recommended that I have the order anyway since he could have regular income someday (ID 10).

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

Since I didn't know the process well enough, I had to go back and forth to different agencies several times.... If they had let me know at the beginning what documents they

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<sup>16</sup> Judicial scriveners are one of the legal professions in Korea.

needed, I would have prepared all the documents at one time. I went to the agency with these documents, but the person in charge had changed. Different staff requested different documents.... The process was somewhat complex for me.... I have a part-time job right now... But for example, if I had a full-time job, it would have been very difficult to take time off [to complete these processes].... It took me several months and I visited [the agency and lawyer] several times. I had to call here and there.... I did that, but there are many people who have dishwasher or factory jobs [who couldn't take time off]. There are also rich people, but with their money they will not have to go through these processes by themselves. However, it [the legal service] is free, but it is inconvenient for those of us to use them (ID 16).

Although she received the court's decision by receiving help from a free legal advice service, she was not able to verify the father's financial ability to pay child support, so she could not receive unpaid child support from the father. She explained her future plans and concerns:

[The lawyer said that] the father would pay tax someday, and then I could track down his financial status and sue him within the next ten years.... The lawyer recommended that I sue him later. However, this is the same problem that I have to visit a judicial scrivener and investigate his financial status by myself.... I have to keep paying attention to him.... It will cost me to hire a judicial scrivener and to investigate his financial status. If he doesn't report his income like these days, I will never know his income. He can buy a car under another person's name. But I still have to spend money to investigate it.... I have limitations [to access his information]. For example, although I need his income documentation, I can't get it personally. But the government could get it for the judgment. What I want to say is that although I cannot get these documents personally, the lawyer recommended that I keep collecting his information.... I don't think that I can receive it later (ID 16).

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

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

Two mothers talked about the lack of social awareness regarding child support payments. It discouraged the mothers from taking further action (ID 7 & 13). For ID 7, the mother's lawyer recommended not taking more time to negotiate child support with the children's father since she would need another law suit if the father did not pay it voluntarily. ID 13 also did not seriously consider taking legal action to collect child support since a city government officer was not willing to help her. She said:

I heard that if I requested an execute order from the city government, his income could be seized. But the staff seemed to get annoyed. They didn't want to do that since it took some time and needed some paperwork. For example, they recommended that I receive a donation like receiving KRW 100,000 (US \$87) [per month] (ID 13).

### **Mothers' perspective on parenting agreements after the law modification**

Most Korean divorced mothers emphasized that they preferred voluntary involvement in parenting from the fathers instead of forcing them to participate by developing parenting agreements. The mothers acknowledged the necessity of having parenting agreements but they were concerned about its effectiveness.

Five mothers believed that the parenting agreements required by the modified law were an important movement (ID 2, 3, 6, 8, & 16). They, however, doubted its effectiveness since it is not enforceable by law. Nevertheless, the mothers often said, "It would be better with it than without it." One mother said:

Well, it would be helpful from the resident parents' perspective.... But it isn't enforceable.... But there would be a difference between having the documentation and not having it.... If there is a document, one out of ten fathers who didn't pay child support without it, will pay it after the change. More fathers will pay it if they write it. It will be helpful but it won't be harmful (ID 6).

Four mothers, however, did not think that the required parenting agreements will be helpful if the fathers do not care about their children by themselves (ID 1, 4, 12, & 16). One mother said, "It depends on his free will, since it is not enforceable. If he doesn't want to visit, he won't. Since he doesn't pay child support, he won't keep a visitation schedule" (ID 4). Another mother also had a similar negative perception because she felt the parenting agreements were unenforceable. However, this mother placed more importance on the father's sincere interest in his children. She believed that the father's attitude could not be regulated by the legal document. She said:

It is just paperwork.... when people agree verbally, yet they don't keep the agreements. It would be better to make this clear by having a document, but I think it is just a piece of paper. If fathers really mean to do it, they will do it whether there is a legal agreement or not. I argue with the children's father these days because I want him to have a fixed visitation schedule and if he can't visit the children on a scheduled day, he has to explain to the children in advance.... But [if I said this] he would respond to me this way, "I want to see my children today, but if I schedule it next month, should I wait for it until next month?" He only thinks of himself. Do the children also want to see him today? Maybe not. He has to consider the children's position first.... Even if he doesn't keep the agreement, it isn't enforceable by law. I don't think that it is important (ID 12).

In this aspect, most Korean divorced mothers highlighted the importance of the fathers' voluntary participation in parenting. They wanted the fathers to pay child support voluntarily instead of developing a legal document of parenting agreement, arguing with the fathers to receive child support, or taking any legal action (ID 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, & 15). One mother explained why she did not ask the father to pay child support or not take any legal action to receive it:

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

### **Summary**

The mothers' experiences of parenting were examined in relation to divorce policy contexts in which the divorce policy is somewhat ineffective. The current policy leaves divorced parents with the responsibility for involvement and voluntarily paying or collecting child support with a lack of resources to support divorced parents. Thus, many of the divorced mothers did not see the parenting agreements as effective documents when it came to involvement or child support payments. Most of the Korean divorced mothers wanted voluntary involvement in parenting from the fathers even though they acknowledged the importance of the legal system to help divorced parents.

### **Uncovering Central Meanings**

The first step of analysis was to describe general important themes including decisions on parenting, the fathers' involvement in the children's lives after the divorce, coparenting after the divorce, the mothers' expectations of the fathers' roles, and the mothers' experiences of divorce policy contexts in Korea.

The second step was to find general essences. Essence refers to the meaning of relations among phenomenon (van Manen, 2002), so essences could be specified by uncovering the central meanings of the phenomenon. In this step, the central meanings of the phenomenon were identified before investigating the general essences. The central meaning units discovered in the previous step were stated using abstract language in this stage. These abstract descriptions of Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting were presented as follows: a) decisions on



parenting after divorce; b) fathers' involvement in the children's lives after the divorce; c) coparenting after the divorce; d) mothers' expectations of the roles of the fathers in the children's lives; and e) mothers' experiences regarding the divorce policy and family context in Korea. Finally, the general essences were revealed based on the central meanings.

### **Decisions on Parenting after the Divorce**

Most of the Korean divorced mothers briefly talked about parenting arrangements after the divorce with the children's fathers regarding custody and child support at the time of the divorce. In terms of visitation, only nine mothers, out of 17, discussed visitation at the time of the divorce. Even if they discussed parenting arrangements, most mothers did not specify visitation schedules or the amount of child support payments except for the mothers who divorced after the divorce law modification.

#### **Reasons for having custody**

Most of the Korean divorced mothers in this study decided to raise their children for the well-being of their children. Most mothers thought that they were the most appropriate parents for their children since (a) they could provide better care for their children than the fathers or (b) they mistrusted the fathers' competency to raise their children. Some of the Korean divorced fathers who had physical custody of their children at the time of their divorce ended up giving up physical custody and sent them to their mothers when they experienced difficulties raising the children by themselves. These fathers might have thought that raising children would be easier for the mothers since the mothers were usually more involved in the children's everyday lives during the marriage. The fathers were not interviewed, but the mothers' comments reflected the fathers' thoughts about parenting. Some of the mothers pointed out that the fathers could not provide careful parenting since they were not actively engaged in parenting while they lived together. In addition, some mothers' concerns about the fathers' extended families also reflected

the assumption that the fathers would not be the primary caregivers for their children even after the divorce but the extended family members such as grandmothers would be. As Appendix D shows, the mothers' expectations of the fathers were mostly as financial provider, playmate, or principled guide. They also emphasized their identity as a father and expected the fathers to provide emotional support for their children in the sense of being there for their children. The mothers, however, did not express any expectations of the fathers concerning the fathers' participation in their children's everyday lives such as feeding, dressing, or educating.

### **Decisions on child support**

Most mothers in this study made child support decisions based on informal decision-making processes including (a) simply relying on the fathers' moral responsibility that the fathers would take care of their children and be willing to pay child support voluntarily since they were their children's fathers, and (b) not having reasonable guidelines to help divorced parents decide the amount of child support. Because of these informal decisions, the mothers were not sure whether they could or would receive the promised child support from the fathers even at the time when they made the agreement regardless of whether they formally or informally agreed on child support payments.

Regarding the appropriate amounts of child support, divorced parents adopted different decision rules to make decisions on the amount such as the cost of raising children, fathers' incomes, or the mothers' incomes. Some parents, however, experienced conflicts, left the decisions about what to pay to the fathers, or decided unrealistic amounts considering the fathers' financial status since there were no official guidelines to help them decide the amount of child support.

### **Nonresident fathers' visitation arrangements**

Most mothers agreed to have flexible visitation plans with the fathers but did not decide the fathers' specific visitation schedules. Even mothers with a fixed visitation plan only decided the frequency of visits, but they did not specify the days or times. The mothers had different visitation arrangements depending on the ages of the children. Two mothers with adolescent children had a flexible visitation arrangement since their children were old enough to contact their fathers independently. Three mothers with young children, however, did not talk about the fathers' visitation and did not want their children to contact their fathers since they would have to take them out to see the fathers due to the young age of the children.

### **Fathers' Involvement in the Children's Lives after the Divorce**

Almost all mothers basically wanted the fathers to be involved in their children's lives in some way and emphasized the importance of the fathers' regular visitation. The mothers' satisfaction with the fathers' involvement, however, was different depending on the fathers' degree of participation. The fathers' involvement in the children's lives after the divorce was categorized in three ways: a satisfactory on-going relationship, a dissatisfactory on-going relationship, and a discontinued relationship. The mothers were satisfied with the degree of the fathers' involvement in the children's lives (a) if the fathers were interested in their children and responsive to their children, and (b) if the fathers paid either child support or provided some financial support for their children based on their financial ability.

The mothers in a dissatisfactory on-going relationship group maintained their relationships with the fathers, even though they were not satisfied with the involvement of the fathers since their children wanted to see their fathers. The fathers in this group were characterized as being somewhat irresponsible fathers who (a) visited their children irregularly, (b) did not pay child support, or (c) became Disneyland dads. These fathers showed some interest

in their children, but their behaviors were not dependable. These fathers' irresponsible involvement influenced the well-being of their children and often caused conflict between the mothers and the fathers.

The mothers who had cut off their relationships with the fathers explained the reasons for their discontinued relationships as follows: (a) the fathers did not fulfill their appropriate father role including giving reduced attention or not paying attention to their children, not paying child support, or being bad examples to their children; and (b) the divorced parents continually experienced relational conflicts even after their divorce. The mothers who thought the fathers did not fulfill their roles severed their relationships to protect their children. For example, if the fathers paid too little attention to their children, the mothers cut off their relationships with the fathers since they did not want their children to feel abandoned by their fathers.

### **Coparenting after the Divorce**

The mothers' perceptions of whether or not the fathers were good fathers for their children during their marriage were important when it came to having cooperative coparenting relationships after the divorce. The majority of the mothers were not able to establish cooperative coparenting relationships with the children's fathers, but three mothers were coparenting at the time of the interviews. These mothers tried to involve the fathers in their children's lives. For example, when they had parenting issues including discipline, decision making, or conflicts due to different parenting styles, they invited the fathers to participate in the process. The mothers who had uncooperative relationships, however, experienced several conflicts over irregular visitation, not paying child support, or the fathers' lack of attention to their children. These fathers' irresponsible behaviors during their marriage and/or after their divorce prevented the mothers from engaging in constructive coparenting relationships. In addition to the fathers who were not cooperative in parenting, some mothers also did not want to have cooperative

relationships with the fathers since they had been continually disappointed with the fathers.

Another barrier to cooperative parental relationships was ambiguous communication between divorced parents. Some mothers did not clearly express to the fathers what they had in mind, so they sometimes had ambivalent feelings regarding the fathers' lack of involvement with the children after the divorce.

### **Mothers' Expectations of the Roles of the Fathers in the Children's Lives**

The mothers had different expectation levels of the fathers based on the fathers' involvement in parenting during their marriage and after their divorce. They had (a) the same expectations of the fathers as they had before the divorce; (b) lowered expectations after the divorce, and (c) no expectations after the divorce. The mothers who had cooperative relationships with the fathers maintained the same level of expectations of the fathers' participation as before their divorce. Most mothers, however, had to adjust their expectations of the fathers to either lowered expectations or no expectations since the fathers had not met the mothers' expectations. When the divorced parents had these different expectation levels, they experienced more conflicts. Thus, the mothers' changed expectation levels of the fathers helped them adjust after the divorce. In addition, lowered expectations of the fathers helped maintain the fathers' involvement with their children by avoiding conflicts with the mothers.

The mothers' expectations were not stable since their expectations could change as the level of the fathers' involvement with their children changed. As two mothers mentioned, they intended to modify their expectations of the fathers depending upon the relationship changes but possible conflicts could be caused by the differences between the mothers' expectations and the fathers' fulfillment of those expectations.

## **Mothers' Experiences of Child Support Policy Contexts in Korea**

The Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting and the fathers' involvement could be better understood in the context of the divorce policy in Korea. Especially the mothers' experiences of child support were closely related to these contexts.

### **Ineffective child support policy**

Korean divorced mothers in the present study adopted personal strategies to compensate for the ineffective child support policy in Korea since there was little systemic support from Korean society to help mothers receive children support from fathers. The mothers who received child support from the fathers at the time of the interviews doubted whether they would receive it by the time their children became adults. In addition to this uncertain continuity of child support payments, the mothers who did not receive child support from the fathers were not able to receive it by themselves unless the fathers paid it voluntarily. They often gave up receiving it.

### **Mothers' perspective on parenting agreements after the law modification**

Most of the Korean divorced mothers thought that the fathers' voluntary involvement in parenting and sincere interest in their children was more meaningful for them than regulating the fathers' involvement through parenting agreements. Nevertheless, many Korean divorced mothers thought that establishing parenting agreements was an important move in the right direction. However, they were still concerned about whether the modified divorce law requiring parenting agreements really helped their personal situations. They believed that most divorced fathers would not follow what they promised in the parenting agreements since it was not enforceable. Even among the four mothers who divorced after the divorce law modification, only one mother received child support regularly but she also worried about the continuity of child support payments.

## **General Essences**

The general essences emerged from the central meanings: (a) the mothers perceived themselves as the most appropriate caregivers; (b) Korean divorced parents had different coparenting relationships depending on the characteristics of the fathers; (c) Korean divorce policy and family contexts were interrelated with the Korean divorced parents' perceptions and decisions on parenting after the divorce; and (d) the mothers emphasized the importance of the fathers' voluntary involvement and sincere interest in the children rather than coerced involvement.

## **Summary**

In the second step of the analysis, central meanings regarding Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting were stated in abstract language under the dominant themes to provide more comprehensive understanding of the mothers' experiences. The general essences were then revealed from the central meanings.

## **Apprehending Essential Relationships among Essences**

The third step of the analysis was to examine essential relationships among essences to find deeper meanings and to generate more comprehensive descriptions of Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences after the divorce. In the previous step, the data were examined based on the separate central meaning units, and the general essence emerged. In this step, however, these separate central meaning units were considered as a whole unit to analyze them from a comprehensive perspective. Four essential relationships were recognized based on: (a) the well-being of the children, (b) the mothers' values regarding what constituted a good father, (c) the mothers' perceptions of the fathers' involvement, and (d) lack of consensus on parental roles after divorce.

## **Well-being of the Children**

The majority of the Korean divorced mothers made decisions regarding custody and the relationship with the fathers after the divorce based on the perspective of the well-being of their children. The main motivation of the mothers who decided to raise their children was that they would be better parents for their children than the fathers. Likewise, the decisions about continuing, terminating, or restoring the relationships with the children's fathers were also made for the well-being of their children.

The mothers who had cooperative relationship with the fathers tried to involve the fathers in parenting regardless of their feelings about the fathers since they believed the fathers were good for their children. The mothers who had dissatisfactory on-going relationships with the fathers also maintained the relationships despite their dissatisfaction since their children wanted to see their fathers. In addition, as the relationship patterns of the mothers with young children indicated, these mothers did not contact the children's fathers right after their divorce since they did not want to be associated with him or have contact with him. As their children grew up, however, they changed their minds and decided to contact the fathers for the sake of their children. These mothers had to adjust their expectation levels of the fathers to be lower or to have no expectations to avoid conflict and to maintain the relationship with the fathers.

Some mothers considered ending their relationships with the fathers when they thought the relationship with the fathers would not benefit their children for several reasons including the fathers' lack of interest in their children, their irregular visitations, or inconsistent parenting environments between the divorced parents. For example, the mothers who resumed their relationships with the children's fathers for the sake of their children decided to end their relationships once again when the fathers did not show enough interest in their children. In this



way, the mothers felt that they were protecting their children from the fathers' attitudes of indifference toward the children.

The mothers also thought that inconsistent parenting environments between the mothers and the fathers would not be good for their children. Unlike the mothers, these fathers could buy expensive or nice things for their children since they were usually better off financially than the mothers and they visited their children only once in a while. The fathers were often permissive with their children without any control, unlike the mothers who lived with the children and often nagged them or consistently asked them to study (ID 7, 11, 14, 15 & 17). In addition, the mothers thought that these fathers' over-interest in their children would not be on-going but temporary. Thus, the mothers believed that visiting the children's fathers would make it more difficult for the mothers to discipline their children.

#### **Mothers' Values regarding What Constituted a Good Father**

Most of the Korean divorced mothers wanted the children's fathers to be responsible fathers and exhibit values regarding what they perceived to be good fathers. These mothers thought that good fathers should be positive role models for their children, being responsible, dependable, and considerate. These mothers' values were closely related to their reasons for divorcing their ex-husbands, for having custody, for the decisions about their parental relationships after the divorce, and for their expectations of the fathers after the divorce. In terms of the fathers' child support payments, the mothers had different expectations of the fathers at least when it came to responsibility. Some of the mothers wanted the fathers to at least be responsive to their children even if they did not pay child support. However, other mothers regarded the fathers' child support payments as an important standard of the fathers' interest in their children.

### **Before the divorce**

Most of the Korean divorced mothers thought the fathers were good fathers if they were positive role models for the children. These mothers were concerned that their children had learned bad things from their fathers during their marriages because the mothers perceived the fathers as being easygoing (e.g., not having stable jobs regardless of their earnings), unethical (e.g., affairs), or violent (e.g., verbal or physical violence) (ID 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 15, & 16). One mother said, “The good aspect of the divorce is that the children don’t see their father’s bad habits anymore” (ID 6). Another mother also told a similar story:

I worried that the children would grow up like him, especially because they weren’t girls but boys who usually grow up by watching their father. But the father was not diligent and was easily addicted to.... I thought that it [living with the father] wouldn’t be good for the children, so I planned to divorce (ID 5).

### **After the divorce**

The majority of the mothers wanted dependable and considerate fathers who consistently participated in the children’s lives and paid attention to their children’s needs after the divorce, so that their children would feel that their fathers loved them even though they did not live together. Many mothers, however, experienced conflict due to the fathers’ irregular visits. ID 5 described her ex-husband as a bad role model for her children during the marriage, but his attitude became an even bigger problem after the divorce. She described her conflict with the father over his undependability:

He has behaved irresponsibly many times. He has no concept of parenting or time. If he promises something to the children, he has to keep his promise. If he isn’t able to keep it, he has to tell us earlier. He would tell us at the last minute. If he takes a day off, he drinks and sleeps. When I call, he is sleeping. I get so upset. It happened several times. After that happened, my son realized that his father is not dependable, but still he loves his father. I wish that the child could see only the good things about his father. I’m concerned about it (ID 5).

Several mothers thought that their inconsiderate ex-husbands were not good fathers unlike the mothers who believed that they considered the children's well-being first. Related to the fathers' irregular visitations, some of the mothers criticized the fathers who did not consider the children's position first but thought mostly of themselves (ID 3, 7, 10, 12, 15, & 17). The mothers complained that these fathers only visited their children when they wanted to visit even though their children could not see their father when they wanted. ID 7 said that the father's inconsistent visits were unfair to their children.

*Mothers' values and parental relationships after the divorce.* The mothers' values on whether the fathers were good for their children during the marriage or after the divorce were related to the mothers' coparenting relationships and their expectations of the fathers. The mothers who perceived the fathers as good fathers tended to be cooperative with the fathers and were able to maintain positive expectations. Even if they experienced conflict over their parenting, the mothers tried to engage the fathers in parenting.

The mothers who thought that the fathers were not good fathers for their children, however, did not want to cooperate with the fathers and did not have many expectations of them since increased contact with the fathers would not benefit their children. The mothers in uncooperative relationships either lowered their expectations of the fathers or completely cut off their relationships with the fathers. One mother had no expectations of the children's father because of conflict over the father's irregular visits with the children, so she asked the father to stop visiting the children. This mother talked about the continuity of the quality of the father-child relationship during the marriage compared to after the divorce. She explained the father's defense:

He said that the children always call him to ask for something but they don't call him just to say hello. If he was a good father and close to the children, they would call to say hello.

I think that it is good for him that the children want to visit him at least when he buys something for them. If he had been a good father before the divorce, they would have often called him (ID 15).

*Fathers' minimum responsibility and child support.* Regarding child support payments, the mothers had different expectations of the fathers' minimum responsibility. Some of the mothers wanted to keep the fathers in the children's lives even if the fathers did not pay child support (ID 1, 5, 6, & 16). ID 6 said, "We are separated, but I wish that he would visit the children regularly. It would be helpful for their emotions.... Although their father doesn't pay child support, at least he has to do that [visit them]."

Other mothers emphasized the importance of the fathers' financial contribution to their children (ID 2, 9, & 10). These mothers also prioritized the fathers' interests in their children as the highest priority. At the same time, however, they stressed the fathers' financial support for their children. These mothers believed that if the fathers were willing to financially support their children, it would reflect the fathers' interest in their children regardless of whether the amount of money was big or small. That is, these mothers wanted to see that the fathers made sincere efforts to support their children. They wanted to tell their children that their fathers were interested in them by saying that their fathers were willing to financially support them. One mother explained why she wanted to receive child support from the father:

He keeps telling me that he cannot afford to pay it. However, it depends on how he thinks. He does make money these days. If he makes only KRW 500,000 (US \$436) a month and just gives KRW 50,000 (\$44) or 100,000 (\$87) to his children, I would really appreciate it. I would tell my children, "Your father gave this precious money for you even though he is in financial trouble" (ID 2).

### **Mothers' Perceptions of the Fathers' Involvement**

Most mothers in this study expected the children's fathers to voluntarily be involved in their children's lives. Some mothers experienced confusion about the father's involvement. Some

of the fathers avoided their responsibilities to their children, so the mothers were confused about whether it was the fathers' duty to be involved with the children or if it should simply reflect the fathers' generosity. In addition, the Korean divorced mothers tended to de-emphasize the parenting agreements.

### **Appreciation of the fathers' participation**

Some mothers said that if the fathers paid child support or participated in parenting, they would be thankful to them. They acknowledged that the fathers' involvement in the children lives was natural and the fathers' responsibility. Nevertheless, since the fathers had not performed their roles, the mothers thought that if the fathers were involved, they would still be grateful to the fathers. One mother explained her confusion about the father's natural role:

If a couple has children, raising the children should be their shared responsibility in spite of their divorce. Even though they don't raise the children together, parents still have their own roles such as the father role and mother role. If they accept their own role, performing that role is a natural thing to do. It is not something that expects gratitude. But for me, if he paid child support, I would be grateful. I sometimes thought this way. If he paid it, I would be grateful. It would be helpful if we had an educational program that helped people's understanding; that it is natural rather than something they should be grateful for (ID 7).

Another mother was also tired of waiting for the father's participation. She said:

(Interviewer: What if the father tells you that he wants to be more actively involved in parenting? What would be your opinion?) I would really be grateful. If he does, it isn't a matter of if I can agree or not, but that I should be grateful. Since he never does that, if he did, I would really be grateful. I really think that way. When people wait for someone, if the person doesn't come after 10 minutes and 20 minutes, they become upset at first. But after an hour, they worry about the person (ID 16).

### **De-emphasis on the parenting agreements**

In terms of parenting agreements, some of the mothers tended to de-emphasize the official documents regarding parenting arrangements. When the mothers discussed child support and visitation, they often said, "This is just a piece of paper." These mothers did not want to

regulate the father-child relationship by a document, but they wanted the fathers to engage in their children's lives voluntarily.

One mother argued with the father when she tried to change legal custody from the father to her. She explained:

He said that if he gave me legal and physical custody, there would be nothing to show that he was the father of the children even on the document. He felt like he would lose everything so he didn't want to give up legal custody. Then [if he insisted on that], he shouldn't send the children to me. I told him that a document wasn't a big deal. If I had legal custody, weren't my sons your sons? Everybody knows that you are the father of the children and your blood line runs in them. That won't change even if we change it in the document.... We argued several times (ID 12).

As this mother said, even if she had custody, the fact that the father was the children's father would not change. The Korean divorced mothers might want the fathers to fulfill their roles because they were the children's fathers who had the same blood line not because the documents indicated what fathers should do. The fathers' sincerity was more important for these mothers than a legal document.

In addition, most of the Korean divorced mothers had experienced or heard that it was very difficult for them to regulate the fathers' child support payments even with court decisions under the current child support policy. These experiences might have strengthened the mothers' perceptions that the document was only a piece of paper.

### **Lack of Consensus on Parental Roles after Divorce**

Most of the Korean divorced parents in this study did not reach a consensus concerning their postdivorce parenting relationships. Some of the parents experienced difficulties in establishing a new parental relationship with their ex-spouses including how child support payments should be spent and what their parental roles should be after divorce. Some Korean divorced parents related their parental relationships to their personal relationships with their ex-

spouses. They also understood that parental involvement would change if the living arrangements or marital status changed after the divorce.

### **Confusion between parental relationships and personal relationships**

Some of the Korean divorced parents considered child support to be part of their personal relationship with their ex-spouses instead of thinking of it as part of their parental relationship. In terms of the fathers' misconceptions, they thought child support was meant for their ex-wives not for their children. This misconception was one of the reasons that discouraged the mothers from asking for or receiving child support from the fathers. Two mothers believed that the fathers would think that child support would be spent on the mothers not on their children (ID 7 & 15). The fathers also tried to have more control over the relationships with their ex-wives by giving money. One mother explained:

I asked him to pay for the children's educational institute fees, but he said that he didn't have money for it.... I have a limited income, but educational institutes cost quite a lot of money. Parents send their children to the educational institutes a lot here. In addition, the children are scared to stay home alone. In terms of the oldest son, if he stays home alone, he hangs out with his friends. So it isn't good to leave them home alone. (Interviewer: You told me that the father was interested in the children's education before. Then, why doesn't he want to pay for it?) I think that he wants me to undergo hardships. I think that he wants to reunite with me since he sometimes talks about it. He doesn't give any money these days, but he gave me some last year when I asked. He might think that if he gave me some money, our relationships would improve. It wasn't my intention. Since he was the children's father, I asked for his help. If he gave me money, he thought that he gave it for me (ID 15).

Another mother also mentioned that, "He unconsciously thinks that if he has financial means but if I'm struggling for a living with the children, it will lead to us reuniting. Because of it, he would not give any money to me by himself" (ID 7). In addition, some of the fathers misunderstood the mothers' intentions when the mothers asked them to financially support their children, interpreting it to mean that the mothers had emotional feelings for the fathers.

Some of the mothers also had a misconception about child support. Independence and self-esteem were tied to not receiving child support for these mothers instead of thinking of it as claiming their children's rights or the fathers' responsibility in the parental role (ID 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, & 13). However, they thought that the fathers' financial support for the children was related to their self-esteem in that it would make them look bad or feel bad about themselves if they received child support. For this reason, some of the Korean divorced mothers decided not to receive any type of financial support including child support from their children's fathers after the divorce. They also said they wanted to prove that they were able to raise their children without the fathers' support and that they were independent. The mothers thought that not having the fathers' financial support for their children restored their self-esteem and reflected on their own independence from their ex-husbands. One mother said, "I don't know why, but I wanted to live without his support due to my self-esteem" (ID 9). ID 7 also explained her reason for not asking for child support:

Previously, I disliked receiving child support from him even if he would want to pay. I'd like to say that I raised the children nicely by myself.... I thought it was shameful to ask for his money at that moment.... I've never asked him for anything so far, but the major problem is the children's education costs (ID 7).

Likewise, some parents also experienced difficulties in separating their personal relationships with their ex-spouses from their parental relationships when they arranged the nonresident fathers' visitation schedules. For example, some mothers with young children did not want their children to visit their fathers since that would require the mother to inevitably contact the father. Like these mothers, some fathers avoided conflict with the mothers by not visiting their children.



### **Misunderstanding about parental roles after the divorce**

A misunderstanding of some of these Korean divorced parents was that parental involvement or parenting arrangements would change when the parent-child living arrangement changed after the divorce or the other parents' marital status changed. Most of all, some of the fathers seemed to think that paying child support was not their responsibility because the mothers had physical custody (ID 2, 9, & 11). They told the mothers that the mothers had to take care of their children by themselves including feeding and clothing them since they decided to raise their children. One mother explained the father's perception of child support: "He told me that since I took the children with me, I had to take full responsibility for them" (ID 9). Another mother also described the different definitions of child support between her and her ex-husband and his misconception:

There was a disagreement on the concept of child support between him and me. He has a totally different idea from me. He claims that since I am raising these children, I have to pay the expenses that the children have. Since I live with them, I have to feed them and send them to school. These are my own responsibilities. (Interviewer: What definition of child support does the father have?) Education costs. He thought that child support only needs to cover the costs of education. Frankly speaking, it doesn't cost a lot for elementary and middle schools. It only costs for school lunch. He told me that I can cover that expense (ID 2).

Even if the fathers provided support, they often thought they were helping the mothers instead of fulfilling their parental responsibility. Three mothers (ID 7, 9, & 15) also said that when the fathers gave them money, they behaved condescendingly rather than performing their natural duty. The mothers pointed out that this misconception could be related to the traditional gender roles in Korea. One mother explained that, "Even for married couples, if they are dual earners, they should share household chores. But men think that they are helping their wives saying, 'I'm helping you.' The same thing happens in child support" (ID 7). Another mother also said, "He gave me money as if he is doing a big favor. It's his natural duty, but he doesn't think

that it's his natural duty.... Something's wrong with this because traditionally, people have believed that mothers should take care of children's education" (ID 15). With this logic, when the fathers paid child support, if they did it in a condescending manner, the mothers could feel it was demeaning to ask the fathers to pay child support because of these fathers' attitude.

Some of the Korean divorced parents thought that parental involvement, parenting arrangements, or parental relationships would change when the other parents' marital status changed. Three fathers said that they would change their parenting arrangements from what they had agreed at the time of the divorce if the mothers remarried (ID 2, 13, & 15). ID 13 talked about her conversation with the father regarding custody: "He also told me that if I remarry, he would take the child with him. At that time, I was anxious about not losing the child [so I didn't ask him to pay child support]." Another mother also said that the father intended to change his child support payments. She said:

At the time of our divorce, he sent an annexed document to the judge. He wrote several conditions in the document. One of them was that if the mother remarries, he would stop paying child support. The judge told him that this document wasn't valid and the father misunderstood about child support. If the children are minors, even if the mother remarries, paying child support is the father's responsibility although the amount of child support could be adjusted. This annexed paper was invalid. The father accepted the judge's announcement. I assured him of this at that time. In fact, when he drew up that paper, I couldn't understand what he was doing and I thought that he misunderstood something. Since I didn't want to argue with him about the attachment, I let him submit the document to the judge (ID 2).

In addition, two mothers thought they could be cooperative with the fathers regarding parenting issues or they could still receive child support since the children's fathers were still single (ID 8 & 17). One mother said "He hasn't remarried yet, and both he and I are still single. Given this situation, if the children need something or if I need some money for the children, I ask him, 'What could you do in this situation?'" (ID 17).

## **Summary**

In the third step of analysis, deeper meanings of the Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences were explored. Most of these Korean divorced mothers tried to put their children's well-being first when they made any parenting decision. They wanted to involve the children's fathers in their children's lives if they thought that the fathers were good for their children. If not, they did not want to associate with the father for the sake of their children. The mothers also emphasized the fathers' voluntarily involvement in their children's lives. However, some of the divorced parents did not have consensus on parental relationships after the divorce. These parents' lack of consensus and misunderstandings about postdivorce parenting could potentially reduce their children's well-being.

### **Watching Modes of Appearing**

The fourth step of the analysis was to identify how the phenomenon emerged. Four modes emerged in the mothers' descriptions including (a) justification of the mothers' experiences, (b) ways to interpret the fathers' lack of involvement, (c) influence of the children's genders and ages of the children with the fathers' involvement, and (d) the role of ambiguous interaction between the divorced parents.

### **Justification of the Mothers' Experiences**

Korean divorced mothers in this study justified their experiences using common experiences, cultural tendencies, comparison, or discounting the fathers' contribution. Most mothers referred to other Korean parents (ID 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, & 16) or their children (ID 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14, & 16) to support their own experiences or decisions. These mothers often said, "It [divorce] happens a lot around me" (ID 2), and "There are quite a few mothers around me" (ID 1). They emphasized that their experiences were common. In addition, when one mother explained her difficulties in maintaining a coparenting relationship, she tried to justify her

experience that she felt was not unique to herself by comparing herself to other divorced mothers and highlighting cultural tendencies. She said, “But in our culture, the relationship after divorce is worse than strangers. Most mothers do not share information about their children with the fathers if the mothers are raising the children” (ID 3). Another mother also validated her argument in a similar way, but she discounted the father’s role to support her opinion as well as comparing her experience to other people’s experiences:

It is the same in my family as well as other families. Most families have difficulties due to money. If the children live separately from their father for a long time, the father figure is not so important. Of course, there is the father’s role, but as time elapses, the father figure won’t be so big. I could take on his role. But the financial situation isn’t getting better since my capacity to make money is limited. When I see other people, they are also struggling with money (ID 12).

These mothers also compared their children’s fathers to other fathers when they talked about the fathers’ involvement. ID 8 said, “I think that he is like 70 or 80% of other fathers in the father role.... Other fathers are not likely to pay child support in Korea.” ID 14 also said, “I wish he would become an ideal, normal dad, like in other families.” Four mothers blamed the fathers who had not fulfilled their roles by comparing the fathers to other people or referring to them like dead people. ID 5 said, “Other men are not their father. Their grandfather or uncles are men, but they aren’t the children’s father. I wouldn’t expect anything from their father if he was dead, but he is alive” (ID 5).

Regarding the relationships with the children’s fathers after the divorce, most mothers clarified that their decisions about how to maintain their relationships with the fathers were made based on their children’s perspectives. One mother explained her reason for maintaining her relationship with the father despite her dissatisfaction with the father’s involvement. She said, “One of the reasons that I wasn’t able to cut off the relationship with the father was that.... Whether or not he was a good father was my thought and my judgment, not the children’s idea”

(ID 5). However, another mother explained why she wanted her children to wait to visit their father until they grew up:

I don't know about [the father's] situation at this point. He could be remarried. Or he might not want to see the children which would hurt them. I'd like to persuade the children [not to contact the father] until they grow up. The children told me that they wanted to see their father. [But] I told them that because of this situation [I don't want them to contact the father] until after growing up. Since they are young, if this is the case, it would hurt them. I don't know about his situation and he could refuse to see them (ID 6).

These two mothers' decisions were different, but both mothers made their decision based on the well-being of their children.

### **Ways to Interpret the Fathers' Lack of Involvement**

Some Korean divorced mothers interpreted the fathers' lack of involvement in their children's lives as (a) a natural difference between mothers and fathers; (b) not having enough time together; or (c) personal disqualification as a parent. Some mothers described the fathers' lack of involvement as an essential difference between mothers and fathers. These mothers compared their behaviors to the fathers in several circumstances. ID 7 described her standards for ideal nonresident fathers but her conclusion was that the mother should have superiority over the father in terms of parenting:

Parents don't need to have regular conversations about every single detail about the children, but they should talk about the children's critical issues. For example, if the children want to study something and I cannot afford it, then I could ask their father for help and then the children could study. Regardless of where they stay, I wish that their father would help the children concerning something they were confused about, that they could trust their father's love, and that they were aware that their father always hoped that they were doing well even though they lived with their mother. But he doesn't have these kinds of thoughts. I sometimes think that fathers are very different from mothers who do have natural instincts naturally (ID 7).

ID 13 explained mothers' superiority over a father by taking the father's view point:

As a mother, if I were him, even if I didn't pay child support, if I make money, I would want to buy something for my son. If I couldn't buy something right now, I would save money and spend the money in the future when my son entered elementary school. I would think that way, but he [the father] didn't (ID 13).

Another way to interpret the fathers' lack of involvement was that the fathers paid less attention to their children since they did not live or spend enough time with their children. These fathers could be less sensitive to the needs or issues of their children compared to the mothers who lived with their children. One mother complained about the father's detached attitude toward his daughter's concerns. She thought that he cared less about his daughter since he did not need to deal with the problems she experienced. She said, "I explained her [the daughter's] issue seriously, but he didn't take it seriously even though I was really concerned about her. I thought he behaved that way since he didn't raise her by himself" (ID 11). Another mother also said, "Since I raise the child, I have to think about the child, like what I should do for the child. However, nonresident parents are less likely to think about their children since they have their own lives" (ID 3). As these mothers said, if children experienced a problem regarding the relationships with their fathers including irregular visitation or quality of time with their fathers, the mothers who lived with their children inevitably had to deal with their children's suffering, but the fathers would not know or need to deal with it directly.

Three mothers with young children also said that the fathers did not know how to interact with their children when they were together since the fathers were separated from their children when they were young (ID 3, 5, & 13). ID 3 said, "When he visited the child before, the father hardly saw the child alone, so I was always there. It seemed like that it was difficult for him to see the child alone and it was a scary thing for him" (ID 3). Another mother had a similar comment:

I didn't know how to raise a child when I had my first son, but I came to understand what I should do for my second son. But their father didn't know how to play with the children. He was separated from them. He hadn't seen the children when they were babies (ID 5).

Many mothers attributed the fathers' lack of involvement to the fathers' personal characteristics claiming that they were inconsiderate and irresponsible (ID 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, & 16). These characteristics disqualified them as good fathers in the mothers' opinion. Again, these reasons convinced the mothers to raise their children instead of giving custody to the fathers. ID 9 blamed the children's father who was irresponsible:

Since I have much pride, I never asked him for money even though I was in trouble. I've just endured until I could [survive]. In some aspects, giving living expenses is his responsibility since he is a father and parent regardless of whether the children made mistakes or whether we left him. As a father of children even without the relationship with me [he has to pay]. But he doesn't have that kind of mindset (ID 9).

### **Influence of the Children's Genders and Ages with the Fathers' Involvement**

The characteristics of the children such as gender and age influenced the mothers' perceptions of and decisions about the fathers' involvement with their children. Seven of the mothers who raised boys emphasized the role of the father related to their children's gender (ID 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 15, & 16). Out of the 17 mothers, 14 of them raised at least one son. These mothers experienced more difficulties raising boys compared to daughters. One mother explained her reason for contacting the father again:

I have raised two boys. If they were girls, I wouldn't contact their father. What I felt while raising these boys was that they really need a father figure.... The children could say, "I also have my father." It is especially important for boys. Of course they have a mother, but a father takes a more important meaning than a mother in some cases. Boys say things like, "My dad did this for me. My dad is such a strong man. My dad's arm is very thick." Boys talk about these things. I may unconsciously expect that their father would be there for the children (ID 5).

These mothers indicated that there were some roles fathers had to fulfill for the boys including having male conversations or doing physical activities. One mother said, "There are male conversation topics as my son grows up" (ID 16). Another mother also mentioned the difference between men and women.

They are boys, so I can't have sympathy for them. They really like physical activities, but I can't do those things. I also think quite differently from them. It has become much harder since the first son entered middle school. We have different ways of thinking. If I discipline him, he won't change his behavior except for the moment, and he thinks that I am nagging (ID 15).

In terms of the father-child relationship, most mothers agreed that the children would decide whether they would continue a relationship with their fathers or not when they grew up. These mothers, however, had different thoughts about the father-child relationship at the time of the divorce. Six mothers let their children see their fathers regardless of the mothers' level of satisfaction with the fathers' involvement since the mothers thought that the decision should be made by their children when they were old enough (ID 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, & 15). However, five mothers decided to cut off the relationship with the fathers or discouraged their children from contacting their fathers for the well-being of their children (ID 4, 6, 11, 14, & 16). These mothers made that decision on behalf of their children since these mothers thought that their children were too young to make appropriate decisions. These mothers, however, also said that their children would decide what their relationship would be with the fathers when they grew up.

### **Role of Ambiguous Interactions between Divorced Parents**

Unclear, informal, and indirect conversations often occurred during the divorced parents' decision-making process. These conversations sometimes contributed to more parental conflict over the fathers' involvement. When the Korean divorced parents made child support and visitation decisions at the time of the divorce, their conversations were somewhat unclear regarding the amount of child support or the frequency of visitation. In addition, the conversations were likely to be informal. Even when the parents decided on a specific amount, some of the parents did not consider the fathers' actual income. Instead, the fathers only promised a certain monthly amount to the mothers saying that they would or could pay that amount of child



support, regardless of their actual incomes. Furthermore, although the mothers were not sure whether they could or would receive that amount, they did not consider it a problem. These mothers simply thought that if the fathers did not pay the pre-determined amount, they would not receive it. However, if the fathers did their best, even if the amount was not what they had promised, the mothers would consider the fathers' sincerity. Indirect conversations were also common between these Korean divorced parents about visitation. Like child support, some parents did not have conversations about the fathers' visitation, but they assumed that the fathers would visit their children after their divorce.

Many Korean divorced parents were not likely to clearly explain their expectations of the other parent about their children. Some of the mothers in this study even made several contradictory statements during their interviews. They decided to discontinue the relationship with the fathers after experiencing some conflicts with the fathers over personal or parental issues, but they also expressed their negative feelings about the fathers not contacting their children after the decision and complained about the fathers' lack of attention to their children. These mothers assumed that the fathers would want to see their own children even if the mothers asked them not to visit the children. The mothers often said that even if they told the fathers that they did not want contact with the fathers anymore, if the fathers asked them to visit their children, they were willing to allow them to visit the children. However, they felt bad since the fathers did not initiate contact with their children first. Without any clear communication, it would be difficult for the fathers to understand the mothers' intentions.

Most of the Korean divorced parents did not explicitly discuss their parenting issues, but they often assumed the other parent's position. Thus, it would be difficult for the divorced parents who had unclear, informal, and indirect communications to have opportunities to think through

the roles of divorced mothers and fathers, particularly concerning what expectations both parents had, and how they constructed parental relationships after the divorce.

### **Summary**

The ways the phenomenon emerged were identified in the fourth step of analysis. Four means were used by the mothers in the study: (a) The mothers tried to justify their thinking or their decisions by comparing themselves to other Korean parents or their children; (b) The mothers interpreted the fathers' lack of involvement with their children in three ways; (c) Some of the mothers perceived necessity need for a father figure differently or decided whether to continue the relationship with the fathers depending upon their children's genders and ages; and (d) Some of the parents often had ambivalent, informal, and indirect conversations when they made parenting decisions at the time of the divorce and after the divorce.

### **Interpreting the Meaning of Phenomenon**

The fifth step of phenomenology analysis was to construct sensible meaning out of the mothers' experiences. The meaning of Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting is discussed as follows: a) a traditional gender ideology; b) a lack of understanding of postdivorce family relationships; and c) the ineffective divorce public policy in Korea. These three social contexts were interrelated and influenced the Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting.

### **Traditional Gender Ideology**

Gender roles play an important role in understanding the meanings of Korean divorced mothers' parenting experiences. Many Korean families still have a traditional gender ideology. Under the traditional gender ideology, people usually believe that while fathers take a breadwinner role, mothers take charge of childrearing even if they work outside the home. For the Korean divorced families in the present study, the fathers had a stronger traditional gender ideology compared to the mothers. The mothers said that the fathers were not likely to participate

in child care during their marriages. For this reason, most parents believed that the mothers would provide more careful parenting to their children than the fathers. In addition, the fathers who had custody at the time of the divorce also sent their children back to the mothers when they had difficulties raising their children. This provides evidence that the Korean divorced parents had a traditional gender role ideology that childrearing is the mothers' role and that it would be easier for the mothers to raise the children instead of the fathers.

A traditional gender ideology and traditional family relationships during the marriage could strengthen these gender-divided parenting patterns after the divorce. Most of the divorced fathers were not likely to take on a nurturing role during their marriages. As the mothers described, the fathers did not provide careful parenting, since they did not participate in their children's everyday lives or spend enough time with their children while they lived together. Therefore, these fathers might be less sensitive to the needs of their children and have fewer opportunities to develop their parenting skills. These father-child relationships during the marriage could be associated with the fathers' limited involvement with their children's lives after the divorce.

Some of the Korean divorced fathers also tried to control the relationships with their ex-wives through finances. The fathers claimed that the mothers should support their children by themselves since the mothers had confidence to live with their children without the fathers' support and initiated the divorce with that confidence. The fathers believed that if the mothers did not have enough ability to support the children, they should not ask the fathers for a divorce and should have stayed in the marriage. In addition, the fathers also thought if they provided financial support, their relationship with their ex-wives would change. However, these fathers' thoughts were different from the mothers who asked for support for their children because they were the children's fathers.

Some of the mothers talked about the positive aspects of the divorce by saying that they could decide how to spend money and spend more money for their children at their own discretion after the divorce (ID 4, 9, 13, & 14). They also said that they had a sense of accomplishment by making money and by living without relying on their ex-husbands' financial support (ID 5, 7, 9, & 13). These mothers' stories may reflect how financially dependent their lives were during their marriages. For mothers with these experiences, some could think that if they asked for child support, they would lose their dignity. Therefore, they wanted to restore their self-esteem and be independent from their ex-husbands by not asking for any child support.

### **Lack of Understanding of Postdivorce Family Relationships**

Postdivorce family relationships are not well defined in Korean society yet, and few positive role models for divorced families exist as divorce has increased only recently. Korean divorced parents are likely to misconstrue postdivorce family relationships and the concepts of parenting issues after divorce such as child support and visitation. While divorced parents' marital relationships end after a divorce, the parent-child relationship and parental relationship between ex-spouses need to remain after the divorce for the well-being of the children except for extreme cases. However, it was difficult for many of the Korean divorced parents in this study to distinguish between parental relationships and personal relationships with their ex-spouses. In addition, some of the parents misunderstood how the parent-child relationship or the nonresident father's responsibilities would change as their living arrangements and marital status changed.

Some of the Korean divorced fathers identified the breadwinner role of fathers differently depending on their marital status. When the mothers and the children lived with the fathers, they took on the responsibility of supporting the family members. After the divorce, however, the fathers apparently did not think that they had to provide financial support for the separated households. If they provided financial support to the mothers' households, they perceived it as

helping the mothers not their children. Thus, most of the fathers were unwilling to support the mothers after the divorce.

Given the lack of societal understanding of divorce in Korea, many parents did not appropriately prepare for the anticipated parenting issues at the time of the divorce. Most parents only briefly discussed their postdivorce parenting arrangements at the time of the divorce. Many mothers, however, experienced difficulties in parenting after the divorce because what they thought before the divorce was different from the realities they faced after the divorce. For instance, some mothers did not ask for child support from the children's fathers at the time of divorce so they could restore their own self-esteem. After the divorce, however, these mothers realized that receiving child support was not related to their pride and they also felt that their children's opportunities to receive better education diminished by not having financial support from the fathers. In terms of visitation, most parents agreed to flexible visitation schedules through informal decision-making processes. However, these mothers realized that their unstructured visitation arrangements could negatively influence their children's well-being and later experienced considerable conflicts over the irregular visitation with the fathers.

### **Ineffective Divorce Policy in Korea**

Korean divorce policy did not help Korean divorced parents develop coparenting relationships, so the parents had to deal with many parenting issues by themselves. The mothers who divorced after the law modification experienced the same problems as the mothers who divorced before the law modification. Most mothers often expected the fathers to voluntarily provide child support payments for their children. These mothers' expectations could be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, as explained earlier, some mothers might have not asked for child support from the fathers after the divorce due to their own self-esteem concerns. On the other hand, the unenforceable child support policy in Korea could play a significant role.

The mothers experienced or noticed that receiving child support was not easy for them under the Korean divorce policy, and many fathers were unwilling to pay child support voluntarily. Thus, the mothers inevitably gave up receiving child support. In addition, the mothers had to keep asking the fathers to pay child support to receive it since there was no enforcement program. They might have felt that it was demeaning to continuously ask the fathers even if paying child support was the fathers' natural responsibility. If there had been an effective child support policy including a child support enforcement program or easily accessible legal support resources in Korea, however, these mothers would not need to deal with child support personally or need to involve their personal feelings of inadequacy. With the ineffective child support policy in Korea, expecting fathers to pay child support voluntarily is the only way for the mothers to realistically receive it.

The Korean child support policy is underspecified and unenforced. This unspecified child support policy could also contribute to more conflicts between divorced parents. In terms of the amount of child support payments, for example, the parents determined the amount based on a subjective decision. Depending on how the parents negotiated, the amount would be different among divorced parents who had similar household incomes. In addition, most fathers easily agreed to a child support amount in the divorce settlement, but they did not pay it once the divorce was final. Some fathers even promised the mothers an unrealistic child support amount based on their financial capability at the time of the divorce. The fathers could easily promise this unrealistic child support but just as easily not pay it due to this unenforced policy. The Korean mothers' experiences of child support were not different for those who divorced before or after the law modification. Likewise, the mothers doubted the effectiveness of the parenting agreement which is required by the modified law and they deemphasized its effectiveness to receive any child support.

## **Summary**

In the fifth step of analysis, three social and family contexts were used to interpret the meanings of the Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting including the traditional gender ideology, unprepared divorced parents, and an ineffective divorce policy in Korea. These three contexts are connected and influence the mothers' experiences.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, findings of this study were presented according to the five analysis steps including (1) describing the phenomenon, (2) uncovering central meanings, (3) apprehending essential relationships among essences, (4) watching modes of appearing, and (5) interpreting the meaning of phenomenon. The meanings of the Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting were revealed based on the five analysis steps.

Most of the Korean divorced mothers had difficulties establishing cooperative relationships with the children's fathers, and the fathers' involvement with their children after the divorce was very limited. Related to the traditional gender role ideology, many of the divorced fathers did not think that parenting was their paternal role. In addition, most Korean divorced parents did not think much about their postdivorce parental role at the time of their divorce, so many divorced parents misunderstood their parenting role after the divorce.

Korean divorced mothers often experienced conflict over the fathers' involvement including child support and visitation with the children's fathers after the divorce. However, they did not experience much conflict over it at the time of the divorce since they did not discuss details about parenting issues. These mothers' experiences were similar regardless of when their divorce was finalized, either before or after the divorce law modification, even though the 2007 divorce law modification required divorced parents to specify their parenting agreement. This is because the modified divorce law has still left divorced parents to deal with their own issues

without providing appropriate information about postdivorce parental relationship or implementing regulations for those who do not follow the agreements.

Most mothers' priority was the well-being of their children when they made any decisions on parenting including custody and relationships with the fathers. The majority of the mothers wanted the fathers to be voluntarily involved in their children's lives, but their relationships with the fathers differed depending on the levels of the fathers' involvement. If the fathers fulfilled minimum responsibilities, the mothers were willing to maintain their relationships with the fathers. If not, the mothers considered discontinuing it or had already discontinued their relationships with the fathers to protect their children's well-being.



## **Chapter 5. Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Korean divorced mothers experience parenting after divorce. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 divorced mothers between July and September of 2009 in Seoul and its satellite cities in South Korea. Data were analyzed based on the phenomenology data analysis method even though the research was not designed as a phenomenology study. The Korean divorced mothers' experiences of parenting and their meanings were studied. In this chapter, the important findings and the limitations of this study are discussed. In addition, contributions of the study and the implications for future research and policy are discussed.

### **Discussion of Important Findings**

How to be a good nonresident father and maintain a good parental relationship after divorce are not well defined concepts in Korean families and society. Most of the Korean divorced mothers in this study wanted the fathers to be involved in their children's lives after the divorce. The mothers expected the nonresident fathers at least minimally to be responsible, considerate, and dependable fathers who would be consistently involved with their children, but the mothers thought that the fathers mostly lacked these characteristics

#### **Unprepared society and family attitudes about divorced families**

Korean society has paid relatively little attention to divorced families and provided few social resources for divorced families despite an increase in the divorce rate (Kim, Won, Lee, & Jang, 2005). Moreover, a strong social stigma about divorce is still prevalent in Korean society, so social discourse on divorced families is very limited including parental responsibilities and ideal parental relationships after divorce. For this reason, Korean divorced parents and society need more opportunities to consider appropriate postdivorce parental roles and relationships.

Korean divorce policy does not properly assist divorced families to address parenting issues even though divorce law has progressed over the past decade. The 2007 modification of the civil law requires divorcing parents to develop parenting agreements in which they should clearly outline child support and visitation prior to divorce. It is an important move to require official agreements on parenting after divorce, but these parenting agreements have not become a formal structure to help divorcing parents think through their parenting issues and the well-being of their children in advance. For many parents in the present study, these agreements seem like just paperwork to be completed to finalize their divorce because this policy was introduced without social consensus on parenting after divorce and legal restrictions. Therefore, on the one hand, prior to introducing a new policy, defining new parental roles after divorce and clarifying divorced parents' misconceptions about parental roles should be addressed. On the other hand, these findings might indicate that it takes longer to change people's understandings and attitudes toward parenting agreements after the law changes since this study was conducted only a year after the 2007 civil law modification.

A child-support direct payment order was also introduced in November 2009. Many of the divorced mothers who do not currently receive child support would benefit from this new order, but it still has limitations. Most of the mothers in this study would not benefit from it since this policy works only when fathers earn a regular income instead of being self-employed. Furthermore, even if fathers have a regular income, mothers need to find out the address of the fathers' employers to take advantage of a child-support direct payment order. Therefore, these new legal policies might be less likely to directly intervene in the reality of receiving child support payments. That is, this new order also could have given divorced parents too much discretion in their decision making, particularly mothers. As the findings of this study reveal, Korean divorced parents' experiences of parenting after the divorce were not much different

between divorced parents who divorced before and those who divorced after the 2007 law modification.

Most of the Korean divorced parents did not establish cooperative coparenting relationships after the divorce which is consistent with previous research studies (Jun, 2002; Kim & Han, 2004; Ok & Sung, 2004b; Yoo, 2005). Uncooperative parenting relationships after divorce might be related to the lack of consensus on postdivorce parental roles and responsibilities between divorced parents prior to divorce. In addition, some of the divorced parents had several misunderstandings about their parental responsibilities and parent-child relationships after the divorce. As Madden-Derdich and Leonard (2002) reported, a lack of agreement on parental behaviors could impede divorced parents from establishing explicit expectations of parental roles. Likewise, Korean divorced parents' decision-making processes about parenting concerns are characterized as a lack of mutual agreement on parenting and misunderstandings about postdivorce family relationships. This confusion could result in diminishing the children's economic and psychological well-being as well as increase parental conflict over parenting after the divorce.

The current Korean policy could reinforce divorced parents' misunderstandings and ambiguous decisions on parenting after divorce since it does not provide enough information about their new parental roles and has weak compelling power. Most of all, even though the Korean divorce policy indicates that child support is a shared responsibility between both parents, some divorced parents did not reflect this idea in their decision making. Furthermore, if nonresident fathers do not fulfill their responsibilities, some mothers cannot rely on child support policy but have to deal with the fathers personally to receive child support. As a result, some of the mothers in this study often deemphasized their parenting agreements. Several mothers also expressed their personal feelings such as feeling demeaned or, in contrast, feeling grateful for the

fathers' not meeting or meeting their parental responsibilities. These personal feelings would not be necessary if the policy enforced the fathers' responsibility to pay child support.

Korean society and divorce policy are less likely to prepare divorced parents so they can develop positive postdivorce parental and parent-child relationships. The findings of this study suggest that the divorce policy needs to help divorced parents clearly understand their responsibilities and rights and emphasize the definition of child support as the primary means to share child-related costs after divorce (Bartfeld, 2000). The divorce policy also needs to encourage divorced parents to have more conversations about future parenting issues that will arise after divorce and to fulfill their responsibilities by improving the divorce policy.

#### **Economic well-being of the children of divorce**

The economic well-being of the children of divorce should be considered when parents determine child support. Most child support guidelines in the U.S. are implemented based on the principle that both parents are expected to provide the same level of income to their children that they would have if they were living together (Bartfeld, 2000). These guidelines are also enforced so children are assured of their rights. However, the economic well-being of many of the Korean children of divorce has declined compared to when they lived with both parents since a considerable number of children of divorce do not receive any support from their nonresident fathers.

Children's economic well-being usually is based on their resident mothers' ability to provide financially. Many of the Korean divorced mothers in this study experienced financial troubles after the divorce. As the mothers in this study reported, five mothers who were on welfare at the time of the interviews were not on welfare before the divorce, but ended up relying on welfare after the divorce. In their economic hardship, these mothers were most concerned about their children's education since education expenses are a large percentage of the typical

family budget in Korea (Statistics Korea, 2009b). According to Statistics Korea (2008), single-parent households spent less money on education compared to two-parent households. In addition, educational expenditures were 8.8 times less, and depended largely on household incomes. Likewise, many divorced parents in their 30s and 40s who had school age children, reported that their children's education costs were burdensome (Kim et al., 2005). This finding reflects that many Korean children of divorce experience financial hardships and lose better educational opportunities which may contribute to the children's own cycle of poverty into adulthood. Many Korean divorced parents, however, are less likely to consider the financial well-being of their children when they determine child support at the time of divorce or after the divorce. The mothers' well-being as opposed to the children's well-being seemed to be considered even though many mothers were willing to sacrifice their own well-being to maintain the well-being of their children. Some mothers decided not to receive child support since they did not want to associate with the fathers after their divorce or they interpreted either asking for money or receiving money from the fathers as demeaning for themselves. The mothers also experienced conflict between protecting their own emotional well-being and improving their children's financial well-being. In addition, many of the fathers did not seem to care about their children's economic well-being. For some of the fathers, when they provided financial support to the mothers, they provided it to control the relationship with their ex-spouses but not for the sake of their children. Within the Korean social context, Korean divorced parents may not think that child support is for their children's financial well-being instead of being related to the parents' personal relationship.

### **Best interest of children**

Korean society and families often do not typically consider the best interest of children when they divorce. Trinder (1997) raises a question about children's rights in the discussion of parental responsibility and parental decision-making. Regarding economic well-being of children,

children have the right to maintain their standard of living and to receive adequate child care and education regardless of their parents' marital status. In terms of visitation, children have the right to develop a relationship through regular visits with the nonresident parent (Civil Law, 2007). However, it is difficult to find meaningful discussions in Korean society or in Korean divorce policy regarding the rights of children of divorce.

Some of the divorced parents in this study were not likely to consider the best interest of their children when they made decisions on parenting and established their parental relationships after the divorce. They sometimes cared more about their own positions instead of thinking of their children's best interest. The fathers paid less attention to the children's best interest compared to the mothers. As some of the mothers explained, although they talked about their children's right to visit their fathers regularly and asked the fathers to cooperate, most of the fathers did not seem to care about it. These fathers might not have understood their children's perspectives since there was little contact with the children. The parenting agreements required by the 2007 civil law modification addressed the children's right to visit the nonresident parents as well as nonresident parents' right to have regular visits with their children. However, some of the parents did not understand their visitation right as their responsibility for their children. Before requiring parents to develop the legal documents regarding child custody, child support, and visitation at the time of divorce, therefore, it is necessary to educate divorced parents to help them understand the best interest of their children and their parental rights and responsibilities.

#### **Role of fathers in Korean society**

Most mothers emphasized the father's role even though the father's role in a divorced family is not clear but symbolic. Most of the Korean divorced mothers in the study wanted the fathers to be involved with their children which is consistent with previous research studies (Jang & Min, 2002; Jun, 2002). The mothers believed that the fathers could be a role model for male

children, have male conversations, provide physical activity, and take an authoritative role. The mothers believed that it was better to have two parents involved in the children's lives, but according to the mothers, many of the fathers did not participate much in parenting during the marriage. At the same time, these mothers also acknowledged that some of the fathers would not be good fathers because they were bad role models for their children and inconsiderate of their children's needs. Under the traditional gender role ideology, fathers usually have a breadwinner role, but not many fathers even fulfilled this breadwinner role after the divorce since they did not pay child support. Nevertheless, some of the mothers said that even if they did not pay child support, they hoped the fathers would contact their children. As one mother mentioned, these mothers might want their children to be able to say, "I also have a father."

Korean divorced mothers might want to include the fathers in their children's lives since Korean society puts a strong value on a traditional two-parent family. Many divorced mothers experienced social stigma regarding being single mothers (Jang & Min, 2003). This social stigma is not only divorced mothers' experiences but also single families' experiences. Cheon and Choi's (2001) research reported that single fathers also experienced social stigma regarding father-raised children. Noh (2001) pointed out that the fathers' role has symbolic power in Korean society even if it has not been clearly defined. People are not interested much in whether men are good fathers or not if they are present in the home. However, people often idealize fathers even when they are absent by emphasizing the important role of fathers.

### **Limitations of This Study**

This study has several limitations. First, it does not include the opinions of resident or nonresident fathers who could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of divorced parents. As previous studies reported, resident fathers' experiences are different from resident mothers' experiences (Cheon & Choi, 2001; Yoo, 2005). According to Yoo's (2005)

study, mothers are willing to include fathers in parenting even if they are divorced and even if their ex-husbands were involved in adultery. However, in the opposite case, many Korean divorced resident fathers are unlikely to allow mothers to be involved with their children since they tend to consider bad wives as bad mothers. It is more common for resident fathers to discontinue their relationship with the nonresident mothers. For this reason, the researcher made considerable efforts to recruit both resident and nonresident fathers, but it was very difficult to invite them to participate in the study (Cheon & Choi, 2001) due, in part, to cultural issues in Korea. In addition, men are less likely to share their experiences with others compared to women. The researcher interviewed two resident fathers and three nonresident fathers, but their interviews were not included in the present study due to its small sample size. Thus, this research inevitably relies on the mothers' perspectives on parenting after divorce. Divorced fathers might have different experiences and perspectives from the mothers, so the divorced fathers' experiences of parenting need to be investigated in future research to have a better understanding of divorced families in Korea.

The second limitation is the use of sample selection for this study. The data sampled in this study was drawn only from Seoul and its satellites cities in Korea. In addition, the participants of this research might be relatively well adjusted to their divorces and may be more interested in the divorce policy and divorce issues compared to those who did not want to participate in the study since it could be difficult for the mothers to share their stories with the researcher considering the social stigma of divorce in Korea. The research participants were recruited through social service programs for divorced families, divorced parent self-support groups, and supportive housing for single mothers. People who participate in these programs are more likely to adjust to divorce compared those who do not participate in these programs. However, these mothers were relatively low-income because many of them were recruited



through these social service agencies. Furthermore, most of the participants in this study initiated the divorce and thought their ex-husbands caused their divorce. For this reason, these mothers might believe that they would be more appropriate parents than the fathers. Resident mothers could also explain the nonresident fathers' involvement differently depending on the divorce contexts including who initiated divorce or whose fault it was. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this study to all Korean divorced families.

The third limitation is that this study was conducted shortly after the 2007 law modification and included only four participants who experienced divorce after the law modification. It could be too early to discuss the effectiveness of the 2007 civil law modification even though it is important to initiate discussions about potential problems of the law modification. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the influence of policy changes on family life could be different over time. More research needs to be conducted with more participants over time.

### **Contributions of the Study**

The present study contributes to knowledge in several ways. This study provides further explanations of how Korean divorced parents made decisions on parenting and established their parental relationship after divorce by listening to the mothers' voices. Previous research has reported only outcomes of divorce including who had custody, how many divorced parents received child support, if they had visitation, and whether or not they had cooperative relationships, but these studies did not explain the processes of how they reached these outcomes.

It is important to determine these findings based solely on Korean divorced families' perspectives. Many Korean researchers have relied on research findings of other countries since limited divorce research has been conducted in Korea due to difficulties of divorce research. More Korean studies would expand the knowledge of Korean divorced families. One of the

difficulties of this study, for example, is that some divorced mothers did not want to participate in any research on divorce and expressed negative reactions to this research. They had participated in several studies before, but saw no changes in Korean society so they believed they did not benefit from participating in divorce studies. They felt like they were only being used for studies. In addition, because of social stigma, many divorced parents do not want to participate in studies and reveal their experiences to researchers. They also do not like to receive special attention in Korean society in which divorced families are distinguished from “the normal family.” Nevertheless, more research on divorce is necessary to facilitate discussion about issues of divorced families including parental roles and relationships after divorce for the well-being of divorced families and to improve the divorce policy to assist Korean divorced families.

This study also contributes to expanding our understanding of how the Korean divorce policy influences divorced mothers’ experiences and perceptions on parenting after the divorce by comparing mothers who experienced divorce before and after the law modification. The findings and implications of the present study would be useful for further improvement of the current divorce policy and research in Korea.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The present study provides some implications for future research. First, it would be beneficial to explore the perspectives of Korean children of divorce concerning what they consider to be a good father as well as their perspectives of nonresident and resident divorced fathers. This study was conducted from the mothers’ perspectives who shared what kinds of fathers they thought would be good fathers. However, it would be interesting to ask this same question to children of divorce. Korean children who live in two-parent family households are often aware that their fathers do not spend enough time with them due the extremely busy work expectations, even if the fathers want to be involved in their children’s lives (Shwalb, Nakazaw,

Yamanoto, & Hyun, 2010). Thus, it would be culturally accepted that Korean fathers spend considerable time outside the home and are unlikely to be actively involved in parenting. Unlike Western cultures, children might not have high expectations of their fathers, whether the parents are living together or divorced. Then, what are the perceptions of children of divorce? If divorced fathers are minimally involved in their lives, do the children consider it enough for them once they are somewhat connected to their fathers, or do they have different perceptions of their own fathers compared to children of two-parent families?

More mothers emphasized the need for the fathers to have contact with their children than to provide financial support for the emotional well-being of the children. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate whether there are any differences between the effects of accessibility to the fathers and the effects of child support payments on the well-being of children after divorce.

The inquiry of differences of power based on gender between divorced parents arose naturally during this research investigation, but the researcher did not explore this issue. Nevertheless, it would be an interesting research topic for Korean divorced families since many Korean married couples experience power differences in their marriages. Even after the divorce, gender-based power differences are found in the divorced family relationship whereby the mothers want the fathers to be involved in parenting and the fathers could decide whether or not they want to participate in parenting.

Another potential research topic would be disposable incomes of mothers depending on their marital status. Single-mother households usually have lower household incomes compared to two-parent households or single-father households. Interestingly, some of the mothers in this study, however, said that they could spend more money on their children at their own discretion compared to the money that they spent during the marriage since they could now decide how to

spend money. It would be interesting to investigate mothers' control over income within the family depending on marital status or the couple relationship.

Western studies have emphasized shared responsibility and equal parenting time for divorced parents, but given current Korean cultural expectations, it would be difficult to expect Korean nonresident fathers to meet these expectations since fathers' involvement in parenting is minimal during marriage based on the traditional gender ideology in Korea. It would be important to develop guidelines or education materials that suggest appropriate levels of nonresident fathers' involvement in parenting based on the Korean social and family contexts.

### **Implications for Policy**

Policy influences family life and parenting (Bogenschneider, 2006). Thus, the Korean divorce policy should be structured to support divorced parents who fulfill their responsibilities for their children as well as to encourage divorced parents who do not fulfill their responsibilities for the well-being of divorced families. The Korean divorce policy should be improved to help divorced families make informed decisions, to dissolve conflicts over parenting issues, and to improve the well-being of children of divorce since these issues have received little attention. The findings of this research would be useful for developing education curriculum for parents, persons who work with divorced families, and policymakers in Korea. Three policy implications for divorced families are particularly important: (a) parenting education, (b) child support, and (c) social support for needy families.

#### **Parenting education for divorced parents**

Divorce education programs would provide valuable opportunities for divorcing parents to consider their new parental roles after divorce and help develop a better understanding of postdivorce parent-child relationships as well as a deeper understanding of the well-being of their children. Previous research has reported positive effects of parenting education on divorced

parents' parenting roles and responsibilities including increased awareness of the children's needs as separate from the parents' needs, increased parenting skills, and a greater willingness to establish a healthier coparenting relationship (Cookston, Braver, Griffin, Delusé, & Miles, 2007; Kelly, 2007; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001).

Seoul Family Court has provided a one-hour mandatory parenting education session for divorcing parents with minor children when both parents visit the court to file for divorce (Ryu, 2010). This program is designed to help divorcing parents develop parenting agreements. This would be a very important opportunity for divorcing parents to be given information about the importance of establishing a good parental relationship and parent-child relationship after divorce prior to developing their parenting agreements. In addition, it would be an effective and convenient way of delivery since both parents have to participate in these parenting education programs when they visit court to file for divorce. Considering the complexity of parenting issues after divorce, however, its effectiveness is still questionable due to the length and depth of a short one-hour education. Therefore, it is necessary to have rigorous evaluations for this program regarding appropriate length of education and topics that are delivered to divorcing parents to be an effective parenting education program. In addition to general parenting education, providing specific models for parenting agreements and a detailed visitation template would be helpful for divorcing parents since the current template for parenting agreements is too simple to encourage them to consider specific visitation plans and make clear decisions on parenting after divorce. Furthermore, considering the importance of divorce education, it is necessary to expand these parenting education programs to courts in other areas in Korea.

More evidence-based divorce education programs should be developed. In terms of its curriculum, several components need to be addressed in divorce education based on the findings of this study. Most importantly, divorce education programs should address newly defined

parental roles and responsibilities after divorce to increase the knowledge and practices of divorced parents because many of the divorced parents in this study had misconceptions about these issues. Madden-Derdich and Leonard (2000) also reported that nonresident fathers often experience difficulties participating in parenting due to the ambiguity of their roles. In addition, it is important to emphasize the best interest of the children when divorced parents make decisions on parenting. Based on this perspective, when divorced parents think about their parental relationships after divorce, it should be separate from their personal relationships with their ex-spouses.

Another component that should be addressed in divorce education is communication skills to encourage clear communication between divorcing parents. The mothers in this study often made decisions on parenting based on their assumptions regarding the fathers' intention without having clear communication with the fathers. Similarly, the fathers' decisions on parental involvement could be related to their beliefs about their former spouses' actions (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Communication skill education would help divorced parents to establish healthy coparental relationships.

Parenting education is necessary for married parents as well as divorced parents. As the findings of the present study presented, most of the mothers who had uncooperative relationships with the fathers reported that the fathers did not actively participate in parenting during the marriage. In addition, the mothers believed that a good father-child relationship after divorce was related to the father-child relationship before the divorce. Kelly's (2007) research also supports these findings and explains that the family structure before divorce could reinforce the parent-child relationship without making much effort. Thus, parenting education regarding being a good father and the parent-child relationship is important for married parents as well as divorced parents.

## **Child support**

Child support should become an important part of the divorce policy in Korea considering child support is an important financial resource for children of divorce and their resident mothers (Case et al., 2003). Furthermore, child support from nonresident fathers reduces the relative financial burden of resident mothers (Garrison, 1999). Researchers have claimed that a stronger child support policy would improve the level of living of children and their resident mothers (Cha, 2006; Kim et al., 2005; Lee, 2009). Therefore, it is important to have strong child support guidelines and effective child support collection systems in Korea.

*Child support guidelines.* Child support guidelines that include objective resources regarding the cost of raising children would be helpful for divorced parents to decide the appropriate amount of child support. Since there are no child support guidelines in Korea, the usual amount of child support set in court for contested divorce cases is available information in terms of the amount of child support. The judges, however, have decided differently with similar cases.

The necessity of setting realistic and fair child support guidelines is increasing as all divorcing parents with minor children are required to develop parenting agreements based on the 2007 civil law modification. Recently, the number of contested divorce cases has increased after introducing the parenting agreement policy because if divorcing parents are not able to reach an agreement on parenting, they cannot file for an uncontested divorce (Yang, 2010). This increase reflects the fact that many divorcing parents experience conflict over child support. Child support guidelines could reduce this conflict since divorcing parents could use the amount suggested in the child support guidelines to reduce both the social and financial costs of a contested divorce.

One district court suggests guidelines for child support (Chang, 2008), but every judge does not need to follow the suggested amount. This district court recommends that nonresident

parents pay 30% of their disposable income except for high-income and low-income families. For low-income families, the recommendation is that nonresident parents pay KRW 300,000 (US \$262) per month even if this amount is above 30% of the nonresident parents' disposable income. The guidelines suggested by this district court only consider the nonresident parents' income, however. Further discussions regarding the assumptions of child support guidelines and different formulas (Beld & Biernat, 2003) are necessary to establish appropriate and fair child support guidelines in Korea.

The actual cost of raising children should be considered when child support orders are established in the court since the amount of child support usually ordered in the court is relatively small compared to the actual cost of raising children in Korea (Jang & Min, 2002). According to research from the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, in 2006, if a family had a KRW 1,492,000 (US \$1,303) average monthly household income, they spent an average of KRW 881,000 (US \$769) for child rearing including education, food, clothing, and health care. They spent almost 60% of their household income for their children (Kim, 2007). For a family with an average of KRW 577,000 (US \$504) monthly household income, they spent a surprising 144% of their income on child rearing. In other words, since these low-income families often believe that children's education is crucial for the well-being of the entire family, the parents even borrow money to spend on their children's education. Thus, the actual cost of raising children is relatively high compared to the usual amount of child support set in the court with a range of between KRW 300,000 (US \$262) and 500,000 (US \$436) in 2006 (Cha, 2006) .

***Child support collection systems.*** Many researchers have suggested several strategies to increase nonresident parents' child support payments in Korea: (a) strengthening the child support policy by forcing divorced parents to pay child support; and (b) the government paying child



support to resident parents first and then seeking indemnity from the nonresident parents (Kim et al., 2005; Lee, 2001, 2009).

Compulsory execution is necessary to collect unpaid child support in Korea. To date, only the ethical responsibility of fathers to pay has been emphasized but only a small number of nonresident fathers voluntarily pay child support. The Korean government has provided legal aid for divorced parents by sponsoring the Korea Legal Aid Corporation and the Korea Legal Aid Center for Family Relations to help single parents file lawsuits against nonresident parents who do not pay child support (Ministry of Health & Welfare, 2010). As the findings of the present study show, however, many of the divorced mothers gave up receiving child support from the fathers since the legal processes were time-consuming and somewhat complex for the mothers. This is consistent with Lee's (2001) research. Furthermore, even if the court ordered the fathers to pay child support, if the mothers were not able to provide evidence that the fathers had assets or consistent incomes, there was no way to receive it. These mothers also had to keep track the fathers' financial status over time to receive child support someday. It was not an effective procedure for divorced mothers. Another solution, a child-support direct payment order, is only available for a limited number of divorced parents whose ex-spouses have regular incomes like company employees. Therefore, it is clear that a strong child support enforcement program is necessary in Korea. Establishing an independent government agency that collects child support on behalf of the mothers would be helpful since many divorced mothers did not want to associate with the fathers because of the money issues.

Another way to collect unpaid child support is that the government pays child support to resident mothers first and then seeks indemnity from nonresident fathers when nonresident fathers do not pay the established amount. According to the UN Convention on Children's Rights, if private support is unavailable, the government has to provide support for the children (Lee, 2001).

In addition, Sung and Chang (2008) raised a question whether childrearing is a private responsibility or public responsibility since a child support enforcement program emphasizes parental responsibility for their children. This policy would increase the government's protection for children of divorce. This collection method for child support payments would be important to secure the economic well-being of children first regardless of child support, so it would benefit children of divorce and their resident parents.

### **Social support for needy families**

The government's support for low-income, single-mother households should be expanded. It is very difficult for low-income, single mothers to receive welfare in Korea (Kim et al., 2005). If fathers have economic capability to support their children after divorce, the government needs to engage in a private issue to ensure that the fathers pay for child support. If parental support is impossible, however, the government has to take responsibility to protect these children. Nevertheless, the Korean government has paid insufficient attention to low-income single-mother families. The Korean government has provided minimal support including a child-rearing allowance and high school tuition for single parents with children under age 18 who are at or below 130% of Korean poverty guidelines. In terms of the child-rearing allowance, the Korean government pays only KRW 50,000 (US \$44) a month to low-income single parents who raise a child under 12 years old (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2010). However, considering the actual cost of raising children and the expensive cost of private tutoring in Korea, it is questionable whether this policy really helps low-income single mothers and their children.

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## Appendix A. Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in Research Study: One-to-One Interview

You are invited to participate in a research study about “Divorce Policy and the Well-being of Divorced Parents and their Children in Korea.” Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Seohee Son at the University of Minnesota, Department of Family Social Science, 290 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108, U.S.A. I can be contacted by phone in Korea (XXX) XXX-XXXX, in the U.S.A. (XXX) XXX-XXXX, or by email at \_\_\_\_\_@umn.edu.

#### Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of divorced parents regarding parenting after divorce. This study will be used to provide meaningful information for researchers and policy makers and suggest policy implications for the well-being of divorced families.

#### Criteria for Participating in the Study

In order to be involved in this study, participants must have had their divorce finalized no longer than five years ago and have at least one child under age 18.

#### Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you some open-ended questions about your experiences of divorce and parenting after divorce. Sample questions are as follows: How would you describe your experience of reaching an agreement on parenting issues such as custody, child support, and visitation with your child(ren)?; and What are the barriers to coparenting after divorce? The interview will last between 60-90 minutes and will be audio taped. After completion of the interview, you will be given a KRW 30,000 (US \$26) gift card as a thank you for helping with the study.

#### Data Acquisition and Confidentiality

All information obtained for this study will be coded by identification numbers to protect your participant confidentiality. I will use a digital audio recorder and the recording will be password secured. The interview data will be kept confidential and will not be shared with others. All information obtained for this study will be stored securely. The data obtained for this study will be used for research purposes only. The audio recordings will be erased after the completion of the study.

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study

During your participation in the research, you may feel stressed or uncomfortable given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic of divorce. If you express any discomfort or concerns, the interview will be stopped, and I will give you the list of service organizations that could provide counseling or consulting regarding the issues of divorced parents. A benefit to this study is that you might want to have a voice concerning divorce under the current social and law contexts and may want to share your feelings and the experiences with others. Another benefit to this study is that you may have a chance to reflect on your life and relationships with your ex-spouse and child(ren). In addition, this study will be used to provide meaningful information for researchers and policy makers and suggest policy implications for the well-being of divorced families.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

You are free to accept or decline to participate in this study. You should decide to participate freely without any obligations to do so. You may decide to withdraw at any time and your decision to do so will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or with me.

Contacts and Questions

I would be glad to answer any further question you may have about the study. Please feel free to contact Seohee Son at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or \_\_\_\_\_@umn.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than me, contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (1-612) 625-1650. My advisor for this study is Dr. Kathryn Rettig, and she can be contacted at (1-XXX) XXX-XXXX, email: \_\_\_\_\_@umn.edu.

Statement of Consent for One-to-One Interviews

I have heard the researcher read and explain the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study in the one-to-one interview format.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B. Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your experiences of divorce in general (reasons for the divorce).
2. Please tell me the barriers to divorce and the nature of the divorce process.
  - a. How would you describe your experiences about reaching an agreement on parenting issues such as custody, child support, and visitation with your child(ren)'s father?
  - b. Are you satisfied with the divorce outcomes including custody, child support, and visitation?
3. Please tell me about your marriage and father-child relationships before the divorce.
4. What about your current relationship with your child(ren)?
5. What is your current relationship with your child(ren)'s father?
  - a. What are your expectations of the nonresident father?
6. What is your opinion about coparenting after divorce in Korean society?
  - a. What are the barriers to coparenting after divorce?
7. What about your current life as a whole?
  - a. What are the positive aspects of divorce?
  - b. What are your difficulties after divorce?
8. Please tell me about your child(ren)'s adjustment after your divorce?
9. What kinds of support do you have/need to help your adjustment to divorce?
10. What do you think about the current divorce law and process such as the cooling off period and parenting agreements?
  - a. Do you think that the current policy could influence your parent-child relationship after divorce?
  - b. Do you have comments on these policies based on your experiences?
11. Do you have any comments on this research for policy makers?

## Appendix C. Code System

1. Decisions on Parenting after Divorce
  - 1.1. Reasons for having custody
    - 1.1.1. Natural duty of mothers
    - 1.1.2. Mistrusted the fathers' competency
    - 1.1.3. Fathers giving up custody
  - 1.2. Decisions on child support
    - 1.2.1. Reflecting the parents' financial or parenting situation
    - 1.2.2. Agreeing to the father's arbitrary decisions
    - 1.2.3. Agreeing to the usual amount of child support set in the court
    - 1.2.4. Not receiving child support
  - 1.3. Nonresident fathers' visitation arrangements
    - 1.3.1. Fixed visitation plan
    - 1.3.2. Flexible visitation plan
    - 1.3.3. No visitation plan but a tacit agreement on the on-going relationship
    - 1.3.4. No visitation plan and no relationship.
  
2. Fathers' Involvement in the Children's Lives after the Divorce
  - 2.1. Satisfactory on-going relationship
  - 2.2. Dissatisfactory on-going relationship
  - 2.3. Discontinued relationship

3. Coparenting after the Divorce
  - 3.1. Cooperative relationships in coparenting after the divorce
  - 3.2. Uncooperative relationships in coparenting after the divorce
    - 3.2.1. Uncooperative fathers
    - 3.2.2. Uncooperative mothers
    - 3.2.3. Ambiguous communication regarding parenting after divorce
  
4. Mothers' Expectations of the Roles of Fathers in the Children's Lives
  - 4.1. Same expectations
  - 4.2. Lowered expectations
  - 4.3. No expectations
  
5. Mothers' Experiences of Divorce Policy Contexts in Korea
  - 5.1. Ineffective child support policy
    - 5.1.1. Child support as a personal issue
    - 5.1.2. Lack of systemic support for child support
  - 5.2. Mothers' perspective on parenting agreements after the law modification

### Appendix D. Examples of Mothers' Expectations of the Role of Fathers

Component <sup>17</sup>	Subcategories	Quotes
Financial support		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the children want something, he could do that for them. (ID 1)</li> <li>• I would tell my children that your father gave this precious money to you even though he is in financial trouble. (ID 2)</li> <li>• For example, if the children want to study something and I cannot afford it, then I could ask their father for help and then the children could study. (ID 7)</li> <li>• He has to financially support them until they grow up. (ID 8)</li> <li>• I could tell the children that we could live due to their father's support. (ID 9)</li> <li>• I couldn't ignore the father's financial support. (ID 10)</li> <li>• I just ask him to pay child support and play with the children. (ID 14)</li> <li>• I hope that he will regularly support the children even if it would be a small amount of money. (ID 17)</li> </ul>
Positive activity engagement	Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is much better for the children than before when they had no contact. (ID 1)</li> <li>• I would feel bad if the father didn't do this [visits]. (ID 2)</li> <li>• We are separated, but I wish that he would visit the children regularly. It would be helpful for their emotions. (ID 6)</li> <li>• I wish that the father sometimes would eat out with the children. (ID 9)</li> <li>• I don't disagree with the father sometimes seeing the child to go to an amusement park or to watch a movie together. (ID 10)</li> <li>• I would not hinder him from contacting the children. (ID 12)</li> </ul>

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<sup>17</sup> Pleck's (2010) components of paternal involvement were used.

**Appendix D. Examples of Mothers' Expectations of the Role of Fathers (Continued)**

Component	Subcategories	Quotes
Positive activity engagement	Playmate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is 6 years old, so for now I expect the father to play with the child more often. (ID 3)</li> <li>• Father's roles include playing with the children and financial support, things like that. (ID 4)</li> <li>• I hoped he would play enthusiastically with the children over the weekends. (ID 5)</li> <li>• I expected him to play with the child and to read books. (ID 13)</li> <li>• He just would be satisfied that he sometimes visits the children and plays with them. (ID 14)</li> <li>• They really like physical activities, but I can't do those things. (ID 15)</li> </ul>
Warmth	Affection Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regardless of where they stay, I wish that their father would help the children concerning something they were confused about, that they could trust their father's love, and that they were aware that their father always hoped that they were doing well even though they lived with their mother. (ID 7)</li> <li>• As he dated the woman, he paid less attention to my child. I thought if I let him continue the relationship with the child, she will be hurt again, so I cut off the relationship (ID 11)</li> </ul>
Responsiveness	Psychological presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the father was just there, the children would be satisfied with that. (ID 5)</li> <li>• He could be supportive of them when they are in trouble emotionally. (ID 8)</li> </ul>
Control	Principle guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So if the father called the children and has some conversation about their behavior or attitudes, I would be less concerned about my children even if I worked outside the home and left them alone. (ID 1)</li> <li>• We have different ways of thinking. If I say something, he won't change his behavior except for a moment and he thinks that I am nagging. (ID 15)</li> <li>• Getting things they want might be good for the children for the time being; there is no real presence as a father for the children. In this aspect, nobody is taking charge of the authoritative role in this family. (ID 17)</li> </ul>
	Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the children get in trouble, they can go to their father for advice if I am not available. (ID 8)</li> <li>• Even if he can't pay child support, he could visit the children and give them advice. (ID 16)</li> <li>• He will need his father to make decisions, for example, his education. (ID 13)</li> </ul>