

The Lived Childbirth Experience of Korean First-time Mothers in the United States

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BACKGROUND: The trend of recent global migration has highlighted the importance of cultural awareness among health care providers because acknowledging cultural difference and its impacts on immigrant women's out-of-culture childbirth experience is particularly crucial in obstetrical care settings.

OBJECTIVE: To explore the lived experience of Korean first-time immigrant mothers giving birth in the United States from their own perspectives.

DESIGN: Hermeneutic phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews with seven Korean first-time mothers who recently gave birth in the United States. The interview data were analyzed to identify emerging themes, which were centered on both positive and negative perceptions of the experience.

RESULTS: The emerged positive perceptions included friendly health care providers, husband's active involvement, strengthened bonding with husband, freedom from traditional rituals and taboos, and giving the baby a U.S. citizenship. Difficulty in making medical decisions, health literacy, a different health system, different postpartum food culture, and lack of support system were identified as negative perceptions.

CONCLUSIONS: The findings of this study may help health care providers in obstetrical settings better understand the meaningful aspects of childbirth experienced by Korean immigrant first-time mothers while they gave birth and received perinatal care in the U.S. sociocultural context. Immigrants' childbirth experience in a foreign country has multidimensional aspects that suggest further research on their perinatal health needs evolving from a different health culture, culturally embedded health practices, and lack of support system.

KEYWORDS: Korean immigrant mothers; childbirth experience; phenomenology; culturally congruent perinatal care