

**CHILDCARE IDEOLOGIES:
A LONGITUDINAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
WORKING MOTHERS IN SOUTH KOREA**

by

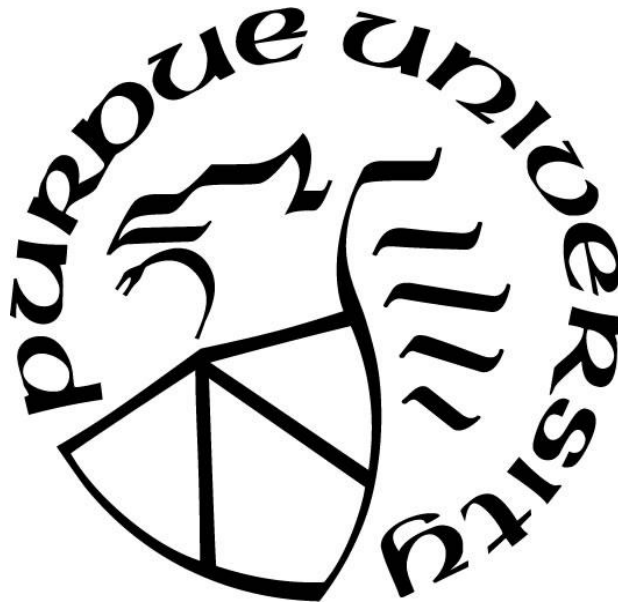
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines working women's experiences with careers and childcare in South Korea. Korea is characterized by its ultra-low fertility rate, aging population, and high proportions of working women and those opting out of work after childbirth. Despite the government's generous childcare policies and widespread help from child(ren)'s grandmothers, Korean mothers report substantial difficulties in pursuing their careers due to childcare responsibilities. Thus, this dissertation asks the following questions: 1) How do beliefs and norms about childcare influence Korean women's career pursuits and childcare arrangements? 2) What factors influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits in the context of COVID-19? 3) How does grandmothers' care help influence Korean working mothers' careers and childcare arrangements?

To investigate these questions, I analyze three waves of longitudinal in-depth interview data (n=102) from women in Korea. The first wave was collected in-person in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic with 37 women. The second (n=32) was conducted in 2020, and the final (n=33) wave in 2021. Due to travel restrictions related to COVID-19, the second and final waves were conducted virtually using video calls. The semi-structured interviews asked questions about women's experiences with their careers and childcare, and examined how their experiences have changed or remained the same since the COVID-19 pandemic. This is one of the first qualitative studies to examine working mothers' experiences with childcare pre-pandemic (2019) and during the pandemic (2020 and 2021).

Based on the findings, I develop the concept of "childcare ideologies"—defined as beliefs and norms about childcare. Korean women shared a diverse range of beliefs and norms about childcare encompassing family members like mothers, fathers, and grandparents, as well as non-family members like care facilities and the government. Because childcare is not a concern or responsibility of mothers alone, this dissertation encourages the sociological scholarship to conceptualize childcare more broadly, by including the discussions of political interests, social and cultural norms, and intergenerational familial care, among other relevant factors.

In addition, I document women's experiences related to pursuing their careers and arranging grandmothers' childcare help. The findings show the influence of *gendered* childcare beliefs and norms on Korean mothers' career aspirations and pursuits. Childcare beliefs that do

not assume that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare motivated mothers to aspire to career success and pursue such aspirations. On the other hand, childcare beliefs that associate mothers with having primary childcare responsibility discouraged mothers from their career aspirations and pursuits. Furthermore, while I demonstrate Korean mothers' heavy reliance on their children's grandmothers for childcare help, I show that mothers preferred to receive childcare help from maternal grandmothers than from paternal grandmothers.

In analyzing these empirical findings, this dissertation contextualizes Korean mothers' experiences related to childcare and career pursuits within the novel context of the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, I employ a gendered life course framework to investigate how women's family lives and careers have been affected when the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic caused an economic and societal disruption, in addition to a health crisis. I conclude the dissertation with empirical implications and policy recommendation to better anticipate future health challenges and to assist working women and their families when these challenges emerge.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Taking care of children and arranging childcare are major responsibilities in mothers' lives. For working mothers in particular, childcare is another job to be performed at home in addition to their career responsibilities (Hochschild and Machung 2012). Despite the rise of a gender ideology that prioritizes egalitarianism, childcare responsibilities are still primarily assumed to be women's rather than shared equally between mothers and fathers (Bianchi et al. 2012; Daminger 2020). Ideologies of *good motherhood* often hinge on women's fulfillment of intensive mothering and prioritization of childcare (Hays 1996). Accordingly, childcare is often done by mothers themselves, with other women who are kin or hired caretakers frequently assisting mothers in this task (Glenn 2010). At the same time, childcare arrangements also involve more than mothers, such as other unpaid and paid caregivers and government support (Krapf 2009).

Although a rich body of work has examined ideologies of motherhood and how they contribute to gender inequality in societies across the globe (e.g., Collins 2019), no research to date has examined in detail the beliefs and norms tied specifically to childcare arrangements and responsibilities. Thus, I conceptualize childcare arrangements more broadly beyond ideologies tied specifically to motherhood. This study takes such an approach by investigating *childcare ideologies*—defined as beliefs and norms related to childcare—among working mothers in South Korea (henceforth Korea). In particular, I examine the types of childcare ideologies in Korea, and how they are relevant to working mothers' career pursuits, and care arrangements with their child(ren)'s grandmothers. In doing so, I contextualize Korean women's experiences within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study is set in Korea because Korea has a unique combination of generous governmental benefits for childcare as well as traditional norms that render childcare the responsibility of mothers and other women in the family. The Korean government provides strong support for childcare, including tax benefits, cash allowance, comprehensive childcare facilities, and paid parental leave policies that are longer than the average leave of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD 2019b). At the same time, Korean grandmothers commonly provide care for their grandchildren. However, despite the institutional and familial resources that working parents can draw on for childcare support, evidence suggests that Korean mothers struggle to balance work and childcare (Brinton and Oh

2019; Goo and Chang 2018). For example, although Korea provides one of the longest parental leaves among the OECD countries (OECD 2019b), a report from 2018 showed that 50% of Korean working mothers left their careers after their first birth and 47% of those who left gave childcare as the reason (Lee et al. 2018). As a result, Korea's population of working mothers was the fourth lowest among the OECD countries in 2019 (OECD 2020).

Korea has experienced several demographic changes in recent decades that are tied to new family formation patterns and dynamics: increases in women's education and employment, delays in parenthood, and declines in fertility (Park and Woo 2020). Specifically, 76% of Korean women aged 25-34 earned a tertiary education degree in 2018 as opposed to 60% in 2008 (OECD 2019a); additionally, 51% of Korean women were working in 2019, a slight increase from 47% in 2000 (Statistics Korea 2019b). Korea also has an aging population (15% of the total population is 65 years or older in 2019) and an extremely low total fertility rate (TFR, 0.98 children per woman in 2018) (OECD 2019b; Statistics Korea 2019a). At the same time, Korean women experience gender inequality at work and home. Korea reports the highest gender pay gap among OECD countries (OECD 2020) and a majority (73%) of working mothers in Korea are also primarily responsible for household labor (Korean National Statistical Office, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in care responsibilities between women and men, increasing the burdens on working mothers in particular (UN Women 2020). In Korea, emerging evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental effect on families' abilities to arrange childcare. For instance, during the height of the pandemic in Korea in March 2020, 36% of working parents experienced a gap in childcare, and 59% of parents have changed their childcare arrangements since the outbreak of COVID-19 (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education 2020). COVID-19 could be especially disruptive to Korean childcare arrangements because many families rely on grandmothers, who are at an elevated risk of COVID-19 infection and complications because of their age.

In this dissertation, I provide an account of Korean mothers' experiences related to childcare and career pursuits, focusing on beliefs and norms tied to childcare. Drawing from 102 interviews with 37 women conducted across three years, I analyze women's experiences in childcare and careers both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. That is, I compare women's narratives before (2019) and during (2020 and 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic to examine the longitudinal impact of COVID-19. By comparing data collected from the same women before and

during COVID-19, the findings from this dissertation advance our understanding of how working mothers pursue their careers and negotiate childcare arrangements with grandmothers in the midst of a global pandemic. This information is essential for designing policies to better anticipate future health challenges and to assist working women and their families when these challenges emerge. Moreover, this dissertation aims to bolster efforts and resources to support working women, to reduce gender inequality in families, and to promote a healthier working and parenting environment.

In the sections below, I describe the dissertations' research objectives, and provide a brief overview of each empirical chapter (Chapters 4-6). In Chapter 2, I introduce the theoretical framework of the dissertation and review the relevant literature for each empirical chapter. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research methods including the research setting, sample, data collection, and analysis. In Chapter 7, I summarize the findings from each empirical chapter, and conclude with theoretical and empirical contributions of this dissertation.

1.1 Research Objectives

1.1.1 Objective 1: To investigate and document ideologies of childcare in Korea.

The term “ideology” refers to how a group of people makes sense of and thinks about the world (Glenn, Chang, and Forcey 1994). In this dissertation, I conceptualize an *ideology* as a set of beliefs and norms that is widely shared. More specifically, *childcare ideologies* encompass individual beliefs and societal norms regarding childcare. These beliefs and norms include what is defined as good childcare, and who should be providing and held responsible for childcare. Although the discipline of sociology has been invested in understanding ideologies of motherhood and family, there is a lack of discussion on ideologies specific to childcare. However, childcare often involves multiple sources of care beyond mothers, such as familial and non-familial caregivers and governments, all of which influence beliefs and norms tied to childcare arrangements (Krapf 2009). Additionally, because COVID-19 has complicated childcare arrangements since formal and informal sources of childcare have declined during the pandemic (United Nations 2020), there is an urgent need to understand childcare dynamics within broader social and structural contexts. Thus, this dissertation fills an important gap in the literature in

conceptualizing childcare as its own ideology rather than subsuming it within ideologies of motherhood.

1.1.2 Objective 2: To investigate what factors influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits in the context of COVID-19

Career aspirations are individual preferences relevant to careers, and these preferences are likely to influence career-related decisions (Correll 2004). Although parenthood influences career aspirations for both men and women, women are more likely than men to downshift their career goals and paths after having children (Lee and Cheon 2009; Bass 2015; Kim, O'Brien and Kim 2016). A report from 2018 showed that 50% of Korean working mothers left their careers after their first birth and 47% of those who left gave childcare as the reason (Lee et al. 2018). This finding resonates with research showing that childcare is one of the primary reasons for work-family conflict (Moen 2011). In addition to childcare responsibilities, a toxic workplace culture and the recent COVID-19 pandemic are expected to pose more challenges for women's career pursuits. Given that Korea already struggles with lower maternal employment compared to average OECD countries (OECD 2020), it is timely to investigate factors deterring women's career pursuits. Thus, this dissertation examines Korean mothers' experiences of pursuing their careers while navigating their childcare responsibilities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and investigates the factors that either diminish or enhance Korean mothers' career aspirations.

1.1.3 Objective 3: To investigate the extent of grandmothers' care help for Korean working mothers.

Around the world, working parents attempting to juggle their work and childcare responsibilities often rely on their child(ren)'s grandparents for help with childcare. In Korea, 38% of parents receive childcare help from grandparents (Lee et al. 2019). Among grandparents, grandmothers take primary responsibility for childcare because childcare and housework are traditionally considered as within women's domestic sphere (Barnett 1999), although research has shown that more grandfathers in the United States become involved in grandchildren care in their 60s (Kahn, McGill, and Bianchi 2011). In Korea, while fathers and grandfathers participate very little in childcare, grandmothers' help with childcare remains consistently high (Oh 2018). Overall,

given the heavy reliance on grandmothers for childcare help in Korea (Lee and Bauer 2010), this dissertation investigates the extent of grandmothers' care help for Korean working mothers.

In addition, there is a growing popularity in maternal grandparental help, compared to paternal grandparental help. The data from 2018 show that 22% of Korean parents received childcare help from maternal grandparents—an increase from 16% in 2012—whereas 16% received help from paternal grandparents in 2018 (15% in 2012) (Lee et al. 2019). Thus, I also examine the difference between paternal and maternal grandmothers' care help, and how grandmothers' care help has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Empirical Chapter Outline

1.2.1 Chapter 4: Childcare Ideologies

This chapter investigates and documents ideologies of childcare in Korea in three ways (Objective 1). First, I demonstrate what Korean mothers conceptualize as quality childcare, by documenting Korean women's idea of what good childcare looks like. Second, I show Korean mothers' beliefs on who should be responsible for providing such quality childcare. The findings show that while Korean mothers value their identities and roles as mothers, a majority of them also emphasize the roles of other family members, non-familial care providers, and institutions in childcare labor. Finally, I document how childcare ideologies have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that childcare ideologies, like other ideologies, change across time and context.

1.2.2 Chapter 5: Korean Mother's Career Aspirations and Pursuits

This chapter investigates what factors influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits in the context of COVID-19 (Objective 2). I first document how childcare ideologies influence women's career aspirations and pursuits. Specifically, childcare beliefs that do not assume that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare motivated mothers to aspire for career success and pursue such aspirations. On the other hand, childcare beliefs that associate mothers with primary childcare responsibility discouraged mothers from their career aspirations and pursuits. Second, I document women's experiences of workplace culture and policy. By doing so, I analyze how some workplace policies and culture motivate, and others discourage, Korean

women from their career aspirations and pursuits. Finally, I describe how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced women's career experiences. In sum, this chapter responds to calls for longitudinal research on working mothers' career aspirations to better capture change over time, and to enhance our understanding of women's experiences with work and family after childbirth (see Kim et al. 2016). It also provides novel insights on the longitudinal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers.

1.2.3 Chapter 6: Korean Mothers' Experiences with Grandmothers' Childcare Help

In this chapter, I investigate the extent of grandmothers' care help for working mothers in Korea (Objective 3). Building on the findings on childcare ideologies from Chapter 4, I document Korean mothers' experience of receiving childcare help from grandmothers. Overall, Korean women discuss that there are greater advantages than disadvantages in receiving childcare help from grandmothers. At the same time, the findings show that maternal and paternal grandmothers' childcare helps Korean working mothers differently. While there are general advantages in receiving help from grandmothers, mothers experienced more disadvantages when receiving care help from their mothers-in-law (paternal grandmothers) than from their own mothers (maternal grandmothers). Finally, I analyze how the extent of grandmothers' involvement with childcare has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from this chapter highlight the importance of the varying and changing role of grandparental childcare involvement for adult children.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

As introduced in Chapter 1, this dissertation explores Korean mothers' experiences related to childcare and career pursuits, focusing on beliefs and norms tied to childcare. In this chapter, I situate this dissertation within previous literature. There are three sections in this chapter. First, I explain the overall theoretical framework—the gendered life course framework—that I employed in this dissertation. Second, I delineate previous studies that are relevant to my three research objectives. Finally, I introduce the cultural and social contexts of Korea and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which provide the context for this dissertation.

2.1 Gendered Life Course Framework

I employ a gendered life course framework in this dissertation. The life course framework situates individual and family adaptive strategies within the broader and shifting contexts of history, society, and culture (Moen and Wethington 1992). I use this theoretical framework because it overcomes some of the limitations of the concept of family adaptive strategies, which has been commonly used in the work-family literature. In this section, I define the concept of family adaptive strategies, discuss the advantages and limitations of this concept, and then introduce the gendered life course framework, which serves as the framework for the dissertation.

2.1.1 Family Adaptive Strategies

The concept of family adaptive strategies has been widely used in the literature on work-family because it acknowledges a family's rational abilities to devise strategies to cope with challenges (Engelen 2002; Kok 2002; Moen and Wethington 1992). This is a useful concept to understand how families come up with certain strategies in response to social change (Moen and Wethington 1992). At the same time, scholars have also debated the conceptual and methodological limitations of the concept of family adaptive strategies. (Engelen 2002; Moen and Wethington 1992). Below, I discuss the conceptual limitations, followed by methodological limitations of family adaptive strategies.

Limitations of Family Adaptive Strategies

There are two major conceptual limitations in investigating the concept of family adaptive strategies. First, it is unclear whether scholars can interpret a family's actions as strategies without imbuing their own interpretation (Moen and Wethington 1992). For example, even though researchers may understand one action as a strategy, family members may disagree (Moen and Wethington 1992). Second, it is unclear whether such strategies can be considered as causally driven by macro-level demographic changes (Moen and Wethington 1992). For example, when family members seek employment opportunities when the breadwinner becomes unemployed during an economic crisis, researchers may interpret this change as the families' micro-level strategy to overcome the macro-level economic crisis. However, this interpretation is still based on the scholars' implicit interpretations, rather than the explicit observations of how these strategies are indeed connected to the macro-level change. In fact, these family members could have sought employment opportunities to seek financial independence from the breadwinner, without the desire to contribute to the family financially. Third, researchers' findings may be limited to families who successfully use these strategies, although there could also be cases of failure. For example, if family members from two different families both sought employment opportunities because the breadwinners become unemployed, but only one family overcame the financial crisis while the other did not, seeking employment itself may not be a successful strategy. It may be contingent upon other factors, which should be interpreted as a successful strategy instead. However, if researchers make inferences from the successful cases only, they may inaccurately impose that families successfully adapted to a changing social constraint by employing the strategy of seeking employment.

Furthermore, there are three major methodological limitations in using the concept of family adaptive strategies (Moen and Wethington 1992). First, there could be a problem of the level of analysis. Although what researchers observe and analyze are the behaviors of the target population, the behavior itself is not the strategy. Thus, researchers cannot infer whether one action is the result of a carefully planned rational strategy, or a simple action (Moen and Wethington 1992). Second, there could be an issue of the unit of analysis. Even though researchers claim to make an analysis of families, it is indeed the individuals within families who make decisions (Moen and Wethington 1992). Because of the existing power relations based in such factors as age and gender, and because of conflicting interests among family members, the family's strategy may

not reflect every family member's goals (Kok 2002; Moen 2011; Moen and Wethington 1992). Finally, there is also a concern about measurement (Moen and Wethington 1992). When researchers observe the action of families, what researchers observe may be the product of strategies, rather than the strategy itself. As a result, family adaptive strategies may be more of a hypothetical construct which cannot directly be measured in empirical studies (Engelen 2002).

At the same time, these limitations stem from employing large-scale survey data with behavioral outcomes (Moen and Wethington 1992). With this dissertation, I show how qualitative in-depth interview data can overcome the conceptual and methodological limitations discussed above. During the interviews, I was able to examine how participants and their families decided on their strategies *as a family*, how family strategies are tied to macro-level demographic changes, and whether families employed their strategies successfully or not.¹ Thus, qualitative data are useful for studying family adaptive strategies because they allow the researcher to avoid imbuing their own interpretations about families' adaptive strategies, a limitation of studies relying on survey data. Additionally, interview questions facilitate analyses of the processes through which strategies are employed. That is, the researcher can determine whether actions were just simple actions or the result of careful planning, as well as how each family member contributed to devising the family's strategies. By utilizing qualitative data and these techniques in this study, I investigated how different power relations between women and their family members were reflected in their family adaptive strategies.

Life Course Framework

To overcome the limitations of family adaptive strategies employing large-scale survey data, Moen and Wethington (1992) suggest the use of the life course framework. This framework suggests that when there are macro-level changes, such as a global pandemic, there are also changes in a family's resources and needs to devise new family strategies (Moen and Wethington, 1992). Thus, this framework situates families' and individuals' adaptive strategies within the larger and shifting contexts of history, society, and culture (Moen and Wethington 1992). Accordingly, using this framework, researchers can analyze the strategies that individuals and families develop in response to societal changes.

¹ See Chapter 3 for more information about research design.

This framework also enables temporal analysis, such as examining when families make certain decisions, how long it takes for them to make those decisions, and in which order they execute their plans (Kok 2002; Moen and Wethington 1992). With this framework, researchers can investigate whether and how family strategies change over time in response to social change, and how these strategies affect different members of the family (Moen and Wethington 1992). This information is useful because it reflects how the accumulation of individuals' and families' resources from the past may influence families' strategies in the present (Kok 2002; Moen and Wethington 1992). Overall, this framework enables a contextual analysis of families' strategies in relation to macro-level social structure (Moen and Wethington 1992).

2.1.2 Gendered Life Course Framework

In addition to the benefits of the life course framework, Moen (2011) suggests employing a *gendered* life course approach—how individuals' life courses differ because of their gender—because women and men have historically been exposed to different resources and life choices regarding work and family. The gendered life course approach acknowledges different types of structural constraints on women and men and analyzes strategic choices within relevant cultural and structural schema (Moen 2011). That is, this framework analyzes individual trajectories as embedded in broader social structures and constraints tied to gender, such as gender norms, gender inequality, and work and government policies targeting women (or the lack thereof) (Moen, 2015). Because this approach provides a broad, dynamic, and contextual understanding of how individuals and their life courses are gendered, it is useful for investigating women's experiences of work and family over time (Moen 2011).

The gendered aspect of the life course is critical because this framework could change the analysis of the same issue very differently; because there are different choices available to men and women due to cultural schemas and social constraints, the gendered life course approach can provide insights into how men and women make different strategic choices as well (Moen 2011). Just like any sociological concept, how gender influences individuals varies depending on the historical and social context. For example, in the early 1960s in the United States, maternal employment, unlike paternal employment, was considered as a social problem that causes danger to families because it was perceived to deprive children of their mothers (Moen 2011). However, that is no longer the case in many contemporary societies. For example, contemporary Americans

instead would problematize the structural limitations of long working hours that deprive mothers' and fathers' time with their children, instead of problematizing maternal employment itself (Moen 2011). That is, because the role of gender changes across temporal and social contexts, it is important to understand how gender may influence individuals' life courses accordingly.

Overall, this dissertation analyzes how gender influences working mothers' life courses based on the types of resources that are available, or the lack thereof, to women, as well as the specific beliefs tied to being a woman. In Chapter 4, by using the concept of childcare ideologies, this study analyzes the beliefs and norms tied to childcare, as distinct from motherhood. In Chapter 5, I analyze how the gendered norms and beliefs that tie motherhood with childcare responsibilities, as well as the types of workplace supports (or lack thereof) that exist may support or discourage women's career aspirations and pursuits. In Chapter 6, I analyze how the norms and beliefs about childcare that are tied to gender also influence intergenerational childcare arrangements. In doing so, I situate Korean women's experiences within the context of the macro-level changes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Literature Review

In this section, I review the bodies of literature that are relevant to the three research objectives of this dissertation. Regarding the first research objective of investigating and documenting ideologies of childcare in Korea, I review the literature on ideologies of gender, family, and motherhood. Then, I provide my own conceptualization of childcare ideologies, and explain how it is different from the others. The second research objective of this dissertation is to investigate why some Korean mothers decrease their career aspirations and pursuit, while others do not. For this, I review the literature on work-family, focusing on how gender influences women's career pursuits after childbirth. Then, I introduce the literature on career aspirations—how career aspirations have been conceptualized and what has been studied thus far, particularly in relation to women's career aspirations. The third and final research objective is to investigate the extent of grandmothers' care help to Korean working mothers. Thus, I introduce the previous literature on grandmothers' participation in childcare. In doing so, I review the advantages and disadvantages of grandmothers' childcare help for adult children (parents), and what has been studied about maternal versus paternal grandmothers' childcare help.

2.2.1 Childcare Ideologies (Research Objective 1)

The first research objective of this dissertation is to investigate and document ideologies of childcare in Korea. Ideologies demonstrate what people consider *normal* in a society (Dow 2016; Glenn et al. 1994). They reflect how people think of the world, as well as influence people's experiences (Glenn et al. 1994). Although a rich body of work has examined how ideologies of gender and motherhood contribute to gender inequality in societies across the globe (e.g., Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Collins 2020; Glenn 2010; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Krapf 2009; Oh 2018), there is a dearth of research examining in detail the beliefs and norms tied specifically to childcare arrangements and responsibilities. In this dissertation, I conceptualize childcare ideologies as beliefs and norms related to childcare, which also intersect with ideologies of gender, family, motherhood, and structural factors like work and policies.

Gender Ideologies

Gender ideologies are people's beliefs and norms about gender roles (Davis and Greenstein 2009). Gender ideologies are useful for analyzing the gendered cultural expectations regarding care, family, and work (Grunow, Begall, and Buchler 2018). Gender ideologies also influence all levels of our societies; from the micro-level interactions among family members, to the meso-level cultural beliefs and practices, to the macro-level government policies and structures (Ridgeway 2011). At the micro-level, gender ideologies influence the division of household labor. For example, despite the rise of a gender ideology that prioritizes egalitarianism in relationships and households, childcare responsibilities are still primarily assigned to women rather than shared equally between mothers and fathers (Bianchi et al. 2012; Daminger 2020). At the meso-level, gender ideologies intersect with ideologies of race and class to shape inequality; these ideologies produce cultural expectations about a specific group of people (Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz 2013). For example, the cultural expectations on how men and women, as well as, whites, Blacks, Asians, and those of different social classes behave are not only distinct from each other, but also unequal because they reflect a hierarchy of social relations (Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz 2013). At the macro-level, gender ideologies influence and are interdependent with broader social structures, such as work-family policies (Grunow et al. 2018).

In this context, I argue that childcare ideologies are a part of, and are influenced by existing gender ideologies, as well as ideologies of family and motherhood. However, I argue that childcare ideologies deserve their own conceptualization because they influence the direction and scope of research, as I discuss further below.

Family Ideologies

Family ideologies are people's meanings of *normal* or *ideal* family in a society (Bernardes 1985; Daly 2003). Understanding family ideologies is important because it helps us understand the ideal version of family, as well as to challenge, or de-mystify, such conceptions (Bernardes 1985). Bernardes (1985) argues that family ideologies are closely shaped by other ideologies in our society, such as ideologies of gender and ideologies of work. At the same time, family ideologies influence various aspects of families, including the composition of family members, such as having two heterosexual parents or a single-parent (e.g., Biblarz and Stacey 2010) and care dynamics such as kin support (e.g., Mazelis and Mykyta 2020).

In this regard, my conceptualization of childcare ideologies is also akin to family ideologies. For example, in the United States, the ideology of family responsibility assumes families to be fully responsible for family care given the lack of adequate social welfare (Levitsky 2014). However, it is often the female members of the family who end up compromising their careers to care for a sick or elderly family member, leading to gender inequality in caregiving labor (Levitsky 2014). In this dissertation, I conceptualize ideologies of childcare to broaden the focus beyond the discourse on family in order to engage with broader structural issues such as work and government policies. That is, I conceptualize ideologies of childcare, not assuming parents, or families' responsibilities only, but also including potential non-familial care and government responsibilities. Future research may apply and advance this conceptualization to better understand various aspects of care, such as care of elders.

Motherhood Ideologies

Many sociologists have developed the conceptualization of motherhood ideologies over time. To start with, motherhood was conceptualized as a key part of women, and childcare as an integral part of motherhood (Glenn et al. 1994). Childcare especially was considered as an essential

element within ideologies tied to motherhood, the notions about what a good mother looks like (e.g., Glenn et al. 1994; Hays 1996). According to the ideology of patriarchy, motherhood exists in relation to men; women bear and nurture men's children (Rothman 1994). Gender scholars also called for the father to join *mothering* to nurture and care for children physically, emotionally, economically, and socially (Glenn et al. 1994). However, these conceptualizations of mothering confine caring to the domain of femininity.

Motherhood Ideologies and Women's Careers

As there are more working mothers in contemporary society than in times past, scholars have conceptualized motherhood in relation to paid work. Hays (1996) explains ideologies of motherhood, among middle- and upper-class Americans, with the cultural ideals of *intensive mothering*. *Intensive motherhood* demonstrates that ideal childcare involves child centering, emotionally involving, exclusive, and time-consuming mothering, to compensate for the notion that working mothers cannot fully devote to childcare (Hays 1996). Similarly, in Korea, ideal motherhood refers to women, working or not, who sacrifice themselves to fully understand children's psychology and help their success (Jia 2014). However, this ideology has also been criticized to assume and reinforce traditional gender roles (Arendell 2000).

Developing intensive motherhood, Wolf (2011) conceptualizes an ideology of *total motherhood* in her study of cultural expectations related to breastfeeding in the United States. Total motherhood not only requires mothers to provide quality care, but to also be experts in *everything* and devote themselves to protecting children from any potential risk. For example, American mothers feel compelled to be lay pediatricians, psychologists, safety inspectors, toxicologists, and educators for their children, in addition to any work they do in the paid labor market (Wolf 2011). On the other hand, Christopher (2012) conceptualizes *extensive motherhood* such that good motherhood involves delegating direct day-to-day childcare to others, such as relatives or nannies, while being "in charge" of children's well-being holistically. Extensive motherhood challenges Hays' concept of *intensive motherhood* (1996), because many employed mothers struggle to meet the expectations of intensive mothering (Christopher 2012). Instead, mothers enjoy the benefits of employment for themselves, not only for their children, although they still reject the ideal worker norm which prioritizes workers with limited family responsibilities such as childcare demands

(Christopher 2012). However, extensive motherhood ideology is also grounded in the belief that women, not men, are responsible for childcare.

More recent studies on motherhood argue for an intersectional and context-specific analysis of motherhood (e.g., Dow 2016). Dow (2016) highlights that hegemonic ideologies of motherhood—such as intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) and concerted cultivation (Lareau 2011)—are limited to White middle- and upper-class families in the United States (Dow 2016). Instead, Dow (2016) conceptualizes a predominant motherhood ideology among African American middle- and upper-middle-class as *integrated mothering*; that is mothers are financially independent from a man, employment is a duty of good mothers, and childrearing is interdependently supported by other family and community members (Dow 2016). Below, I discuss how motherhood ideologies vary across contexts.

Contextualizing Motherhood Ideologies

Motherhood ideologies are tied to political and social contexts. For example, motherhood can conflict with work, depending on the presence of, or lack of, public policies and cultural attitudes pertaining to work and family (Collins 2019). Accordingly, ideologies of motherhood vary based on political and social contexts (Collins 2019). For example, research documents different societal expectations on motherhood and work in two close East Asian countries. In China, the normative expectations on motherhood have been emphasizing the *doing it all* model of motherhood (Zhou 2020). That is, Chinese *ideal* mothers perform both unpaid household labor to their finest, while participating in wage work, because working mothers are good role models for growing children, especially daughters. When work and family are in conflict, instead of the past notion that mothers choose family over work, Chinese mothers are compelled to excel at the competing demands of both realms (Zhou 2020). From this perspective, mothers' employment benefits children, not necessarily mothers, because it is considered as educational (or inspirational) for children to see their mothers work. On the other hand, Brinton and Oh (2019) argue differently for Korean motherhood. In line with Stone's findings on the opting out phenomenon among highly educated mothers in the United States (2007), highly educated Korean mothers opt out of employment, contributing to a gendered household division of childcare and other household labor (Brinton and Oh 2019). These Korean mothers opt out because there is a strong male-

breadwinner/female-caregiver ideology, which is perceived to be incompatible with the strong ideal worker norm in Korea (Brinton and Oh 2019).

Indeed, childcare has been conceptualized as central to motherhood such that it conflicts with maternal employment in Korea. When Korean women continue to work after having a child, they are expected to perform *intensive motherhood* and prioritize childcare over their career (Oh 2018). For example, Korean working mothers often feel the need to justify asking for childcare help from other family members (including fathers), as if childcare is their responsibility alone (Oh 2018). In addition, the culture of long working hours and the dualism culture that expects women to choose between their career and their family intensify Korean working mothers' challenges in balancing the two (Brinton and Oh 2019; OECD 2019b). Research analyzing Korean women's employment and motherhood between 1978 and 2006 shows that when family care responsibilities were considered women's responsibilities, women were more likely to leave the labor market to focus on motherhood (Ma 2013).

Political context also influences motherhood. In a theoretical review of Korean motherhood, Won (2016) employs a concept of *political motherhood*, that is the degree of the state's involvement in mothering. If there are more state policies on care, it strengthens political motherhood, which results in a decrease in the number of male-breadwinner model families, and an increase in the number of married women in paid work (Won 2006). However, Won (2006) argues that political motherhood is limited in Korea despite the presence of care-supportive state policies, due to the gendered nature of Korean policies and the labor market, which assume childcare responsibilities belong to women. Won (2006) hypothesizes that Korean political motherhood may be weak because the government assumes that other familial care, such as grandmothers, will be readily available for Korean families. Although this kind of conceptualization of motherhood most closely resonates with my conceptualization of childcare ideologies, there is a key difference. Won's political motherhood incorporates the role of state policy in childcare with an analysis of the state's involvement in mothering. On the other hand, I take a slightly different approach (and language) to analyze the state's involvement in childcare in general, not limited to mothering or mothers' involvement in childcare. I discuss more on how childcare ideologies are different from motherhood ideologies below.

How Childcare Ideologies Are Different from Motherhood Ideologies

In this dissertation, I conceptualize childcare ideologies as beliefs and norms related to childcare; that is, what is *normal* and *taken for granted* about childcare within a society. According to this conceptualization, childcare ideologies are inclusive of ideologies of motherhood. What goes beyond the aspects of motherhood in childcare ideologies are other people providing care, both familial and non-familial care providers, social norms on childcare, and the government policy on care. For example, a recent qualitative study examined how norms about childcare and long working hours influence fathers' use of parental leaves in Korea (Lee 2022). That is, instead of investigating how fatherhood ideologies—cultural and individual meanings of being a good father—influence the use of leave policies, Lee (2022) analyzes how norms of childcare and institutional constraints influence the use of leave policies within the work culture in Korea. Although I did not have this study in mind when I designed this dissertation, I take a somewhat similar approach. While ideologies on motherhood refer to norms about what an ideal mother looks like, especially in regards to childcare, childcare ideologies investigate the commonly held societal beliefs and norms about childcare, such as, “Who should be providing childcare?” This is a different question from, “What is a good mother?” An answer to the latter question would entail the discussions of motherhood ideologies as summarized above, such as perfectly navigating both work and family, or prioritizing childcare over work to fulfill the meanings of good motherhood.

Research Question

More specifically, a research question on childcare ideologies would ask the following: What does *normal* childcare look like? What is an *ideal* or *desirable* form of childcare? An answer to this question could be mothers, but also fathers, both parents, grandmothers, or to be specific maternal versus paternal grandmothers, both grandmothers or grandparents, the government, or a private babysitter, etc. The list of potential answers could vary depending on the cultural, social, economic, and political contexts. For example, in China, grandparents' childcare help is more desirable than paid help like childcare centers (Goh 2009). However, not all societies may agree upon the same ideal of childcare, regardless of mothers' involvement with childcare. In another example, a comparative study investigating societal expectations pertaining to effectiveness of social networks for childcare finds diverse levels of expectations within East Asian countries (Ochiai 2009). In Korea, mothers were perceived to be the most effective childcare providers followed by, relatives, communities, and then fathers, while in China, fathers were deemed to be

more effective in childcare than mothers (Ochiai 2009). That is, norms on ideal childcare vary across contexts. This study conceptualizes childcare ideologies to incorporate a more sociological, or macro-level understanding of various aspects of childcare, beyond the scope of motherhood. By doing so, this study problematizes the assumption that mothers should be responsible for every aspect of childcare.

Research Interests

Although the concept of motherhood ideologies is valuable on its own, childcare ideologies entail a broader scope of agents and institutions. For example, Glenn et al. (1994, 357) define mothering as “a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people.” Based on this definition, ideologies of motherhood suggest that it is “normal” for *mothers* to nurture children in American society (Glenn et al. 1994). However, although mothers do provide such “sets of activities and relationships” to care for their children, so do other people (fathers, grandparents, hired babysitter, teachers at kindergarten, etc.) That is, a mother is one of many who provide childcare, but not the only childcare provider. For example, mothers “actively negotiate and redefine mothering” with their childcare providers (Arendell 2000:1199). However, ideologies on intensive motherhood (Hays 1996; Jia 2014), total motherhood (Wolf 2011), and extensive motherhood (Christopher 2012) conceptualize motherhood with the sole focus on mothers’ role in childcare, without giving much attention to other care providers and structural factors such as state policy. Accordingly, although these types of motherhood ideologies provide useful information about women’s identities and some aspects of childcare, they do not provide a holistic portrayal to understand childcare as a societal issue.

Childcare ideologies build on the concept of motherhood ideologies. As discussed above, previous studies urge us to account for social, economic, and political contexts in understanding motherhood ideologies (Arendell 2000; Collins 2019; Glenn et al. 1994). That ideologies of motherhood are tied to specific contexts reflects that in different contexts, there are varying societal expectations on motherhood, or mothers’ involvement with childcare. Different political expectations and contexts matter, such as the kinds of government policies that are in place. For example, social policies reinforce ideologies of the good mother as a woman’s role in the United States; American social policy assumes that mothers are responsible for childcare, not the government (Arendell 2000). However, in Sweden, norms of gender equality and the presence of

generous government support enable both parents, not just mothers—as well as the government—to be responsible for childcare (Collins 2019). Just as the United States and Sweden have different understandings of parental and governmental roles in childcare, childcare ideologies go beyond motherhood to investigate societal expectations for childcare, including the state’s involvement in childcare, the involvement of other family members, including fathers and grandparents, and the involvement of private childcare providers such as daycare providers and kindergartens. By using the concept of childcare ideologies, instead of motherhood ideologies, this study draws the attention away from individual mothers to challenge the assumption that mothers should be in charge of childcare. Instead, childcare ideologies focus on childcare as a social problem, because childcare is not an issue pertaining to individual mothers, but rather a structural issue which is caused by and may be improved by implementing better social and structural support, such as better policies, and shorter and more flexible working hours, not only for mothers but for all employees.

Thus, I build on previous work by investigating childcare ideologies as ideologies that incorporate not only individual, but also political, economic, and social contexts—including the COVID-19 pandemic—pertinent to childcare, which influence women’s experiences with intergenerational relationships and career pursuits. With this effort, the sociological scholarship may shift the focus to social resources and structures related to childcare, rather than focusing on childcare as the personal problem of individual employees, especially mothers. In Chapter 4, I will document childcare ideologies in Korea in more depth.

2.2.2 Career Aspirations (Research Objective 2)

The second research objective of this dissertation is to investigate why some Korean mothers decrease their career aspirations and pursuits, while others do not. In this section, I introduce the literature relevant to work-family life, paying particular attention to research on how gender and childcare have influenced women’s career aspirations and pursuits.

Work-Family

Moen (2011) challenges the work-family literature to recognize social changes. For example, the work-family balance *myth* suggests that it is an individual goal and problem to manage work

and family, rather than a public issue pertaining to social structure, states, work, and scholarship (Moen 2011). Demographic, cultural, economic, technological, and behavioral changes lead to new demands and expectations that working families need to meet (Moen 2011). As a part of this effort, Moen (2011) argues that the scholarship of work and family has been defining its research populations and topics too narrowly. To expand the research focus, we should move away from using “work-family” as an adjective, and instead use it as a noun (Moen 2011). Because work-family can mean a range of topics such as balance, conflict, enrichment, spillover, and stress, it is more appropriate to assess the overall fit or misfit between work and quality of life for all types of employees and families (Moen 2011).

To better understand work-family, we should recognize that there are two types of work: paid and unpaid work. Although paid and unpaid work are both work in the sense that they require time, effort, and labor, they are also different from each other. As their names suggest, unpaid work does not result in monetary compensation as paid work does. As a result, the consequences of not prioritizing paid work are very tangible: decreases in income, exclusion from promotion, and even getting laid off. Accordingly, paid work is valued in modern market-oriented societies, while unpaid work is often undervalued and taken for granted (Glenn 2010; Moen and Roehling 2004).

The distinction between paid and unpaid work is also gendered (Moen and Roehling 2004). Women are expected to provide more care than men for family members based on their status as a wife, mother, and/or daughter (Glenn 2010; Moen and Roehling 2004). Historically, women were viewed as the second worker who complemented and supported men’s paid work (Moen and Roehling 2004). Women’s life paths are often shaped by their husbands’ careers such as geographical moves depending on their husbands’ job prospects and retirement (Moen and Roehling 2004). Unlike the norm of reciprocity which is perceived as a *debt* for gifts and services, women’s caregiving work is considered as voluntary participation which does not need to be reciprocated (Glenn 2010). As a result, women’s caregiving arrangements have been taken for granted rather than being recognized as labor relations. Even when women work for pay, gendered work distinctions pressure women to be responsible for unpaid care and domestic work at home. Thus, this dissertation investigates how Korean mothers’ career pursuits are related to their experiences of childcare responsibilities in the context of social changes stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Career Aspirations

The concept of career aspirations—individual preferences relevant to careers—is useful for studying work-family because aspirations are likely to influence individuals' career-related decisions (Correll 2004).² High career aspirations are associated with higher confidence and achievements in one's career (Kim, O'Brien, and Kim 2016). However, cultural beliefs about gender support the idea that men are more competent than women, which contributes to lower career aspirations among women (Correll 2004). In addition, career aspirations differ by gender: although parenthood influences career aspirations for both men and women, women are more likely than men to downshift their career goals after having children (Bass 2015). Therefore, in comparison to men, women experience more challenges in their career after they have children (Shockley et al. 2017).

How mothers understand the role conflict between their career and care responsibilities in regards to career aspirations is context specific. For example, mothers in Stockholm attributed the conflict between work and care responsibilities to high parenting expectations, while mothers in Germany blamed their high career aspirations, and mothers in the United States blamed themselves (Collins 2019). In Korea, Kim, O'Brien, and Kim (2016) find that college educated women with high career aspirations prioritized career over family when there was a conflict between the two roles. However, because career aspirations are likely to change over time and especially in the case of work-family conflict, there has been a need for longitudinal research on working mothers' career aspirations (Kim et al. 2016).

This dissertation explores Korean women's career aspirations and pursuits focusing on childcare arrangements. In Korea, even when women work for pay, they remain primarily responsible for the unpaid work of childcare (Brinton and Oh 2019; Oh 2018). In other words, Korean mothers must constantly gauge their career aspirations and career-related decisions within the context of childcare ideologies in Korea. Among Korean women who opted out of their careers in 2016, 40.3% opted out due to marriage, 38.2% due to pregnancy and childbirth, 13.1% for family care, 6.9% for children who were too young to enroll in elementary school, and 1.5% to care for school-enrolled children (Statistics Korea 2014). In sum, 100% of women who opted out

² Although much of the seminal research on career aspirations and decisions come from the United States, there is no reason to suggest that these patterns would be different in Korea. Therefore, I focus my review in this section on these studies.

in Korea made their decisions to prioritize *family*, the domain of unpaid work. In addition, among Korean working women in 2018, 50% left their careers after having their first child (Lee et al. 2018). This pattern indicates that concerns about childcare and career are closely related. In other words, Korean women decide whether to seek help for childcare to pursue their career aspirations, or to leave employment to focus on childcare depending on their economic stability and career prestige (Oh 2018).

Family-Supportive Policies and Women's Careers

The effect of Korean family-supportive policies on working mothers' career pursuits also remains unclear. For example, although leave policies legally protect employees' return to work in Korea, they do not guarantee protection for workers in many cases as employers tend to ignore the legally mandated policies (Tayler et al. 2004). Further, survey data from 2018 indicate that only 5% of Koreans think that childcare support policies are "very effective" (Choi 2019). Goo and Chang (2018) also document that working mothers taking leave feel a sense of guilt toward their colleagues; because their employers often do not hire any temporary employees, their colleagues are expected to take turns working on behalf of those on leave. Accordingly, when there is an opportunity related to training or promotion, those who have used a leave policy, oftentimes women, are expected to give up the opportunity for male colleagues who covered for a woman's work during her leave (Goo and Chang 2018). Women's use of long leave policies was also associated with career changes to less prestigious occupations in Korea, although the reasons were unclear (Ma 2014). This pattern in Korea resonates with patterns in other contexts: a study on family-supportive policies from 20 countries around the world reveals that although policies such as long parental leaves, reduced working hours, and tolerance toward absenteeism may facilitate women's labor force participation, they can also discourage employers from hiring women (Mandel and Semyonov 2005). In sum, several studies suggest that while some family-supportive policies enable women to maintain their careers, they have an unexpected consequence of disadvantaging women's careers and career aspirations in the long term.

For working parents and especially mothers, Moen (2011) challenges us to seek policy transformation, not assimilation or accommodation. The goal of policy change should not be assimilation, which requires women to adjust to an already-existing male career mystique (Moen 2011). The goal should also not be accommodation, which provides temporary alleviation of the

problem without structural changes (Moen 2011). Without careful planning, family-friendly policies can have an unexpected effect on women's economic attainments in the long term (Mandel and Semyonov 2005). Thus, I pay particular attention to how existing family-friendly policies influence women's career aspirations and pursuits and suggest policy recommendations.

Overall, this dissertation adds to the literature by investigating how beliefs and norms about childcare, or childcare ideologies, influence working mothers' career aspirations, and how their aspirations are translated into actual career decisions over time (Chapter 5). The massive increase in childcare needs due to COVID-19 (Alon et al. 2020) is also likely to have influenced working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits. Accordingly, I document findings on Korean women's career aspirations and pursuits during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide suggestions for policy transformation for working mothers in Chapter 5 as well.

2.2.3 Grandmothers' Grandchild Care (Research Objective 3)

The third and final research objective of the dissertation is to investigate the extent of grandmothers' care help for Korean working mothers. In this section, I review the literature on grandparental childcare help, paying special attention to grandmothers' care help. Then, I focus on studies of Korean grandmothers' childcare help, as well as studies that differentiate maternal versus paternal grandmothers in their participation in childcare.

Grandparental Childcare Help as Family Adaptive Strategies

In post-industrialized societies in which working parents must juggle their paid work and childcare responsibilities, many rely on their child(ren)'s grandparents for help with childcare (e.g., see Glenn 2010; Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez 2013 for U.S., Hank and Kreyenfeld 2003 for Germany, and Chen, Liu, and Mair 2011; Ko and Hank 2014 for China). In countries lacking support for mothers to combine work and care, grandparents are likely to take on *intensive* responsibilities for childcare (Craig, Hamilton, and Brown 2019). For example, in China, grandparents help with childcare because they have lower opportunity costs than mothers who are younger and better educated, and paid caregivers who are costly to hire (Chen, Liu, and Mair 2011). In a way, grandparents' grandchild care is a family adaptive strategy to alleviate working parents'

burden of care, enabling women to pursue career opportunities in China's economic and societal contexts (Chen, Liu, and Mair 2011).

Likewise, Korean grandparents are a useful childcare resource for working adults. Because women's childcare responsibilities heavily interfere with women working for pay in the given economic and societal contexts of Korea as discussed above, Korean women rely heavily on grandmothers for childcare help. For example, 38% of Korean parents received childcare help from grandparents in 2018 (Lee et al. 2019). Lee (2013) finds that Korean grandmothers help with grandchildren care because of *boo-mo-ma-eum*. In Korean, *Boo-mo* means parents, and *ma-eum* means heart. This word can be translated into the heart (or love and care) of parents. In other words, to be good parents for their working adult children, they help out with grandchild care and housework (Lee 2013). Korean grandparents generally care for their grandchildren during the day only until their adult children return from work, and a majority are not custodial and do not co-reside with their grandchildren (Chung and Park 2018).

Among grandparents, grandmothers have taken primary responsibility for childcare because childcare and housework are traditionally considered as within women's domestic sphere (Glenn 2010). Research has shown that American grandfathers become more involved in grandchildren care in their 60s in the United States (Kahn et al. 2011). However, in Korea, grandmothers' help with childcare remains consistently high while fathers and grandfathers participate very little in childcare (Craig et al. 2019; Oh 2018). Even when both grandparents help with care, Korean grandmothers and grandfathers provide different types of care. Korean grandmothers' care is characterized by physical and intense types of care work: feeding, bathing, dressing, and putting children to bed— while Korean grandfathers' care is dominated by talk-based care: reading, teaching, talking, and listening— and minding—monitoring children without active involvement— with little time spent on physical care (Craig et al. 2019).

In fact, Korean grandmothers actively provide childcare help for their working adult children (Goo 2017). Forty-two percent of children with working mothers were taken care of by grandparents, but not grandfathers, in Korea (Lee and Bauer 2013). Korean grandmothers help even more for younger grandchildren; among the 55% of children whose mothers worked for pay, 57% were cared for by their grandparents, mostly by grandmothers (Lee and Bauer 2013). On average, caregiving grandmothers in Korea spent about 52 hours per week on childcare (Lee and Bauer 2010). This is more than equivalent to full-time work hours (40) in many societies (Lee and

Bauer 2010). This is a substantial number considering that ideally all working mothers should have access to public childcare facilities.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Grandmothers' Childcare Help

As discussed above, Korean care-providing grandmothers are resources for working mothers, because they provide the similar high quality care as mothers would themselves. They take on the roles of mother to their adult children and grandchildren (Kim, Song, and Lee 2015). They ensure that their working adult children can focus on their career without concerns of childcare by helping with instrumental care, such as feeding, accompanying to care facilities, and playing (Kim et al. 2015). To express their gratitude, Korean working mothers provide monetary compensation to care providing grandmothers, although the amount is far less than what they would pay for the public or private childcare facilities (Lee and Bauer 2010). Since many working mothers rely on caregiving grandmothers, those who do not have access to support from grandparents are relatively disadvantaged in the labor market (Brinton and Oh 2019).

Despite the benefits, Korean working mothers also experience several challenges when receiving care help from their children's grandmothers. First, Korean mothers are conflicted about care-providing grandmothers *outdated* care methods, such as not caring about hygiene and lacking knowledge of modern educational materials (Kim et al. 2015). Accordingly, a different childrearing style may lead to intergenerational conflicts. Second, even when there is no conflict over how care should be carried out, Korean working mothers struggle to communicate their needs to care-providing grandmothers since they are in the position of receiving help (Kim et al. 2015). Due to the emotional burden and stress associated with childcare, many Korean grandmothers preferred to work for pay rather than caring for their grandchildren (Lee 2013). Considering grandmothers' reluctance to help with childcare, Korean working mothers often feel guilty when asking grandmothers to help with childcare work (Goo 2017). Finally, some working mothers experience identity crisis as a mother when they feel that grandmothers have replaced them in the role of mother (Kim et al. 2015). At the same time, Korean working mothers constantly feel the need to justify their sense of *deservingness*, or their needs to continue working for pay to be able to receive childcare help (Oh 2018).

Maternal vs. Paternal Grandmothers

While extensive literature has studied grandmothers' care, few studies have analyzed potential differences between maternal grandmothers (mother's own mother) and paternal grandmothers (mother's mother-in-law) in childcare assistance, even though there are different patterns in paternal and maternal caregiving across societies. For example, in the United States, maternal grandmothers are more obligated than paternal grandmothers to care for their grandchildren because otherwise their daughters will suffer from attempting to balance work and child care obligations (Glenn 2010). On the other hand, there is an increase in the prevalence of maternal grandmothers' childcare help in China. Because of the patriarchal nature of filial piety, which prioritizes paternal relations over maternal lineage, paternal grandmothers have historically been more likely than maternal grandmothers to help with childcare (Chen et al. 2011). Another study from China shows that the grandparental childcare help is a result of negotiations among daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law on how to distribute childcare and household help, rather than a dyadic parent-child (son) relationship (To 2015). In urban Chinese families though, sociopolitical changes leading to women's empowerment increased women's bargaining power with their husbands to receive help from their own mothers instead of relying on the tradition of seeking childcare help from their mothers-in-law (Zhang et al. 2019).

Similar to the case of China, there is an increase in the prevalence of maternal grandmothers' care help in Korea. Data from 2018 show that 22% of Korean parents received childcare help from maternal grandparents—an increase from 16% in 2012—whereas 16% received help from paternal grandparents in 2018 (15% in 2012) (Lee et al. 2019).³ Lee and Bauer (2013) argue that maternal grandmothers were motivated to provide care help to alleviate their working daughters' physical and emotional burdens from juggling their career and family responsibilities, because these kinds of burdens were less pronounced for their working sons. Ko and Hank (2014) also find that Korean grandparents are more likely to care for their working daughters' children than for their son's children. In addition, the extant research on intergenerational relationships in Korea suggests that maternal grandmothers may be more favored as child caregivers; Korean husbands and wives feel more comfortable asking favors from maternal grandparents (wife's parents) than from paternal ones (Lee 2011).

³ Although Lee et al. (2019) did not focus on grandmothers specifically, they find that there is an increase in maternal grandparents' childcare help while paternal grandparents' help has remained stagnant over time in Korea.

Although these findings are useful, there is a need for understanding how help-receiving mothers experience the relationships with maternal and paternal grandmothers who may be providing care. First, despite the heavy reliance on grandmothers for childcare help in Korea (Lee and Bauer 2010), there is little information about what has brought such change. For example, although Chen, Liu and Mair (2011) investigate whether paternal and maternal grandparents differ in the likelihood to care for grandchildren in China, there is no research to date that has examined this in Korea. Moreover, while Zhang et al. (2019) suggest that the transition from paternal to maternal grandmothers' caregiving in China reflects women's empowerment because it challenges the patriarchal nature of filial piety, it is not clear whether the care help from maternal grandmothers also indicates women's empowerment in Korea.

Thus, this dissertation connects the tradition of grandmothers' childcare help with childcare ideologies by exploring how Korean mothers request, arrange, and receive childcare assistance from maternal and paternal grandmothers. For example, I investigate whether Korean mothers who receive childcare help from maternal grandmothers feel more empowered to better manage work and childcare, as compared to mothers who are receiving help from paternal grandmothers. I document Korean mothers' experience of receiving care help from grandmothers in depth in Chapter 6.

2.3 Study Contexts

In this section, I introduce two contexts within which this dissertation is situated: Korea and COVID-19. First, I discuss the context of Korea to better understand Korean women's career and childcare arrangements. Specifically, I introduce the family-supportive policies, the Early Childcare Education and Care (ECEC) system, and gender inequality in Korea. Second, I discuss how the novel COVID-19 pandemic has influenced Korean society, and summarize how the Korean government has responded thus far. Doing so, I review how the pandemic has created not only health risks, but also social challenges including increased childcare needs.

2.3.1 Korea

Family-Supportive Policies

Korea is a liberal family-oriented welfare regime, which is characterized by high labor force participation and gendered unpaid work (Craig et al. 2019; Ochiai 2009). Its family-supportive policies have changed and developed over time. Korean childcare policies started with supporting disadvantaged families. That is, the first childcare related policy in Korea, the Child Welfare Act, was enacted in 1962 to support poor and orphaned children after the Korean war. This act excluded care for children who have parents (Cha, Moon, and Kang 2018). In 1982, the Act for the Promotion of Early Childhood Education was revised to educate children aged 6 and 7 to prepare them to enter elementary school (Cha et al. 2018). As the industrialization and urbanization process accelerated in the 1990s, the Korean government provided more daycare facilities and childcare policies to provide public childcare for low-income families, and families with children with special needs (Cha et al. 2018). In the 1970s and 1980s, the Korean government promoted a strong family planning policy arguing that a high fertility rate impedes economic growth (Chin et al. 2012). However, only in two decades, Korea reached the lowest total fertility rate in the world in 2005 (Chin et al. 2012). The low fertility rate was even more alarming with declining marriage rate and increasing divorce rates (Chin et al. 2012). Unlike the U.S. or Europe, the low marriage rate was not compensated by cohabitation rates due to conservative social norms in Korea (Chin et al. 2012).

In response to a decreasing fertility rate and to support struggling working mothers, the Korean government implemented more family-friendly policies. Until the 1990s, the Korean government regarded childcare as an individual family's responsibility, rather than a social responsibility (Cha et al. 2018). In 2001, the Labor Standard Act was reformed to extend paid maternity leave from 60 days to 90 days (Bae and Goodman 2014). The Korean government also recommended private companies provide reduced work schedules for parents who could not take full-time parental leave (Chin et al. 2012). However, only in the mid-2000s, did the Korean government begin to develop universal childcare policies to support working parents, and especially mothers. In 2005, the Basic Act on Low Fertility and Aging was enacted to expand public childcare eligibility to any couple with preschool children (Cha et al. 2018). In the same year, The Ministry of Gender Equality was expanded to become the Ministry of Equality and

Family (Chin et al. 2012). This ministry exclusively manages all administrative work-family policies with the aims of offering universal coverage, taking social responsibility for well-being, and providing prevention-approaches rather than problem solving approaches (Chin et al. 2012).

Now, the Korean government is regarded to provide fairly generous family-supportive policies, although these policies have not resolved working mothers' childcare concerns and responsibilities enough to allow them to fully focus on their careers. Korean family-friendly policies include tax benefits, cash allowance, and comprehensive childcare facilities (OECD 2019b). For example, the Korean National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) launched a voucher named "*GoeunMom Card*," *goeun* meaning nice in Korean, which subsidizes pregnant women and infants' pre-and post-natal medical bills (Seo 2019). The voucher was worth KRW 200,000 (equivalent to USD 169) when first introduced, and its amount increased to KRW 500,000 (equivalent to USD 424) in 2012 (Seo 2019). Other postnatal healthcare—such as five vaccines for infants and toddlers—are provided free of charge regardless of a family's income level (Seo 2019). Starting in 2018, the Korean government also introduced a national child allowance cash transfer to minimize the costs of raising children (OECD 2019b). Although the cash allowance payment was means-tested initially, it covers all children aged zero to six since 2019 (OECD 2019b). The rates are around 2-3% of average earnings (OECD 2019b).

In addition, Korea offers generous paid leaves, although employees sometimes struggle to take the leaves. Korean mothers can take up to 65 weeks of paid leave covering 37% of their earnings on average, and Korean fathers can take a total of 53 weeks (OECD 2019b). The paid leave policies are more generous than the ones from other OECD countries, which provide on average of 55 weeks for mothers and eight weeks for fathers (OECD 2019b). However, even though the leave policies are supposed to legally protect employees' rights to return to work, in reality they often fail to protect workers as employers in Korea tend to ignore the legally mandated policies (Tayler et al. 2004). Due to employers' negative sentiment regarding the use of the leave program, the parent employee's work status is not guaranteed after their return in many cases, although their work status is legally protected in theory (Tayler et al. 2004). Additionally, Yoon (2017) finds that only 20% of the research participants in a nationally representative study (Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Families) even knew about the availability of leave policy for fathers. Accordingly, Yoon (2017) argues that the low awareness and use of leave policies for fathers indicates that Korea is a failed welfare state. A different qualitative study also

finds that fathers' use of parental leave policies resulted in discrimination at work such as receiving lower scores on performance reviews (Lee 2022).

In addition to the leave program, there is a policy on flexible (or reduced) working hours. In 2008, the Labor Standard Law introduced the possibility that Korean employees with a child younger than age eight can reduce their working hours or take flexible working hour arrangements of 30 or less hours per week (OECD 2019b). This is to expand the opportunities for working mothers to work-part time on their regular contract (OECD 2019b). However, as this is a recommendation, rather than a legally binding policy, only 8.4% of the wage workers utilized this policy Korea, compared to 50% in Greece and 90% in the Netherlands and other Nordic countries (OECD 2019b). It is also unclear how much of one's salary and benefits is guaranteed with these policies compared to when employees work 40 hours or more per week.

Early Childcare Education and Care (ECEC)

The Korean government supervises Early Childcare Education and Care (ECEC) with two umbrella ministries. The Ministry of Education is in charge of kindergarten for children age 3 to until they enroll in elementary school, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare oversees childcare centers like day care for all children from infants to until they enroll in elementary school (Yu et al. 2021). That is, starting at age 3, Korean children can enroll in either kindergarten or daycare, which have a different purpose of operation. Because kindergarten is managed by the Ministry of Education, it focuses on the educational aspect, while daycare centers focus on instrumental care of children's health and well-being as they are managed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

However, even when children attend daycare, nine out of 10 children come home before their working mothers (Seo and Kim 2018). Most kindergarten (for children age three to five) and day care centers (for children ages zero to five) in Korea care for children from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm according to the government instructions (Ju and Lee 2019). For parents who cannot pick up their children by 1:30 pm, childcare facilities tend to provide care until 5 pm, and sometimes longer (Ju and Lee 2019). With these subsidies, Korean parents have the lowest out-of-pocket childcare costs in the OECD countries (OECD 2019b). The childminding services care for children during the "out-of-hours" for children who need to be cared for after kindergarten or day care centers close (OECD 2019b:131). While the childminding service seems useful in theory, the fact that

only about 1% of eligible children were cared for by this service (OECD 2019b) indicates that this policy needs to be improved.

Despite two different ministries overseeing ECEC in Korea, the Korean government's investment in quality childcare is below average compared to other OECD countries. For example, although on average OECD countries spend 0.7% of GDP on early childhood education and care, Korea spends a little over 0.5% (OECD 2020). The average ratios of students to teaching staff and other staff are both below other OECD countries as well (OECD 2020). Korea also has relatively relaxed restrictions for ECEC educators: it requires a community college education for teachers and no educational requirement for teachers' aids, although 18 other OECD countries require at least college degree for teachers and some training for teachers' aides (OECD 2020). In addition, Kim (2019) argues that because the government's financial support in private childcare centers do not match with the minimum wage growth rate in Korea, childcare facilities suffer from understaffing issues.

Furthermore, there is a concern for child's safety at ECEC. According to all reported child abuse cases from 2020 in Korea, teachers, and staff at care facilities (6%) were the second most likely perpetrators of child abuse cases, after parents (82%) (Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare 2021).⁴ Korean mothers also worry that their children who are too young to understand bullying may be bullied by their peers and are not given proper protection by their teachers (Ju and Lee 2019). Goo (2017) argues that, in a typical labor contract, employers have more power over their employees, but in the realm of childcare, employees (care providers such as teachers) have more power over the employers (mother). That is, Korean working mothers have to appease the care provider, rather than the other way around, since mothers worry that care providers may mistreat their child when mothers are at work during the day (Goo 2017). The overall concerns regarding placing their children at care facilities stem from the lack of trust in teachers (care providers) (Ju and Lee 2019).

Due to such distrust in private care facilities, Korean parents heavily rely on family members for childcare help. According to the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare's survey data from 2009, 70% of Korean working mothers of infant children reported that the ideal care

⁴ In the United States, among reported cases of child abuse from 2019, a majority of perpetrators were parents (78%), followed by non-parent family relatives (7%), and the "others" which include foster siblings, nonrelatives and babysitters (5%) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, and Children's Bureau 2021).

arrangement for their child was home-based care by grandparents, not even by babysitters or nannies (Suh et al. 2010). The monetary value of unpaid childcare work—childcare provided by a family member without pay—in Korea was estimated to be USD 15,572 million (Yoon 2014). This amount far exceeds both the Korean government’s budgets for children which was USD 2,471 million, and the family expenditures in paid child care facilities, which was estimated to be USD 5,559 million (Yoon 2014). In other words, USD 15.5 billion worth of labor on childcare went unrecognized and not financially compensated in Korea.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality in the workplace and at home aggravates Korean working mothers’ career pursuits while managing childcare. For example, Korea’s gender pay gap is the highest (34% as of 2018) among OECD countries, of which the average is 13% (OECD 2020). Additionally, Korea ranked 116th out of 156 countries for gender wage equality for similar work (World Economic Forum 2021). Even after Korean mothers return to work after birth, they are more likely to be in a temporary employment position than in stable employment with good social security coverage (OECD 2019b). Additionally, only 16% of senior workplace roles in Korea are occupied by women, compared to 42% in the United States, reflecting a significant glass ceiling in Korea (World Economic Forum 2021). The male-oriented workplace culture also pressures women, and especially mothers, to opt out of the labor force (Bae and Goodman 2014). As a result, Korea is one of only six countries—out of 37 OECD countries in all—in which the maternal employment rate⁵ is below 60%, compared to the OECD average of 71% (OECD 2020).

The unequal division of domestic responsibilities may also intensify Korean working mothers’ struggles to pursue their career aspirations. Among heterosexual, married Korean working women, 73% report that they are primarily responsible for domestic unpaid work (Statistics Korea 2018). In 2018, Korean working mothers reported that only 25.3% of their husbands participated in childcare (Seo and Kim 2018). Korean mothers, rather than fathers, are expected to be responsible for housework, including childcare and children’s educational attainment (Yoon 2016). Although the unequal division of household labor between Korean wives

⁵ The maternal employment rate was measured among married women aged 15-54 with at least one child aged 0-17 in Korea.

and husbands exists before the birth of the first child, research shows that it increases significantly after the first child is born (Kim and Cheung 2019).

2.3.2 Context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been detrimental for working parents trying to arrange childcare. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional challenges for working mothers due to increased in care demands (Ahmed, Buheji, and Merza Fardan 2020; Alon et al. 2020) and inequalities in care responsibilities between women and men, in addition to severe health, economic, and social interruptions (UN Women 2020). An emerging body of work emphasizes the persistence of gender inequality in work and family life during the COVID-19 pandemic (Reichelt, Makovi, and Sargsyan 2021).

The Korean government had a relatively rigorous policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Korea scored 58.3 on the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Stringency Index, which is higher than other East Asian countries (e.g., 56.9 in China and 42.6 in Japan) (Blavatnik School of Government 2021). Because Korea employed a combination of COVID-19 testing, rigorous quarantine guidelines, free treatment for patients with COVID-19, and digital technologies for contact tracing, its response to COVID-19 is considered one of the most effective in the world (Lee, Heo, and Seo 2020). Below, I discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced childcare and employment in Korea.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Childcare

At the height of the pandemic, the Korean government closed schools and workplaces and issued stay-at-home orders (Blavatnik School of Government 2021). In addition, Korea implemented emergency care policies, such as extra cash benefits and expanded access to public facilities for children without other forms of care, including day-cares, kindergartens, and elementary schools, even though these facilities were otherwise closed (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education 2020). The Korean government also provided government-level guidance for ECEC in response to COVID-19 highlighting disease prevention and a safe learning environment (Yu et al. 2021).

Despite these efforts, Korean care institutions, especially private ones, faced challenges in meeting the government's guidelines because these policies did not accommodate care institutions' varying contexts including increased demands for care, and did not provide adequate support for safety-related expenses and care instructions while social distancing (Shin et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2021). Korean care facilities reported that the government's policy guidance in response to COVID-19 was too vague, lacking details such as instructions on how to respond in the case of positive COVID-19 case (Shin et al. 2021). Accordingly, 36% of Korean working parents reported a gap in childcare during the peak of COVID-19 (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education 2020). Fifty-six percent of Korean women also reported increased time spent on care work during the COVID-19 pandemic (Korean Women Workers Association 2020).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Employment

The Korean government employed several measures to protect the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic, although these measures did not completely prevent economic insecurity. In 2020 during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Korean government invested 15% of its GDP on fiscal policies with aims to 1) protect vulnerable employment and industry, 2) promote economic recovery, and 3) prepare for the post-COVID-19 pandemic economy (International Labour Organization 2020). In addition, the Korean government introduced the Korean New Deal development strategy to increase investment in the digital industry, including artificial intelligence and overall information and communications technology (ICT) (International Labour Organization 2020). Despite the Korean government's timely response to the pandemic, COVID-19 still exacerbated Korea's labor market. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was especially critical on the service industry, as well as on temporary and self-employed workers in Korea (International Labour Organization 2020; Kim 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic's negative impact on employment was also gendered. Because there are more women than men in the service industry and temporary employment in Korea, women's unemployment soared disproportionately more than men's during the pandemic (International Labour Organization 2020; Kim 2021). The Korean Development Institute reports that the COVID-19 pandemic hurt women's employment more than any previous economic crisis in Korea (Kim 2021). In particular, although there is no statistically significant difference in employment between unmarried women and unmarried men during the COVID-19 pandemic,

married women's employment dropped significantly compared to married men in Korea (Kim 2021). This pattern of gender inequality was especially high for the age group of 39-44, followed by the age group of 32-38, which is likely to have young children.⁶

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced my theoretical framework, reviewed the literature on which this dissertation builds on, and explained the research contexts. Incorporating the gendered life course approach, I analyze Korean women's experiences of work and family within the gendered structure and social constraints in Korea. In particular, I focus on how the Korean social context and the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic have shaped Korean women's perspectives and experience on childcare management and career pursuit.

This dissertation builds on sociological scholarship in three ways. First, because the literature on gender and family has assumed gendered responsibility for care work, I conceptualize and document childcare ideologies that are distinct from motherhood ideologies in Chapter 4. Second, while previous studies have documented women's career pursuits in cross-sectional settings, this dissertation contributes to the literature by documenting how women's career aspirations and pursuits change over time, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Chapter 5. Finally, while literature on family has extensively documented the benefits of grandparents' care help for adult children, I investigate how Korean women benefit from grandmothers' care help, and how their experiences vary for help from maternal versus paternal grandmothers in Chapter 6.

⁶ The average of age for this dissertation's sample was 36 years old, and ranged from 31-42 for wave 2 (2020) which was conducted in the first year of COVID-19 pandemic. See Chapter 3 for more information on sample demographics.

CHAPTER 3. DATA & METHODS

As discussed in Chapter 1, I have three research objectives in this dissertation: 1) to investigate and document ideologies of childcare in Korea, 2) to investigate what factors influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits, and 3) to investigate the extent of grandmothers' care help for Korean working mothers. To investigate these research objectives, my study relies on longitudinal qualitative in-depth interviews because they are one of the best methodological tools to understand the cultural norms and values that are often taken for granted and invisible (Rubin and Rubin 2012). More specifically, I collected and analyzed three waves of qualitative in-depth interviews with 37 working mothers in urban Korea ($n=102$). The first wave was collected in May-August 2019 in-person, and the last two waves were collected virtually in May-August 2020 (wave 2) and May-August 2021 (wave 3). Because COVID-19 emerged mid-data collection, I incorporated analysis of the unprecedented pandemic, which had a global impact on health, economic stability, and so many aspects of people's lives.

In this chapter, I introduce the data and methods I employed for this dissertation in five sections. First, I explain the study design of three waves of longitudinal in-depth interviews. Second, I describe the sample. I explain my sampling strategy, the criteria for research participation, the process of sample recruitment, and I provide a description of sample demographics. Third, I discuss the data collection procedures and attrition of the sample at each wave of data collection. In this section, I also share my reflection on data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fourth, I describe my analytic strategy for the overall dissertation and for each empirical chapter (Chapters 4-6). Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing the ethics of data and methods.

3.1 Study Design

In this dissertation, I aimed to provide analytic generalizations about the dynamic and complex social patterns of how childcare ideologies influence Korean mothers' career pursuits and childcare arrangements. As discussed in Chapter 1, despite the panoply of family-friendly policies, Korean working women struggle with career pursuits due to childcare issues, and heavily rely on grandmothers' care help. Thus, I investigated why and how some Korean working women met

their childcare needs, while others did not, and how grandmothers' childcare help influences Korean women in the midst of existing cultural norms on childcare. Qualitative research methods are beneficial for developing an "analytic generalization" via analytic insights that are illustrative of larger social patterns (Stone 2007:248). Accordingly, I devised a qualitative study which enabled me to seek answers to specific questions pertaining to women's experiences related to childcare arrangements and career pursuits.

Like other qualitative researchers, rather than attempting to generalize to the larger population of Korean working mothers or determine what proportion of Korean mothers had to renounce their career goals due to childcare issues, I aimed to produce theoretical insights about my group of interest (Small 2009, 2021), which is Korean working mothers. Below, I justify my decision to conduct in-depth interviews, followed by my reasoning for designing a longitudinal study.

3.1.1 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews have several methodological benefits. They are valuable methodological tools to gather rich, detailed information on individuals' narratives and stories, rather than simple yes-or-no, or agree-or-disagree responses (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Accordingly, interviews help a researcher better understand the *processes* of the topic of research interest (Josselson 2013). For example, because I was interested in Korean working mothers' care arrangements with their child's grandmothers, I was able to inquire about the *processes* of negotiation Korean women engage in with grandmothers and how they navigate their available care options, and how such processes had changed or remained the same during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chapter 6 for more).

At the same time, interviews enable a rigorous but flexible data collection process. Interviews help ensure consistent data collection because they allow a researcher to explore themes consistently across various waves, contexts, and individuals (Lamont and Swidler 2014). A researcher also has the flexibility to tailor questions for each research participant to gain more insights beyond a predetermined set of questions (Rubin and Rubin 2012). For example, because I constructed the semi-structured interview guides prior to data collection, I was able to ask consistent questions within my broader interest of childcare experiences and careers, while including individual-specific questions. See below for more details on the interview guides.

Finally, I chose interviews because they are useful for gaining information about cultural norms, rules, and values that shape people's behaviors and traditions (Rubin and Rubin 2012). This is because interviews allow a researcher to explore and find terms, phrases, behaviors, or choices that reflect local cultural norms and values (Rubin and Rubin 2012). For example, although I did not plan to conceptualize childcare ideologies at the initial stage of research design, the information about cultural norms and values on childcare helped me theorize childcare ideologies through abductive analysis. See the "Analysis" section below for more details.

To maximize the benefits of interviews, I worked to develop rapport with participants by using both verbal and non-verbal cues and probes (Rubin and Rubin 2012; Stone 2007). For example, I nodded occasionally when the interview participant was speaking. The nod signaled that I was interested in their narratives. When something was unclear, I asked "Could you tell me more about it? How so?" Finally, throughout the interview process and in communications with the participants, I tried to be empathetic, nonjudgmental, and emotionally responsive to participants in order to enhance rapport (Josselson 2013). Building rapport is critical for collecting high quality data as it builds a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and allows participants to feel comfortable openly sharing their experiences. Engaging with the participants was also important for participant retention across all three waves of interviews.

Semi-Structured Interview Guides

Based on the review of relevant literature, I developed the semi-structured interview guides with questions addressing the following themes: care arrangements including experiences with care-providing maternal and paternal grandmothers (Objectives 1 and 3); managing work and family (Objective 2); women's identities as mothers and workers (Objective 2); fertility intentions and behavior;⁷ experiences using family-supportive policies (Objective 1 and 2); and demographic information. At waves 2 and 3, I also added questions on the COVID-19 pandemic, which I discuss more below.

Overall, I initially designed the interview guides to investigate objectives 2 and 3 while also allowing flexibility to uncover new themes and changes from the previous waves (Hermanowicz

⁷ I asked questions about fertility intentions and behavior to better understand women's childbearing ideals and what factors may keep them from reaching – or help facilitate their reaching – their fertility ideals. Work-family conflicts and difficulties with childcare are common factors that reduce fertility among working mothers. However, I do not analyze these data in the dissertation because they are beyond the scope of this project.

2013; Saldaña 2003). The questions on care arrangement did not intend to investigate the first objective at the conception of this study design. Instead, the responses to these questions helped me develop the first objective as I progressed with analysis. I discuss this iterative analytic process in later sections of this chapter. The interview guides are available in Appendix A (wave 1), Appendix B (wave 2) and Appendix C (wave 3).

3.1.2 Longitudinal In-depth Interviews

A Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) design allows a researcher to study individuals' accounts with a time dimension (Vogl and Zartler 2021). Unlike cross-sectional analysis, in QLR, researchers can examine how participants' thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs change through time (Saldaña 2003). Because I employed a panel design by interviewing the same participants over time, I was able to compare similarities and differences within each participant across three years.

Furthermore, in addition to consistent and flexible data collection of in-depth interviews as discussed above, a researcher can ask not only the same questions on the same themes, but also different questions unique to the participants, and on newly emergent themes across different waves of data collection in QLR (Hermanowicz 2013). That is, I was able to ask unique follow-up questions tailored to each individual based on their interview responses from the previous waves, in addition to the standard semi-structured interview questions that I asked of all participants. For example, when Mirae (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed that she did not get along with her mother-in-law at wave 1, when I re-interviewed her at wave 2, I asked whether there had been any changes in her relationship in the past year, and if so, why? That is, I was able to document individual trajectories on how individuals' experiences and relationships had changed, and what factors had influenced those changes.

The longitudinal research design also allowed me to investigate new themes and contexts. For example, by analyzing the data from waves 1 and 2, I conceptualized childcare ideologies as an important cultural factor that influences Korean mothers' career pursuits and care arrangement experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, by interviewing the same participants over three years—before COVID-19 (2019), during COVID-19 (2020), and one year later (2021)—I was able to document the trajectories of participants' childcare arrangements, career aspirations, and other family dynamics, and how they had changed or remained the same before

and during the pandemic. In a way, because of the opportune timing of data collection, this research design enabled a natural pseudo-experiment on the impacts of COVID-19.

Finally, QLR can substantiate important connections between micro- and macro-level changes (Hermanowicz 2013), which helped me employ a gendered life course approach (Moen 2011) (See Chapter 2 for more). For example, to investigate the first research objective, I analyzed whether changes in beliefs and norms about childcare stemmed from individual changes in their preferences, versus structural changes in the available childcare options during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chapter 4 for more). For the second research objective, I analyzed how participants' career aspirations and pursuits had changed, and whether any changes in the participants' career aspirations and pursuits were due to changes within themselves, or changes in response to macro-level factors such as government policies or the presence of COVID-19 (see Chapter 5). Finally, to study the third research objective, I documented whether any changes in mothers' experience of receiving grandmothers' care help were due to micro-level changes such as changes in family dynamics, or tied to any structural changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic (see Chapter 6).

3.2 Sample

In this section, I describe my sampling strategy, the eligibility for research participation, my sample recruitment process, and I provide a description of the sample demographics.

3.2.1 Sampling Strategy

I sampled the participants using a purposive method of dimensional sampling. A purposive sampling strategy is useful to produce a logical inference when using a small number of cases in qualitative research (Small 2009). As a non-probability sampling method, the dimensional sampling method allows for analytical generalizations among a small number of cases (Arnold 1970). This sampling strategy constructs a sample based on analytic dimensions such as race, class, or age (Arnold 1970). Arnold (1970) delineates three steps for this sampling strategy: 1) define a group that a researcher wants to generalize about; 2) define the most important dimensions among the members of this group to develop a typology; and 3) use this typology as a sampling frame for selecting a small number of cases. For example, to make an analytic generalization about religious practice, Winchester (2008, 1761) employed a dimension of "time since convert."

Taking a similar approach, I employed a sampling dimension based on which grandmother provided mothers with childcare help.⁸ Because I was initially interested in potential differences in Korean mothers' care arrangements with their child's maternal versus paternal grandmothers, I distinguished the sample dimensions based on whether the childcare providing grandmother was maternal or paternal. Thus, the sampling dimensions for this dissertation included three groups at wave 1: (1) mothers receiving care help from the child's maternal grandmother (41%, n=15 at wave 1), (2) mothers receiving care help from the child's paternal grandmother (38%, n=14 at wave 1), and (3) mothers who do not receive care help from the focal child's grandmothers (22%, n=8 at wave 1). If the participant received help from both maternal and paternal grandmothers (8%, n=3 at wave 1), I categorized them based on who provided more care help. I included the last group as a reference group. When participants changed their care arrangement with grandmothers across waves, I changed their group accordingly. Although the initial sampling dimension relied on types of grandmother care, I also analyzed participants based on diverse axes of thematic patterns following emergent themes and the research objectives I developed throughout the analytic process. Please see the "Analysis" section below for more information.

Finally, because it was critical to account for potential attrition in the initial study design in longitudinal studies (Hermanowicz 2013), I oversampled each group beyond the estimated saturation point, the point at which no new information was found (Charmaz 2006). Through data collection in 2019, I determined the saturation point for each group; although I did not find any new information when I reached 22 participants (n=8 for the first two groups, n=6 for the last group), I oversampled each group to interview a total of 37 participants.

3.2.2 Participant Eligibility

I limited the study participants to mothers with at least one child who was younger than age seven at wave 1. Seven is the age at which Korean children start elementary school. Research shows that mothers in the United States experience more work-family conflict when children are

⁸ When I first designed this dissertation, I was primarily interested in investigating Korean mothers' experience of navigating childcare with their child's grandmothers, given the widespread use of grandmothers' care help in Korea (Lee and Bauer 2010, 2013), and a growing proportion of maternal grandmothers' providing childcare help compared to paternal ones in Korea (Lee et al. 2019). However, as I discuss more below, I expanded my research objectives during the iterative processes of abductive analysis.

younger (Nomaguchi and Fetto 2019). Similarly, Korean mothers of young children may experience more challenges in pursuing their work and arranging childcare because children younger than seven are not in elementary school, and therefore families have to find care for them. For children who are too young to enroll in elementary schools, the Korean Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECEC) provides three types of comprehensive care: center-based daycare, kindergarten, and childminding services at home (OECD 2019b). These three public childcare arrangements are heavily subsidized by the government, in addition to cash benefits offered to parents with children enrolled in daycare and kindergarten (OECD 2019b) (See Chapter 2 for more). Thus, by limiting the participants to mothers of children younger than seven, I focused on mothers' experience of childcare and their career aspirations in the presence of ECEC care support.

Additionally, given the longitudinal nature of the research, I was able to explore whether the mother's childcare negotiation process and family and career dynamics changed after their child begins attending school, when their child enrolled in elementary school in the second or third wave. For example, I was able to analyze how Yewon (39 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) her ideas about *good* childcare, and her experience of arranging care with her care-providing mother-in-law have changed when her child started elementary school at wave 2. The Korean government provides "after-school education" services until 5 p.m. in almost every public primary school, where 66% of Korean elementary school students are enrolled (OECD 2019b). However, because of the culture of long working hours in Korea (Brinton and Oh 2019), parents may need to find childcare arrangements in addition to the "after-school education" services. In addition, although not expected at the initial stage of study design, I was able to examine how such after-school education programs were running during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, I compared whether and how the changes in care, such as from kindergarten to elementary school, influenced Korean mothers' experiences navigating childcare arrangements.

3.2.3 Sample Recruitment

For sample recruitment, I relied on the online community "Momsholic Baby" on Naver, the most popular portal website in Korea (Momsholic Baby 2003). "Momsholic Baby" is a semi-private community: only women of reproductive age (born after 1971 and before 2002 as of 2019) are eligible to become members. I chose this online community because of its popularity among

Korean mothers: since its foundation in 2003, it had been the largest community in the category of “maternal childcare” on Naver; as of March, 2022, it has a total of 3.1 million members. Members of this group could upload posts in a wide range of topics. The examples of the post categories include but are not limited to: information on public and private policies focused on pregnant women, shopping, medical services, children-friendly restaurants, and concerns and questions about navigating family dynamics, being working mothers, and additional fertility concerns. Overall, “Momsholic Baby” provided comprehensive access to a community of mothers who are interested in childcare information.

In order to recruit participants, I joined the “Momsholic” community on September 19, 2018, when I first began developing this research project. To join the community, I used my personal Naver account, which verified my gender and birth date using the government’s Electronic Verification Systems (EVS). After my gender and birth date were verified, I became a member. I did not disclose that I was a researcher, because I was not asked about my motivation for joining the community. Because the community granted the right to upload a post only after writing at least three comments to other people’s posts, I left three comments on already existing posts, posted by strangers, on May, 14, 2019. The comments were emojis responding to other posts, not relevant to this research project. Completing this process allowed me to post the recruitment flyer.

The recruitment flyer included the IRB protocol, study title, objective, participant eligibility, and my contact information including my Purdue email address, my phone number in Korea, and my personal ID for KakaoTalk (an online messaging program widely used in Korea). See Appendices D and E for the English and Korean versions of the recruitment flyer, respectively. Since older posts do not get much attention on the website, I posted the recruitment flyers on “Momsholic” three times in 2019: two weeks before I began the interviews (May 15), after I interviewed 10 participants (June 13), and after I interviewed 20 participants (June 28). Upon completion of data collection, I deleted all three recruitment posts from the website, because the posts included my personal contact information.

Among the 37 participants that ultimately participated in this study, 26 contacted me through KakaoTalk messenger, eight by text message, and three by email. When the potential participants expressed their interest in this study, I first thanked them, and then verified their child’s age and their childcare method in order to confirm their study participation eligibility.

There were three people who expressed interest in the study, but were not eligible to participate. There were also five other people who expressed interest in participating, but never responded to my messages. I determined that they were no longer interested in participation and did not follow up afterwards. Once I determined that women were eligible to participate, I scheduled to meet them in-person at a location convenient to them for the first wave of data collection in 2019.

3.2.4 Sample Demographics

The sample was generally comprised of well-educated, working mothers in their 30s and early 40s from urban areas. At wave 1, 26 participants (70%) were working full-time, six (16%) were working part-time, and five (14%) were stay-at-home mothers. At wave 2, 12 participants' (38%) work statuses changed from wave 1, and ten (30%) changed at wave 3 since their last interview either at wave 1 or 2 (see Table 2). Overall, the participants were well-educated: at wave 1, seven (19%) were pursuing or had received a graduate degree, 29 (78%) had received a bachelor's degree, and one woman's (3%) highest education level was a high school degree. All participants were from urban areas: 28 from Seoul, six from cities in Gyeonggi-do province, one from a city in Chungcheong-do province, and two from two different cities in Gyeongsang-do province. This urban centering of the sample was not surprising considering that 81% of the Korean population resided in urban areas as of 2018 (The World Bank 2018). Participants ranged in age from 29 to 44 and the average age was 35 at wave 1. Finally, the majority of the study participants (78%, $n=29$) had only one child at wave 1. Six participants (16%) had two children, and two participants (5%) had three children at wave 1. The participants' number of children ranged from 1 to 3 at all three waves. I provide a summary of participants' descriptive information in Table 1 below and more information about demographics and changes between each wave in Table 2.

Although I did not limit the sample by social class, nearly all participants were identified as middle- or upper-middle-class women who were employed in the formal labor market. One working mother was identified as working class. It is likely that my sampling strategy is tied to the higher socioeconomic status of my sample. When the middle and upper-middle class compose a majority of the population (e.g., 59% in 2019 in Korea, Korean Ministry of Economy and Finance 2019), a researcher tends to recruit middle class participants unless there is a particular effort to recruit from the highest class strata or to recruit working class individuals (Emmel 2013). However,

because analyzing class was beyond the scope of this dissertation, I did not employ an additional purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants from diverse class backgrounds. Finally, all participants were in a heterosexual marriage at wave 1.

Table 1. Abridged Descriptive Participant Information

Category		N	Percentage (%)	Range	N	Percentage (%)	Range	N	Percentage (%)	Range
		<i>Wave 1</i>			<i>Wave 2</i>			<i>Wave 3</i>		
Work Status	Full-time	26	70		19	59		21	64	
	Part-time	6	16		6	19		7	21	
	Stay-at-home	5	16 ^a		7	22		5	15	
	Total	37	100		32	100		33	100	
Care Providing Grandmothers	Maternal Grandmother (Participant's own mother)	15	41		12	37		12	37	
	Paternal Grandmother (Participant's mother-in-law)	14	38		6	19		8	24	
	Both grandmothers (as well as other family members)	3	8		4	13		3	9	
	None from Grandmothers	8	22		10	31		10	30	
	Total	37	100		32	10		33	100	
Education	Enrolled in graduate school / Received MS or PhD	7	19		7	22		7	21	
	University degree	29	78		25	78		25	76	
	High school degree	1	3		0	0		1	3	
	Total	37	100		32	100		33	100	
Average Age		35		29-44	36		31-42	37		32-43
Average number of children*		1.24		1-3	1.37		1-3	1.44		1-3

Note: Four were pregnant with their second child at wave 1, and three each at waves 2 and 3.

Given the value of longitudinal studies for examining changes over time, there were several changes in participants' characteristics at waves 2 and 3 compared to wave 1. Among the participants who were interviewed at wave 2 ($n=32$, see section below on attrition), 25 (78%) changed their childcare arrangements. Among these 25, 13 (52%) employed more forms of childcare, for example, expanding from receiving care from one grandmother to receiving care from both grandmothers. Ten (40%) employed fewer childcare providers in the past year, for example, from receiving care from both grandmothers to the participant herself providing care at wave 2. Two women (8%) changed the type of childcare providers, for example, from maternal grandmother and kindergarten to maternal grandmother and elementary school. Only one participant employed a different grandmother as a primary childcare provider since wave 1: she moved from a maternal to a paternal grandmother. The average number of children among participants has increased from 1.23 in wave 1 to 1.37 in wave 2 (six had their second child between two waves). Six participants (19%) had positive career changes such as getting promoted or taking extra responsibilities at work, while another six (19%) experienced negative career changes, such as quitting or scaling down their career responsibilities. I discuss more on how I coded positive and negative career changes in the "Analysis" section below.

There were several changes at wave 3 as well. Among the 33 women who participated in a wave 3 interview, 15 (42%) changed their childcare arrangement since their last interview at either wave 1 or 2. Among these 15, ten (67%) had more forms of childcare providers, three (20%) employed fewer, and two (15%) employed a different type of care providers. The average number of children increased from 1.37 in wave 2 to 1.44 in wave 3 (two delivered their second child since wave 2). Among ten participants (30%) who experienced career change since their last interview, eight (80%) experienced positive and two (20%) experienced negative changes in their career.

Overall, with the longitudinal research design I was able to document and analyze changes in the processes, challenges, and concerns that Korean mothers had in arranging childcare with different childcare providers, including themselves, their own mothers, their mothers-in-law, and public/private childcare facilities, as well as any changes in their career and family size. In terms of demographic changes, although she was not divorced, one woman started living separately from her husband, and another one divorced since wave 1.

Table 2. Detailed Information on Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Education	Number of Children	Care Arrangement	Education	Number of Children	Care Arrangement	Career change	Education	Number of Children	Care Arrangement	Career change
<i>Wave 1</i>					<i>Wave 2</i>				<i>Wave 3</i>			
<i>Full time working mothers (n=26)</i>												
Bora	30	College	1	MG & daycare	N/C	N/C	MG, husband, and daycare	Took more career responsibilities	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Kyungha	35	College	1	MG & kindergarten	N/C	N/C	MG & elementary school	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Minsun	34	College	1	MG & kindergarten	N/C	N/C	N/C	Moved to a better company	N/C	Pregnant with 2nd child	N/C	N/C
Hyojung	32	MS (Medical school)	Pregnant with 2nd child	Maternal grandparents, her parents' friend from church and kindergarten	N/C	2	Maternal grandparents and kindergarten	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	Moved to a smaller hospital in a rural area
Bomin	35	College	1	MG only	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	2	Husband, kindergarten	N/C
Jihee	34	College	2	MG & kindergarten	N/C	N/C	N/C	Promotion	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Garam	35	College	1	MG & kindergarten	N/C	N/C	Maternal grandparents, sister, and elementary school	Part time	N/C	N/C	N/C	Full time
Minyoung	35	College	1	MG (primary) & PG	N/C	N/C	Herself	N/C	N/C	N/C	PG	N/C

Table 2 continued

Woori	38	College	2	MG (previously PG) & kindergarten	N/C	N/C	MG (primary), PG, daycare and kindergarten	Took more career responsibilities	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Minjin	38	College	1	MG (occasional)	N/C	N/C	Herself	Quit her job	N/C	N/C	MG (occasional)	Full time
Wonmi	30	College	1	PG & kindergarten	N/C	2	PG, daycare and kindergarten	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Inyoung	38	College	1	PG & daycare	N/C	N/C	N/C	Promotion	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Soomin	37	College	1	PG & daycare	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	MG	More career responsibilities
Suyeon	34	College	Pregnant with 2nd child	PG & daycare	N/C	2	Herself	N/C	N/C	N/C	PG, Kindergarten	N/C
Soyoung	35	College	Pregnant with 2nd child	PG & daycare	N/C	2	Herself	N/C	N/C	N/C	PG, Kindergarten	N/C
Joomi	37	College	1	PG only	N/C	N/C	PG & daycare	N/C	N/C	Pregnant with 2nd child	Kindergarten	N/C
Mirae	35	PhD	Pregnant with 2nd child	PG & kindergarten	N/C	2	PG (primary), MG, kindergarten and part-time babysitter	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Dasom	36	College	1	PG & daycare	N/C	Pregnant with 2nd child	Herself	Quit her job	N/C	2	Kindergarten	N/C

Table 2 continued

Yewon	39	College	1	PG & kindergarten	N/C	N/C	PG (primary), MG and elementary school	N/C	N/C	N/C	Elementary school, PG (occasional)	N/C
Hyejin	35	College	2	Kindergarten (Previously PG)	N/C	N/C	Elementary school and daycare	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Youngji	36	Currently doing MA	1	Daycare only	N/C	N/C	Kindergarten, MG (Occasional)	N/C	Master's	N/C	N/C	N/C
Mikyong	33	MA	1	Babysitter and daycare	N/C	N/C	Kindergarten	Quit her job	N/C	Pregnant with 2nd child	N/C	Part time
Sujin	34	College	2	MG (previously PG)	N/C	2	PG	N/C	Attrition			
Soohee	32	High School	1	PG & kindergarten	Attrition				N/C	N/C	Kindergarten	N/C
Yeonjae	29	College	1	Kindergarten only	Attrition				Attrition			
Yeram	35	College	2	PG (primary), MG, babysitter, maid and kindergarten	Attrition				Attrition			
<i>Part-time working mothers (n=6)</i>												
Hana	36	MA	1	MG	N/C	N/C	MG & daycare	N/C	N/C	N/C	Daycare	N/C
Sunmi	34	College	1	MG & kindergarten	N/C	Pregnant with 2nd child	Kindergarten	N/C	N/C	2	N/C	N/C
Sooah	35	College	1	PG	N/C	N/C	PG & daycare	Took more career responsi- bilities	N/C	N/C	N/C	Full time

Table 2 continued

Mijung	35	College	1	PG & daycare	N/C	N/C	Kindergarten	No work since the pandemic	N/C	N/C	Elementary school	Part time
Narae	37	Currently doing MA	1	MG (on weekdays) & PG (on weekend)	Master's	N/C	Husband, MG, PG and daycare	Took more career responsibilities	N/C	N/C	MG, PG and daycare	Stay-at-home mother
Seoyeon	41	College	3	PG (4 days), sister (1 day) and kindergarten (all weekdays)	N/C	N/C	Kindergarten	No work since the pandemic	N/C	N/C	N/C	Part time
<i>Stay-at-home mothers (n=5)</i>												
Heejin	35	College	1	Daycare only (Both grandmothers could not help)	N/C	N/C	MG and daycare	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Inseon	30	College	1	Herself	N/C	Pregnant with 2nd child	Kindergarten	N/C	N/C	2	N/C	N/C
Yunah	33	Currently doing MA	1	MG (occasional)	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C	Daycare	Part time
Jiyoung	37	College	3	Daycare only (Both grandmothers could not help)	Attrition				N/C	N/C	N/C	N/C
Haemi	44	College	2	Kindergarten only (Both grandmothers refused to help with childcare)	Attrition				Attrition			

Notes:

1. All names are pseudonyms.

2. MG refers to maternal grandmothers (participants' own mothers), while PG refers to paternal grandmothers (participants' mothers-in-law).

3. N/C refers to no change in between waves.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

In this section, I delineate my procedures for data collection at each wave. In doing so, I also discuss my efforts for participant retention and provide a summary of attrition at waves 2 and 3. Finally, I conclude with my reflection on data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3.1 Wave 1 Interview

During the first wave of data collection in 2019, all interview participants were informed about the longitudinal nature of this study and provided verbal consent to participate in all three waves of interviews, in addition to informed written consent to participate in wave 1 (in-person), and waves 2 and 3 (electronically). All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' written informed consents, and conducted in Korean by myself, as I am a native speaker (See the "Ethics" section below for more details). Wave 1 interviews lasted an average of one hour (61.5 minutes). At wave 1, except for one interview conducted via video call due to the cost of travel, 36 interviews were conducted in person; 28 interviews took place at a café, eight in the participant's home, and three in the participants' office.

3.3.2 Wave 2 Interview

For wave 2, interviews with 32 participants (86.5% from wave 1) were conducted over video call due to the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) restrictions on in-person interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic. The average length of wave 2 interviews was 77 minutes. Below, I describe my retention strategies and participant attrition for wave 2.

To retain participants between each wave, I contacted the participants on several occasions. In January 2020, I sent a new year's greeting and shared my plans for the second wave of data collection (summer of 2020). I utilized the contact information that the participants used to contact me initially. For example, if a participant communicated with me in KakaoTalk messenger during wave 1, I used KakaoTalk to send her the follow-up message. Similarly, for those who emailed me to communicate initially, I emailed them to follow-up. However, for those who text messaged me, since I could not send a text message from my phone in the United States to Korean phone numbers, I created an arbitrary phone number using Skype to send text messages. Among the 37 participants from wave 1, 22 (59%) responded with a greeting message and expressed their

interests in participating in the wave 2 interviews. In May 2020, I contacted all the wave 1 participants again using their primary modes of contact, whether it be KakaoTalk, email, or text message, to schedule the virtual interviews for wave 2. I explained that I could not conduct in-person interviews due to COVID-19, and the interviews would be conducted via video call. Except for one participant who suggested to talk on Zoom, 31 interviews were conducted using the video call function on KakaoTalk messenger. For those who did not respond to my messages in either January or May, I contacted them two more times throughout the data collection process, from May to August 2020, to remind them about the interview.

Despite my efforts to retain participants, I lost five participants in the second wave of interviews. Among these five women, one responded that she was too busy with childcare and work to participate. Although I explained that I am willing to accommodate to her schedule until fall of 2020, she never responded back. The other four participants never responded to the greeting messages in January and May, nor the other two reminder messages during the data collection period in 2020.

Two of the women who did not participate in wave 2 received childcare help from paternal grandmothers, and three did not have help from either maternal or paternal grandmothers at wave 1. The findings suggest that participants who received help from maternal grandmothers (their own mothers) had better childcare arrangement experiences, compared to those who received help from paternal grandmothers or no grandmother (See Chapter 6 for more). In this context, the attrition of women from these two groups could be meaningful data in and of itself. There could be other reasons too. The attrition could also simply reflect that these mothers were too busy to participate in an interview, or that their contact information had changed. Since none of the participants indicated that they no longer wanted to participate in this research, I contacted all 37 participants for the final wave of interviews in 2021.

3.3.3 Wave 3 Interview

Similar to wave 2, I conducted wave 3 interviews via video call with 33 participants (89.2% from wave 1, 96.9% from wave 2) due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions. Everyone except one participant from wave 2 participated in wave 3, while two who did not participate in wave 2 but did in wave 1 participated in wave 3. The wave 3 interviews lasted for 84 minutes on average.

In order to retain participants for the final wave, I employed similar retention efforts from 2020. In January 2021, I sent a greeting message to share a tentative plan for data collection to all participants from wave 1, using the primary modes of contacts. In this message, I explained that although I planned on conducting in-person interviews for wave 3, I would adjust to virtual video call interviews in the case of travel restrictions due to COVID-19, as I did for wave 2. Among the 37 wave 1 participants, 32 participants (86%) responded to the greeting message in January. Their messages were simple—wishing me a happy new year and saying they looked forward to the interview in the summer.

In late May of 2021, I contacted all 37 participants from wave 1 again to share the final plan to conduct interview via video calls and scheduled the interview dates. I contacted the participants at wave 3 using their primary modes of contact, whether it be KakaoTalk, email or text message, to schedule the virtual interview. I explained that I could not conduct in-person interviews due to COVID-19, and the interviews would be conducted via video call. Similar to wave 2, all interviews were conducted using video call on KakaoTalk.

At wave 3, I was able to interview two participants who did not participate in wave 2 but did in wave 1. Among these two who participated in waves 1 and 3, one explained that because she was going through a divorce in 2020, she did not have mental capacity to participate in the interview. Another participant said that because she was a stay-at-home mother without much childcare support, she was too busy with childcare in 2020 to participate in the interview. In sum, I was able to interview 33 participants at wave 3 (89% of the wave 1 sample). The interviews were conducted from May to August 2021.

Despite my retention efforts, I lost a total of four participants since wave 1. Although I sent two more reminders about the interview until August, 2021, I never heard back and considered them as lost cases. Three of these women did not participate in wave 2 either. One participant who was interviewed at waves 1 and 2 responded in the message in May 2021, writing that she was unable to participate in the wave 3 interview because of her busy work schedule. Although I contacted her two more times to remind about the interview and explained that she could participate when her work schedule would get better even later in the year, I never heard back and considered her case as an attrition.

Because the study design accounted for potential attrition (Hermanowicz 2013) as discussed above, I did not recruit any additional participants in 2020 and 2021. It is also natural to lose

participants in longitudinal qualitative research (Vogl and Zartler 2021). Because I lost five participants (14%) from wave 1 to wave 2, I anticipated a similar rate of attrition for wave 3 (13%, $n=4$). Accordingly, I estimated approximately 76% of participants from the first waves ($n=28$) will join the final wave, which is greater than the initial saturation point. Fortunately, I was able to retain more participants ($n=33$) than my initial anticipation.

3.3.4 Data Collection during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The global health crisis of COVID-19 has influenced this dissertation and the study participants in both positive and negative ways. To start with positives, the pandemic allowed the study to expand its research scope to examine changes in Korean mothers' experiences of childcare in the context of a global pandemic. Because longitudinal data allow a researcher to use history as quasi-experimental social science (Kok 2002), the pandemic added value to this study as one of the first in the world to study COVID-19 as a social experiment.

The pandemic also enabled me to examine how families respond to various unexpected situations. More specifically, I was able to examine women's life course trajectories as discussed in Chapter 2. For example, I was able to ask participants about their future plans, such as how those who reported experiencing negative changes as a result of COVID-19 were responding and planning to overcome existing challenges. Unfortunately, the waves 2 and 3 data revealed that many participants experienced negative consequences of the pandemic, such as increased workloads, unemployment, economic instability, psychological distress, and health crises. For these participants, I was able to add questions on how they were responding to and managing such challenges. At the same time, some participants also experienced positive impacts of the pandemic, such as increased time with their family, improved working conditions, and increased awareness on health. For these participants, I was able to ask about their plans for maintaining the status quo. By comparing the data between those with positive and those with negative changes, I was also able to investigate what conditions and mechanisms that may lead to positive versus negative outcomes in the times of crisis. For example, although a majority of participants worked from home at least at some point during waves 2 and 3, only some of them discussed positive changes in their career pursuits and childcare arrangements. Accordingly, I compared women who experienced positive versus negative changes while working from home, and analyzed what factors had led to such differences (see Chapter 6 for more).

However, due to COVID-19, I had fewer opportunities to build rapport with participants at waves 2 and 3. At wave 1 during the in-person interview, I was able to establish rapport with the participants without difficulties. For example, I talked to the participants casually before the interview, waiting for coffee, talking about the weather, introducing myself, etc. Many of the participants also stayed for as short as 10 minutes, and as long as 30 minutes to talk to me after the interview. Some participants vented about their stress, some casually talked about their family and work, and some asked about me or the research. These interactions and conversations provided valuable information about the participants. I took field notes on these conversations, and more importantly, this helped me create rapport with the participants. During these casual conversations, I got to empathize with them, we shared laughs, and some participants volunteered to walk me to a bus stop, and showed me their neighborhood on the way. Overall, these in-person interactions were valuable information and potential motivations for encouraging them to participate in future waves of interviews.

On the other hand, building rapport during virtual interviews was challenging during waves 2 and 3, when I could not carry out in-person interviews due to the international travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although I was able to ask all prepared questions through virtual face interviews, I missed out on opportunities to interact with the participants personally beyond the interviews. Although I was able to have some informal conversations during the virtual interviews, the length of conversation was limited; it usually lasted about 10 minutes. Due to increased childcare demands, participating in an interview itself required a hefty time commitment from the participants. In addition, when participants shared emotional experiences and stories, and cried during the video call, I wished that the interviews were in person for me to provide more support, such as handing over tissue and bringing water.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic affected this dissertation in both positive and negative ways. It helped expand the research scope, albeit unexpectedly, and helped me learn more about the participants' family dynamics, including their family adaptive strategies. At the same time, I missed out on opportunities to build stronger rapport with them.

3.4 Analysis

In this section, I introduce a general analytic approach I employed in this dissertation. I first discuss the benefits of abductive research, and my process in carrying out abductive analysis. Then,

I explain my process in transcribing and coding the interview data. Finally, I discuss how I analyzed the data I present in each empirical chapter (Chapters 4-6) to investigate the three research objectives of this dissertation.

3.4.1 Abductive Analysis

Often, grounded theory is regarded as the most common analytic strategy for qualitative methods like in-depth interviews (Aspers and Corte 2019). As a theory-generating approach, grounded theory aims to build theoretical constructs based on a researcher's systematic interpretive process (Glaser and Strauss 1971). At the same time, to fully rely on the empirical findings for theory generation, grounded theory prevents a researcher from familiarizing her/himself with the literature prior to data collection (Glaser and Strauss 1971). Although this may seem ideal, in reality it is nearly impossible for researchers not to be aware of any previous literature before entering the field for data collection (Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

Another potential analytic strategy in interpreting qualitative data is the extended case method. Drawing from Bourdieu's conceptualization of reflexive sociology, the extended case method strives for a dialogical methodology to account for both micro- and macro-level analyses (Burawoy 1998). Accordingly, this approach requires a researcher to observe, to distance themselves, then to re-enter the field; researchers should intervene with the interviewees to reveal their true selves, to analyze the empirical findings, to analyze the social structure that interviewees are situated within, and to reconstruct the original theory (Burawoy 1998). However, the extended case method may also be impractical because it is difficult for a researcher to re-frame the original theoretical framework in the middle of research, especially beyond her/his apriori theoretical framework (Tavory and Timmermans 2014).

An abductive analytic approach overcomes the limits of both analytic approaches discussed above. Abduction overcomes the limits of grounded theory because it enables theorization relying on both previous theoretical frameworks and empirical observations (Tavory and Timmermans 2014). Abduction also overcomes the extended case method because it does not focus on re-framing the preexisting set of theories (Tavory and Timmermans 2014). Instead, abduction is a speculative and ongoing process for researchers to interpret and define the meanings of observations within existing theoretical frameworks, as well as creating novel theoretical insights (Tavory and Timmermans 2014; Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

Employing abductive approach, I relied on both previous literature and empirical findings to generate theory. Specifically, I followed the four main tenets of abductive research: make observations, read a broad range of literature, systematically analyze the observations, and actively participate in the intellectual community (Tavory and Timmermans 2014). To further enhance the theoretical insights derived from interviews, I wrote field notes and analytic memos throughout the data collection process. During and after each interview, I wrote my initial thoughts and observations from the interviews on field notes. The analytic memos focused on my interpretations of emerging themes analyzing preliminary patterns of the qualitative data. I referred to both the field notes and the analytic memos as part of the analytic process. I discuss more on my abductive analysis for each research objective later in this section.

3.4.2 Transcription

I transcribed the interview data referring to the transcription protocol suggested by McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig (2003). This protocol has four components to ensure quality and confidential management of the interview data. First, the protocol suggests planning the transcription process ahead of time (McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig 2003). Thus, I decided on the use of software and how to manage and store transcribed files before transcribing each wave of interview data. For example, I found a free transcribing software called “Transcribe” and transcribed all interviews myself using the same software. I stored all transcribed files with consistent file names, each including a de-identified participant ID. I completed transcription within the first six months of wave 1 data collection.

I developed and maintained a consistent transcribing processes for waves 2 and 3 as well. After waves 2 and 3, I was able to secure financial resources to hire transcribers whose native language is Korean. For cost-efficiency, I hired five non-professional transcribers from my personal networks—friends and school alumni. Before transcribing any interview, all five transcribers signed an electronic contract using Qualtrics. The contract included statements to never disclose the contents of interviews to anyone, to transcribe as accurately as possible verbatim, and to follow the transcribing guideline, which I discuss more below. To ensure confidential and consistent management of interview data during transcription, I shared only de-identified files with the transcribers; the audio files were labeled with participant IDs instead of participants’ names.

Second, the protocol suggests developing and adhering to a transcribing guideline for consistent transcription of the interview data (McLellan et al. 2003). Thus, I developed a guideline on how to transcribe the interview data referring to McLellan et al (2003). My guideline required to include a de-identified participant ID at the beginning and end of the file, followed by transcriber's name, adding an acronym for an interviewer and interviewee for each sentence, and include laugh or cry in a parenthesis.

Third, the protocol suggests preserving the transcript as accurate to the original audio as possible (McLellan et al. 2003). As a part of this effort, all interviews were transcribed in Korean. I made this decision by referring to previous qualitative research with interviews conducted in non-English languages. For example, for a study of qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in Chinese, the authors transcribed and analyzed in Chinese verbatim to maintain the original nuances of the data (Zhang et al. 2019). I only translated the quotes that I used in this dissertation into English, as Zhang et al (2019) did in their research. Analyzing transcripts in Korean rather than translated versions maintained the authenticity of the analysis because the data preserved the participants' words verbatim. In addition, to ensure transcription accuracy, I reviewed all transcripts with audio-recorded files of interview upon completion of transcriptions. In doing so, I modified any missing words or typos in the transcripts to match the audio-recorded interviews as accurately as possible.

Finally, the protocol suggests maintaining an example of transcription to refer to (McLellan et al. 2003). Thus, I created and referred to this example. Although this example was in Korean since all transcription was done in Korean, I provide an English version of the guideline example for the ease of understanding for non-Korean speaking readers below:

Interview File ID (e.g., Interview 17)

Transcriber's name

Q: Hello. Could you briefly introduce yourself please?

A: My name is XXX. I am 38 years. I am a working mother with a daughter. Oh, I live, I live in Seoul.

Q: How is your daughter?

A: Ah... I think it is about 42 months? Oh, 43 months? (laugh) I am not sure exactly (laugh)

Interview File ID End (e.g., Interview 17 End)

Please transcribe as accurately as possible for the research ethics.

Please make sure to write the interview file ID at the beginning and end of the file.

As mentioned above, the contract that five transcribers signed included this example. Overall, all transcription adhered to the suggested protocol by McLellan et al (2003) and my transcription guideline.

3.4.3 Coding

Coding is an analytic technique to interpret raw interview data to derive and develop conceptual meanings (Corbin and Strauss 2008). My overall coding process was similar to the content coding process that Stryker (1996) employed to construct strategic narrative in her qualitative, historical research. Because Stryker (1996) applied theoretical relevance to historical cases by constructing the conjunctural similarities and differences among historical cases, this coding process was partly descriptive and analytic. Likewise, I analyzed the conjunctural similarities and differences among the participants.

Because I employed abductive analytic strategy, I also coded descriptively and analytically. To do so, I analyzed the transcripts across three cycles of coding. The first cycle of coding was descriptive and categorized the initial set of content themes based on the interview questions (Saldaña 2013). The second cycle of coding was axial, during which I compared the groups of participants based on various axes of difference (Saldaña 2013). The examples of axes included participants' work status, childcare arrangement type (whether receiving help from mothers, mothers-in-law, both or neither), and interview wave to analyze in-person differences (comparing the differences between three waves). The final cycle of coding was analytic and interpretive: I looked for emergent patterns and themes that had not already been coded. Overall, the analysis consisted of both cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons (Hermanowicz 2013).

Using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software, I developed a total of 481 codes under 15 parent codes, or thematic codes. The 15 parent codes include: (1) participants receiving help from their own mothers, (2) participants receiving help from their mothers-in-law, (3) participants receiving help from both grandmothers, (4) participants who do not have access to a grandmother's

childcare help, (5) childcare options other than grandmothers, (6) stay-at-home mothers, (7) relationships with husbands, (8) career trajectories and aspirations, (9) identities, (10) fertility intentions, (11) use of policies or lack thereof, (12) participants' household work, (13) the impact of COVID-19, (14) demographic information, and (15) childcare ideologies. Within these parent codes, I coded for any positive and/or negative changes comparing each wave. In total, I coded 5,151 segments on three waves of interview transcripts (n=102).

Each parent-code served a unique purpose to examine the dissertation's three research objectives (see Chapter 1 for more). The codes 5, 6, 11, 12 and 15 were to examine the first research objective of this dissertation, which are analyzed in Chapter 4. I used the codes 6, 8 and 11 to analyze the second objective of this dissertation, which I analyze in Chapter 5. I developed the first four codes (1-6) to examine the third research objective of this dissertation, which I analyze in Chapter 6. I used the codes 7, 13 and 14 for contextual analysis of the participants. Finally, I added codes 9, 13 and 15 at waves 2 and 3 after finding emergent patterns in participants' discussion of these topics after analyzing the first two waves of data. I developed the rest of the codes based on the review of prior literature. Below, I further describe my analytic strategy to investigate three research objectives discussed in Chapter 1.

3.4.4 Empirical Analysis Chapters

In this section, I delineate my analytic process for the three research objectives, which are tied to the three empirical chapters.

Chapter 4: Analyzing Childcare Ideologies (Research Objective 1)

I conceptualized the concept of "childcare ideologies" as a result of the abductive analytic process (see above for more). That is, although I did not ask direct questions about childcare ideologies during waves 1 and 2, I theorized the concept of childcare ideologies after analyzing interview data from the first two waves, and reviewing the relevant literature. As much as ideologies are difficult to conceptualize, they are also difficult to measure (e.g., Swidler 1986; Tavory 2014). I initially coded the concept of childcare ideologies as a part of the "Motherhood" parent-code because motherhood ideologies are one of the predominant conceptual frameworks in understanding women's childcare experiences in the sociological scholarship (see Chapter 2 for

more). As I progressed with coding, however, I realized that there were narratives about childcare that were different from motherhood ideologies, as I argued in this dissertation. For example, I found that during the first two waves of interviews, the participants talked about their beliefs and norms about childcare in response to the questions on the participants' relationships with their husbands, care-providing grandmother (if any), employers and colleagues, fertility intentions, and policies.

To further delve into the concept of childcare ideologies, I added specific questions about participants' beliefs and their understanding of norms about childcare at wave 3. For example, I asked the following questions: "What is your concept of *ideal* childcare?" and "What's good childcare look like for you?" With these questions, I was able to assess the ideologies of childcare through my participants' own experiences and perspectives. In analyzing participants' responses to these questions, I re-coded the "Motherhood" code to distinguish between "Motherhood" and "Childcare norms," which I later changed the label to "Childcare Ideologies." I categorized the "Motherhood" code as a sub-code under the parent-code of "Childcare Ideologies." In addition, to analyze how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the participants' childcare ideologies, I added questions about whether the pandemic impacted the participants' thoughts and beliefs about childcare in any way.

Because I built on literatures of motherhood to conceptualize childcare ideologies, I drew on Dow (2016) to measure childcare ideologies. Dow (2016) analyzes what the respondents describe as "normal," "natural," "assumed," and "took for granted" about being mothers to conceptualize *integrated motherhood*. Similarly, I coded for what was regarded as normal and taken for granted about who is or who should be providing childcare in Korea. During the analysis, I did not assume that mothers were the sole and/or primary care provider for their children, although they could be. At the same time, I analyzed the availability of government policies, information on public and private childcare facilities, and information about grandmothers' childcare help in Korea, and analyzed whether they matched with mothers' experiences in the use of policies, care facilities, and arranging care help with grandmothers. Overall, my coding scheme for this research objective built on the literature of motherhood, which later developed through the iterative process of finding an emergent pattern on participants' narratives on what I conceptualized as childcare ideologies. I document the findings of this analysis in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5: Analyzing Career Aspirations and Pursuits (Research Objective 2)

To examine the second research objective, I conceptualized the participants' career aspirations as individual preferences relevant to careers, drawing from Correll (2004). For this, I asked interview questions like these: "What are your career goals?" "What would you like to achieve with your career?" "How long do you plan on working?" and "What are your concerns regarding your career if any?" At waves 2 and 3, I added questions to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the participants' work-related tasks, schedule, and any aspect of their career. Finally, in addition to analyzing the participants' responses to these questions, I also probed for and analyzed any other career related responses.

I analyzed positive and negative changes in participants' careers between each wave. I coded positive changes as taking more responsibilities, being promoted, or changing a career trajectory to fulfill their career goals between each wave of interviews. For example, when Youngji (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) worked more hours voluntarily at wave 2 than at wave 1, I coded it as a positive change because she took more career responsibilities at her wish. However, when Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) took more hours at later waves because she had to even though she did not aspire to, I coded it as a negative change because the change was against her will. In addition, I coded negative changes as scaling down their responsibilities at work and changing a career trajectory against their career goals. For example, when Mikyoung (33 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) quit her job to become a stay-at-home mother, I coded it as a negative change because she gave up her career responsibilities even though she did not want to. I discuss the findings from this analysis in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6: Analyzing Care Arrangements with Child's Grandmothers (Research Objective 3)

To analyze how Korean women arrange childcare related demands with their child's grandmothers, I asked the following questions: "Why and how did you decide to ask child's grandmother for childcare help?" "Could you describe your relationship with the care-providing grandmothers?" "In case you disagree with how the care providing grandmother cares for your children, how do you address the issues?" "Do you provide any compensation to the care providing grandmother?" and "How would you describe any advantages and disadvantages of grandmother's

childcare help?” During the interview, I probed for in-depth information about the participants’ relationships with care-providing grandmothers. At waves 2 and 3, I added questions on how the care arrangement with their child’s grandmothers changed across waves, whether and how the COVID-19 pandemic affected grandmothers’ involvement in childcare, and if the participants had any plans to continue or stop receiving care help from grandmothers. I discuss the findings for this research objective in Chapter 6.

3.5 Ethics

This study was approved by the Purdue University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection (IRB Protocol Number: 1904022011). The interview guide and the recruitment flyer, both in English and in Korean, were also approved by the IRB. Before the second wave of data collection, I modified the IRB protocol and interview guides to conduct online interviews to abide by the IRB’s restrictions on in-person interviews during COVID-19. All research participants were informed about their rights and the purpose of this study before the interview, and have been provided with written consent forms for participation at each wave (electronically at waves 2 and 3). To protect their anonymity, I used pseudonyms only to refer to the participants in this dissertation. Finally, I report no conflict of interest with the study participants.

CHAPTER 4. CHILDCARE IDEOLOGIES

In this chapter, I document the range of Korean mothers' beliefs and norms about childcare in three sections. First, I demonstrate what Korean mothers conceptualize as quality childcare. Additionally, based on women's ideas of what good childcare looks like, I analyze Korean mothers' beliefs on who should be providing such quality childcare. In this second section, I show that while Korean mothers value their identities and roles as mothers, a majority of them also emphasize the roles of other family members, non-familial care providers, and institutions in childcare work. Finally, I document how some of these childcare related beliefs and norms have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. With these findings, I argue that the concept of childcare ideologies should be employed to better understand childcare as a social problem.

4.1 What Does “Good” Childcare Look Like?

Childcare entails various tasks. For example, a comparative study on grandparents' childcare help identifies four types of childcare related tasks: 1) *physical care* entails feeding, bathing, dressing, and putting children to bed; 2) *accompanying* includes driving, walking, and picking up children; 3) *talk-based care* includes reading, teaching, talking, and playing games with children; and 4) *minding* entails monitoring, without active engagement with children (Craig, Hamilton, and Brown 2019). While these four types of tasks are all important, some individuals may value certain tasks more than others in arranging childcare for their children. In this section, I document women's conceptualizations of *good* childcare to analyze Korean women's beliefs on the ideal childcare provider in the next section.

The idea of good childcare varied across the participants. Women in this study identified six aspects of high-quality childcare. First, all participants emphasized the importance of the child's physical safety and health when seeking a childcare arrangement. Avoiding any risk of child abuse was the largest concern in arranging childcare. Second, participants wanted a care provider to be able to educate their children academically. The emphasis on education was more pronounced in later waves, as the participants' children were getting older. This finding may be unexpected given that the participants in this study were mothers of young children (pre-elementary school age). However, this belief is reflective of the high emphasis on education in Korean society and

especially the participants' middle- and upper-middle class social backgrounds. Third, participants emphasized caring with love and emotional support. When available, participants preferred care providers who could attend to their child's emotional and mental health over those who could only ensure their physical safety and health. Fourth, some participants emphasized the value of the caregiver providing quality food made with fresh, organic ingredients. Fifth, some discussed that good childcare is what enables parents to enjoy balance in their work-family life. For these participants, as long as care providers ensured the physical safety and health of their child, and their work-family balance was protected, the rest was not as important. Finally, participants hoped that ideally, care providers could help with children's social activities such as making friends. This was one of the biggest concerns for mothers with a child starting elementary school because the children were exposed to a new social setting.

Overall, Korean women emphasized six different aspects of good childcare, although the aspects are not mutually exclusive. That is, when participants sought a childcare arrangement, they did not consider only one aspect of care, but sought care providers who could satisfy as many aspects of "good childcare" as possible. Finally, these ideas were not static; women's beliefs in good childcare changed across time as their child got older.

4.1.1 Physical Safety and Health

All women in the study spoke about their child's safety and health as key features of good childcare. For example, Hyojung (32 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1), who received childcare help from her parents spoke about this aspect during all three of her interviews. During wave 1, Hyojung said she and "my parents think very negatively of [hiring] a babysitter. It must be a very rare case, but sometimes you hear stories about a babysitter hitting a baby, giving sleeping pills... [We] cannot trust them." Although her care-helping parents were planning to move to a different city after the first wave of interviews, I found her still living close to her parents during wave 2. When I asked about her parents' plans for moving, Hyojung said, "I really did not feel comfortable doing [care] without them [my parents]. They decided to wait for us [my husband and I] to wrap up our work here so that we can relocate together. There is no other option. Since I do not feel comfortable about hiring a babysitter, I have to move when they move." As Hyojung planned, by wave 3 she and her family had relocated to a rural part of Korea.

Childcare was at the center of her family's move. Hyojung said ideally, she wanted to find someone that she could "trust" to care for her children. When I probed for her meanings of trust, she said,

Someone that will not hurt my children. I am sure not all babysitters are like that. But even when I care for my children, there are times [that I get angry at them]. How bad would it be for babysitters when the kids are not theirs? Who knows if they hurt children behind the back of mothers? That is trust. I trust that my parents will always care for my children with love, and never hurt them behind our [my husband's and my] back (laugh).

That is, if a mother could get that angry at her own children, non-familial babysitters might also get frustrated and be more likely to hurt a child. When I asked if she witnessed or had any negative experiences related to hiring a babysitter, Hyojung explained:

I never actually saw anyone who had an awful case like that, but if you look on media [news], there are some horrible cases. I understand it is on the news because it is a rare case, and because it does not happen on a regular basis. However, even if it is a 0.01% chance, if it happens to me, that would be a 100% chance of trauma for our children. That is not something we can fix even with money.

Hyojung did not have any indirect or direct experience with this. However, Hyojung, like the rest of the participants, had general concerns about children's safety based on the media exposure of child abuse cases.

Apart from worries of child abuse, participants were concerned about their child's general health and safety. This worry was stronger when women hired babysitters because their children would be left alone with babysitters at home, unlike at care facilities where there are more children and adult teachers to interact with. For example, at wave 2, Minjin (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) described her unpleasant experience of hiring a babysitter:

[The babysitter] kept wearing headphones, when she was with my baby, and even when I am there. She would be on the phone constantly when my daughter was playing at a playground. She let the baby play by herself. She was literally just watching the baby. She was not looking out for the baby, or saying "watch out" like that. She just looked. It was also shocking that she was on the phone wearing headphones. I did not witness it myself [at the playground] but someone told me that my baby was doing something dangerous, but she [the babysitter] was just on her phone. I mean, I saw it several times too. She was constantly wearing her headphones, staying on the phone, when she was helping with other housework too. Maybe other [babysitters] are not like that...

Minjin was not confident that her babysitter was properly attending to her child's safety and health. As she mentioned, it may just be that particular babysitter, not others in general, but she could not risk her child's safety and health. After two weeks, Minjin fired the babysitter.

Overall, all participants shared concerns for their child's safety. According to the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare's report on child abuse cases from 2020, out of all reported cases of child abuse, parents were the major perpetrators (82%), compared to 6% of teachers and staffs at childcare facilities, followed by 5% of non-parent family members (Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare 2021). This is somewhat comparable to the United States. According to U.S. government data from 2019, a majority of perpetrators were parents (78%), followed by non-parent family relatives (7%) and "others," which include foster siblings, nonrelatives, and babysitters (5%) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, and Children's Bureau 2021). The general pattern in participants' concerns about child abuse by non-familial care providers reflects a misrepresentation of child abuse cases at care facilities given that these cases are rare. Indeed, a study that analyzed news reports on child abuse cases in Korea from 2015 to 2017 found that Korean media inaccurately portrayed these cases, and thus, created a normative framework that daycare and kindergarten teachers were not professionals but potential perpetrators of child abuse (Oh, Chung, and Yun 2019).

4.1.2 Education

Among the 34 participants who participated in at least 2 waves of interviews, 21 (62%) spoke about education as a key aspect of quality childcare. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that she wished she had more time for childcare so that she could devote more to her children's education. When I asked what she meant by education, given that her children were ages six and two at the time of the wave 3 interview, Wonmi explained,

I wished I had more time to read them books after work. I can help with homework like writing [learning the Korean alphabet], but by the time I get home, it is too late to teach them math systematically. These days, math is not like simple addition and deduction like our days. Math questions are more complicated... Kids these days learn what is called creative math. I wish I can help with that, but I do not have time. If I stayed at home, my son would do better [with math], although it is not guaranteed (laugh).

Even though her two children were young, Wonmi's quote indicates that age does not matter when it comes to education. When I asked whether anyone else could help with her children's education, including her care-providing mother-in-law, Wonmi responded,

They [my kids] learn [math] at kindergarten but since it is not like one-on-one lesson, it is not clear whether my kids actually understood and followed along. Yeah... I really wished I could do more [with education]. And I do not want to put additional burden on [paternal grandmother]. She does not even have time for that. I feel like education is solely our [my husband's and mine] responsibilities. That is why I enrolled my first son at a tutoring academy.

Wonmi's quote reflects that education involves more time-consuming and detail-oriented care work than the instrumental care her mother-in-law helps with. Wonmi's emphasis on education reflects a general pattern of Korean parents strongly emphasizing education.

Wonmi and 20 other participants who emphasized education as a core quality of good childcare were not outliers. Korean parents, regardless of social class, consider education as a means of social mobility, and spend more money on education than parents in other OECD countries on average (OECD 2019). Furthermore, like childcare, women have been held responsible for children's education in Korea's highly competitive education culture (Chang 2020; Park 2018). As I discuss more in the next section, because education is regarded as a key component of childcare in Korea, women preferred themselves and their husbands—over grandparents who may not have up to date information about education—to engage in children's education during childcare.

4.1.3 Love and Emotional Support

Twelve women (35%) emphasized the value of caring with love and protecting a child's emotional and mental health. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained that she chose her child's grandmothers as primary care providers, because she knew they would care for their grandchildren with love. Wonmi said, "these days in Korea, we see lots of news about child abuse cases at a kindergarten. But my mother-in-law cares for my children with so much love. Even when she disciplines, she just pats their butt. I think that is actually good for kids' emotional stability [for them to calm down]." Wonmi's quote highlights how the aspects of love and emotional health are closely intertwined with the values of safety and health discussed above. Just like Korean mothers emphasized the importance of care providers ensuring a child's

physical safety and health, they wanted their children to be in a mentally safe and healthy environment as well.

For this reason, Woori (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) also preferred to receive help from her child's grandmother rather than from a babysitter. Woori said,

When a child talks, grandmas listen sincerely, engaging with the child. On the other hand, babysitters do not. They make children go play somewhere else instead of listening to them, because their purpose [of care] is to spend [the contracted] time as long as a child is not injured. It is not important for them to engage with children emotionally or educationally.... But I think, especially when children are younger, what is important is to foster children to empathize with others emotionally. For that, I think what is most important [in care] is to listen to children, read their mind from their perspectives, and empathize with them.

Woori's quote reflects that fostering her child's emotional well-being was an important factor in her childcare arrangement. That is, Korean women's conceptualization of good childcare not only involves instrumental tasks like feeding and bathing (Craig et al. 2019) but also caring with love to support child emotionally. As Wonmi's and Woori's quotes suggest, their ideas of good childcare—caring with love and emotional support—influenced their beliefs on whom they should rely on for care help (grandmothers in these cases).

4.1.4 Quality Food

Eight participants (24%) emphasized the aspect of quality food as part of ideal childcare. For example, Mijung (35 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) discussed that when she decided on a kindergarten for her daughter, food was one of the most important aspects. Mijung said, "I cared about [kindergarten's] food. I [decided on the current kindergarten] because they provide a wide variety of food than what I cook [for my daughter]. I also [tried to see] whether they use healthy ingredients for food." Mijung's quote shows that she perceived kindergarten as a care resource that complements her own ability to care for her child. She believed that the institutional resources at a kindergarten could provide healthier and more diverse kinds of food than she would provide at home. In this regard, her ideal about good childcare also influenced her belief that a facility—like a kindergarten—was an ideal care provider for her children.

Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) also added to the importance of quality food. Wonmi received childcare help from the paternal grandmother, and mentioned quality food as one of the advantages of receiving the grandmother's care help. Wonmi said,

When I cook for my children on weekends, I feed them lots of frozen food and instant food (laugh). Even if we eat out, we never know what is in the food. But grandmas cook a lot of food from scratch at home, starting with making their own broth. I feel like that [healthy homemade food] is why my kids are growing up healthy.

Highlighting the importance of a child's health in the definition of good childcare, as discussed above, Wonmi's quote shows that quality food is an important aspect of childcare because food is closely related to health issues. Again, her idea of good childcare influenced her decision to continue relying on her child's grandmother for care help.

4.1.5 Parents' Work-Life Balance

Eight participants (24%) also tied good childcare to work-life balance. For example, Seoyeon (41 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) said at wave 3,

Ideally, I wish there is someone else at home who is not me (laugh). It would be nice if there was someone who can provide care in all aspects—help with kids' education, play with them and all.... What is really ideal is to have my life, right? A life where I can get rest too. But that is not possible, not feasible in Korea. For example, working mothers are taking turns with a babysitter when they get home from work. But then, they need to start caring for their child. That is not ideal.... What is ideal is for mothers to have time to rest, and time for their own too.

Seoyeon described women's second shift (Hochschild and Machung 2012) as the *reality* of working mothers in Korea. What Seoyeon envisioned as *ideal* was to be free from the second shift to have her own time without work or family responsibilities. In other words, although it may be unattainable, these mothers believed that good childcare frees parents from heavy childcare responsibilities. I analyze more on how childcare influences mothers' work and family lives in Chapter 5.

4.1.6 Fostering Friendship

Finally, five participants (15%) discussed the importance of fostering their children's friendship as an important aspect of quality childcare. For example, Kyungha (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) who received care help from her own mother said, "one aspect that grandmothers cannot do [well] is intervening in child's friends' group or helping to make new

friends.” In addition, at wave 3, Seoyeon (41 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) discussed the aspect of fostering friendship:

I heard that moms go on a parental leave when their girls enroll in elementary school. I did not know about that because my older children were twins. I am fine even if they do not have friends because they play with each other... So, moms need to go to school to pick up their child so that moms can interact with other moms, and eventually make friends to play with long-term.... Literally, moms are there to make friends.

Seoyeon’s quote shows that good childcare involves helping a child make friends. Taking Kyungha’s and Seoyeon’s quotes together, because many care providers, like babysitters and grandmothers, may not be capable of or interested in doing so, women considered taking the primary responsibility for their child’s care when the child started elementary school, where they would be introduced to new sets of friends.

4.1.7 Changes in “Good” Childcare

While women’s ideas about good childcare are comprised of diverse aspects of care, these ideas were not static. They changed across context and time. For example, Joomi, who was frustrated about not enrolling her child at the best care facility at wave 2, said at wave 3,

I do not know why [I was frustrated so much]. My child is doing well, having lots of friends [at the private care facility], but at the time, I thought I was doing something wrong to my child [last year by not enrolling at the best kindergarten in town], like taking his opportunity away. Now I think about it, there are a lot of alternatives [on care].

Joomi added,

I have more flexibility in how I think about [childcare]. I have more confidence that my child would do well even if I do not have to arrange everything perfectly. Most importantly, because an unexpected external factor like COVID-19 can mess up my plan, I am now thinking let me just do the best I can [about childcare].

Likewise, the participants’ care beliefs changed as their children got older and as the participants gained more experience with childcare over time.

Korean mothers also put more emphasis on education than instrumental care as their children got older. For example, Garam (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) spoke about her shifting concerns on childcare. At wave 3, reflecting on her past care beliefs, Garam said: “I think [for] childcare.... feeding, dressing, putting your child to bed, mattered more when my

daughter was younger. Now, I am more interested in how to discipline and educate my daughter.” This increasing emphasis on education as a child ages was coupled with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Similar to Garam, Yewon (39 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained her changing interests from childcare to education as her son got older. Yewon said at wave 3, “When [my child] was in daycare, I was focused on the general [instrumental] care. But now, I am more interested in child’s educational aspect.... Before, I only cared about raising caring for my child, that is raising, feeding, how to dress him. But it is changing.” Yewon explained that this change was also because of her increased engagement in her child’s education since the pandemic. Yewon added,

Because he [my son] is taking an online class at home alone... since he is not going to school [due to COVID-19], I have to review his homework when I get home from work... that is why I think my focus has changed [from childcare to education]. At least, I do not have to help with things that he can do himself, like getting dressed, eating by himself and all.

Like Garam, Yewon put more emphasis on the aspect of education as her child got older. The COVID-19 pandemic also created a unique context that influenced mothers’ care beliefs, which I discuss more below. In sum, mothers discussed several aspects of good childcare and their ideas about good childcare changed across context and time.

4.2 Who should be providing childcare?

Based on the idea of good childcare, Korean women discussed varying beliefs and norms about who should be providing childcare. Among 33 participants (wave 3), when asked about ideal childcare providers, 43% (n=14) responded both parents, 21% (n=7) said anyone in the family including grandparents, 24% (n=8) said mothers, and 12% (n=4) reported anyone trustworthy whether or not they were family. Broadly, the majority of participants (88%, n=29) believed that ideally care should be done within the family. This preference for family members as care providers resonates with women’s concerns about their child’s safety and health, as discussed above. Outside the family, babysitters and care facilities like daycares and kindergartens were the most sought-after care providers. In addition, there was an expectation that the government should take more responsibility for care.

⁹ Below, I discuss in more depth how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced childcare ideologies in Korea.

The majority of participants relied on both familial and non-familial care options. For example, women sent their children to care facilities during the day and then asked the children's grandmothers or hired babysitters to provide childcare until the parents came home from work.¹⁰ Then, a child's parent(s) took on the care responsibilities in the evening. In other words, care options were typically not an either-or matter. In the section below, I analyze Korean mothers' narratives on ideal care providers, focusing on the differences between family members and non-familial care options, and demonstrate how their care ideologies changed across time. In doing so, I extend earlier studies documenting intensive motherhood ideologies in Korea (e.g., Oh 2018) by demonstrating that women often held beliefs and norms that did not see mothers as primarily responsible for childcare.

4.2.1 Family Members

Family members were the most popular option for care providers because they were considered to provide *good* childcare, as discussed above. For example, as Inseon (30 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) explained, "Childcare is really hard even though they [children] are mine. When childcare is this exhausting, I doubt if a stranger can take good care of my children." Inseon believed that someone other than her family members would not be able to provide *good* childcare given the exhausting nature of care labor.

For a different example, Seoyeon (41 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) shared her complicated feelings about receiving childcare help from family members. Seoyeon explained why she only relied on family members for childcare help:

Employment [hiring a babysitter] is the best... [employing] someone trustworthy, because I hired that person, s/he will do [provide care] as I demand. If I tell her/him my opinion, for example, do not feed this food to my baby, do this to play with my child, the sitter will do as my words. But when my mother-in-law [help with care], I cannot ask her. I guess I can but, it may ruin our relationships since it is not someone I can speak freely to. I guess I can ask my sister since it is easier to talk to her than my mother-in-law, but still, it is not something pleasant to talk about. Even though I can talk to her comfortably, I am still hesitant to demand my [care] request. That said, ideally, it is the best to pay someone, hire someone I can trust.

¹⁰ This pattern resonates with a general pattern in Korea that care-providing grandparents usually care for their grandchildren during the day only until their adult children return from work, and a majority of these grandparents are not custodial and do not co-reside with their grandchildren (Chung and Park 2018).

However, although Seoyeon described babysitters as *ideal* care providers in theory, she only received care from her family members—her mother-in-law and sister—across the three years of data collection because she could not find “someone I [she] can trust.” When I asked her why she never hired a babysitter, Seoyeon explained her concern for her children’s safety, echoing findings from the previous section. Seoyeon said,

I am scared. Let me say I hired someone paying thousands of dollars. I would still be doubtful [about child’s safety]. You see on the news. There is a play school [private kindergarten] for 1.5 million Won a month. It is a [reputable] franchise too. But if there is a child abuse case even there, why would any moms spend 1.5 million Won to enroll their children there? There are a lot of free public daycare. People hope that teachers [at kindergarten] would care with more attention to kids for that much money, but that [child abuse] happens at a place like that.... I think it is the same everywhere. Unless someone introduces me personally saying, this person has been working at my place for years, I know for sure that she will be great, maybe [I would consider hiring a babysitter]. Unless someone is really guaranteed, I think never [to hire a babysitter].

Seoyeon referred to a case of child abuse at an expensive private care facility in Korea. As Suyeon said, because public care facilities are government-funded and nearly free, a care facility where tuition is KRW 1,500,000 (equivalent to USD 1,235) is considered extremely expensive in Korea. Given that child abuse may occur at such an expensive care facility, Seoyeon feared that there may be a chance of abuse if she were to hire someone that she did not know well.

As previously discussed, Seoyeon’s belief in quality childcare influenced her decision to rely only on family members for help. Seoyeon added, “I can trust her [mother-in-law]. There is no [fear] of abuse. She [mother-in-law] does everything the way my child wants. As soon as [my daughter] gets home, my mother-in-law washes her [my daughter’s] hands, feet, changes her clothes, and basically does everything the way I would.” In addition, Seoyeon trusted that family members were better than non-family care providers in fostering the child’s emotional development. Seoyeon explained, “In terms of child’s emotion, I think grandmothers are better [than babysitters] because they are not strangers. From my children’s perspectives, it would also be better [than having a stranger look after them] because it is their own grandma.” Reflecting on the discussion of good childcare from the previous section, Seoyeon believed that her mother-in-law and her sister would provide *good* childcare, ensuring her children’s physical and mental health.

In a way, Seoyeon settled for the care option that was not her ideal care arrangement—hiring babysitters—because she could not find trustworthy babysitters. That is, when there are competing concerns between the issues of communication (like with her family members) versus worries about trust (with babysitters), Seoyeon opted for the childcare option that she could trust. Her choice reflects the importance of ensuring childcare providers’ quality of care, which she did not feel confident about with babysitters. Similarly, other women in the sample prioritized family members’ participation in childcare. What varied across participants was which family member was regarded as the most responsible for childcare, as I discuss below.

Mothers

Resonating with the literature on ideologies of motherhood and gender, 26% of women (among 33 participants at wave 3, $n=9$) believed that mothers should be responsible for childcare. Given my sample’s middle and upper-middle class background in addition to the fairly low costs of childcare in Korea, these beliefs centered on the quality of childcare—rather than not being able to afford private childcare—that they would be able to provide themselves compared to other alternative care options. For example, Inyoung (38 years old, full-time working mothers at wave 1) believed that good childcare should be done by mothers because:

I think [the ideal childcare] is when a mother does not work, and stay at home. I have many friends who are staying at home. They do better care, pay better attention to their children... even for education, no matter you hire a tutor, or ask a grandma, there is no one who can look after meticulously like a mother does. Fathers usually do not care about that. But not just for education, but for how kids are dressed, and hygiene status, moms are essential. That is why I want to quit soon.

Even though Inyoung had relied on her mother-in-law for childcare across all three years of data collection, she hoped to provide childcare herself ideally. Inyoung thought that although her child’s grandmother had cared for her daughter with love, she was unable to focus on her daughter’s education. Her idea about mothers’ child-centered care reflects the norm of *intensive motherhood* in Korea (Oh 2018; Park 2018). When I probed further about whether babysitters or grandmothers provided high quality care, Inyoung said, “Only moms know about all the details.... I have never seen anyone who pays that much attention to children as much as mothers do, not even dad. Mothers are always responsible. So... mothers are really important in all aspect [of care].” Accordingly, at wave 3, Inyoung discussed her plans to leave her career to focus on childcare.

Inyoung added, “I think I feel guilty towards my child a lot. She is really bright... but I think she is lonely because she does not have her mom and dad during the day... My friends who are stay-at-home mothers say that they are really happy, and their kids are happy.” Overall, she believed that for the best of her child, it would be ideal to provide childcare herself rather than relying on others.

At the same time, Inyoung’s comments also reflect the changing norms about motherhood and childcare in Korea. While explaining her care ideology, Inyoung paused and said, “Um... now that I am talking, I am shocked. I am a liberal person (laugh)... I feel like I am going back to the past... but I think that [staying-at-home] is ideal in Korean society.” Inyoung spoke about her desire to become a stay-at-home mother, putting mothers at the center of care responsibility. At the same time, as Inyoung alluded, the concept of stay-at-home mothers may be associated with the “past” and is no longer the prevailing care arrangement in today’s Korean society. Although she gravitated towards becoming a full-time stay-at-home mother for her child, Inyoung’s questioning of her own perspective indicates varying beliefs and norms about childcare, and perhaps changes in childcare ideologies that diverge from the cultural emphasis on mothers’ responsibilities for childcare in Korea.

Not Only Mothers

Indeed, when asked about participants’ beliefs on ideal childcare during wave 3, 33% (n=11) specifically discussed that the primary childcare provider did not have to be mothers. For example, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said,

Usually working mothers have this feeling of guilt that we are not spending a lot of time with our children. We only get to be together for several hours after work. We tend to feel sorry and worry that our children do not feel loved enough... but after raising my first child, it is fine. [My children] are loved by grandma and grandpa. My husband does better childcare than me. They [my children] feel dad’s love completely in addition to mom’s.... At the day care, all teachers really love him [oldest child].

Soyoung’s quote reflects that ideal childcare does not hinge on gendered expectations tied to motherhood. As Soyoung suggests, mothers are expected to spend more time with their children instead of working. At the same time, Soyoung, and many others in this study, pushed back against these norms by offering competing views of “good childcare.” Again, this narrative challenges Oh’s (2018) findings that intensive motherhood is the prevailing—and perhaps only—norm among

Korean educated mothers. Oh (2018) finds that Korean mothers felt the need to provide accounts for receiving care help because they saw themselves as responsible for childcare. Although Oh (2018) also interviewed highly educated Korean working mothers receiving intergenerational care support, her interviews were conducted in 2013 and 2015. Because my interviews took place from 2019 to 2021, Soyoung and seven other mothers in this dissertation show shifting narratives in gender equality and Korean women's conceptualizations of motherhood and childcare.

Similarly, Hyojung (32 years old full-time working mother at wave 1) explained that being a good mother is "always being there for my child." Her conceptualization of being a good mother to "be there for my child" reflected the physical, financial, and mental support she provided for her child. Being a good mother did not mean that she was primarily responsible for childcare. Hyojung said, "I do not think I am meant to provide childcare.... [Childcare] is so hard. I really do not think I can do that... I prefer to make money and give lots of love when I interact with them (laugh)." Hyojung's understanding of motherhood and childcare demonstrate that they do not always go hand in hand with each other.

Just like nobody would question a father's role because he did not primarily provide care for his child, I would like to highlight that distancing the primary burden of childcare from motherhood did not mean that women placed less emphasis on their role as mothers. For example, Yewon (39 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained, "As much as being a mother is important, I value myself as an active member of the society... I try to not to get stressed about whether I am doing my role as a care provider or not." For her, being an active member of a society as a worker is as important as being a mother.¹¹ She did not believe that providing less care made her less of a mother. These examples show the difference between the ideologies of motherhood and childcare. The ideologies of motherhood focus on the meanings of good mothers, while the ideologies of childcare center on the meanings of good childcare. These ideologies may overlap with each other, but not necessarily so. Below, I analyze women's narratives about ideal childcare providers other than mothers.

¹¹ I further discuss gendered expectations on mothers' childcare responsibility and Korean women's career pursuits in Chapter 5.

Both Parents

Among the 33 participants interviewed at wave 3, 42% (n=14) discussed that both parents—not just mothers—should be responsible for childcare. For example, Bomin (35 years old full-time working mother at wave 1) said that ideal childcare is when “at least one of parents, either mom or dad, spends a lot of time with children” and it “may be complemented or assisted by [child’s] grandmothers and babysitters” but “not to be replaced.” Because of Bomin and her husband’s beliefs about parental responsibilities on childcare, Bomin took three years of parental leave, then her husband took a year-long parental leave. Bomin said her husband planned to extend his parental leave for another year to maximize his time with their children. That is, even though their child’s grandmothers could help with childcare, Bomin and her husband believed that at least one of them should be primarily responsible for childcare.

However, having this belief did not always result in the equal division of caregiving labor between women and their husbands. For example, Yunah (33 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) said she tried her best not to ask for care help from her own mother, although her mother offered to help. Yunah explained that because childcare is an energy-consuming activity, it would be a “failure of duty” as parents to delegate such labor to someone else. As a result, she wanted to “do [childcare] with my husband. I think *we should* do that [and not ask for help.]” While she believed that parents should solely bear the responsibilities of childcare, and even though her husband shared the same belief, she was still performing the majority of childcare work since her husband worked until late each evening. That is, even when Korean women believed that both parents should be equally responsible for childcare, they faced challenges in making it work.

Grandmothers

When a child’s parents (participants and their husbands) were not able to be the primary caregivers, the grandmothers were ideal family members to help with childcare. This finding supports previous research that in countries where there is a lack of care support for working mothers, grandparents are likely to take on *intensive* responsibilities for childcare (Craig et al. 2019). Many women also preferred to seek childcare help from grandmothers rather than hiring a babysitter because they felt more comfortable making care requests to grandmothers (see the first section of Chapter 6 for more). Similarly, Goo (2017) found that when working mothers hired paid

care providers, they were pressured to accommodate the care providers' needs because they feared that if they did not their children would be disadvantaged at care facilities. Accordingly, Korean working mothers prefer to rely on grandmothers for childcare because they are confident that grandmothers will take care of their children with love no matter how picky they are with childcare requests (Goo 2017).

Norms support working mothers' receiving childcare help from maternal grandmothers (women's own mothers) versus paternal grandmothers (women's mothers-in-law). For example, when Minjin (38 years old full-time working mother at wave 1) decided to quit her job after completing parental leave, her colleagues asked why her mother (child's maternal grandmother) did not take care of the child. For them, the *normal* childcare arrangement was for maternal grandmothers to help with childcare so that mothers could focus on their career development. Minjin explained at wave 2:

Because so many people get [childcare] help from maternal family, asking for help and receiving help from [maternal grandmother] is taken for granted.... [when I hear statements like that] it makes me feel like I had to quit my job because my mom was not helping... I feel like my husband, and my in-laws all think that my mom should have helped with childcare. They think that is normal.

Minjin's statement reflects that although there is a gendered aspect in the unequal division of childcare responsibilities between husbands and wives, there are also beliefs and norms about the unequal division of intergenerational care labor between matrilineal and patrilineal family members, where maternal grandmothers bear more childcare responsibilities than paternal ones (See Chapter 6 for more).

When maternal grandmothers were not available for childcare, paternal grandmothers were the most popular alternative. For example, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that even though her mother was not available to help with childcare because she lived in a different city, she was happy that her mother-in-law could help instead. Soyoung explained,

Usually, moms quit their work even though kids go to daycare or hire a babysitter, because there are times when you have to take three, four, even five days off when the kids get sick or something. But for us [my family], we have someone, especially other family members who can help out in an emergency situations like that. It is a huge help to have this plan B [for childcare], just emotionally as well.

Overall, when mothers or both parents could not primarily care for a child, grandmothers were the most sought-after alternative because they are family members who are trusted to provide *good* childcare. I analyze grandmothers' childcare help and the differences between maternal and paternal grandmothers in-depth in Chapter 6.

4.2.2 Non-familial Care

Korean mothers discussed three types of non-familial care options aside from family members. Importantly, Korean mothers emphasized the non-familial care options as secondary to family members' care help. Rather than replacing family care, non-familial care was meant to complement existing care arrangements. In this section, I focus on three types of non-familial care: babysitters, care facilities and the government.

Babysitters

Beliefs and norms about hiring babysitters were complex. Among 33 participants interviewed at wave 3, 52% (n=17) did not trust that babysitters would provide high quality childcare, while 21% (n=7) believed that babysitters were ideal childcare options. Like the case of Seoyeon discussed above, babysitters were often considered ideal, although the majority of mothers were reluctant to hire them because they had trouble finding trustworthy sitters who would provide *good* childcare. Among the 37 participants (interviewed at any wave), only three women (8%) successfully hired a babysitter. These women were able to find babysitters who were experienced and committed to providing *good* childcare. Although one woman stopped hiring a babysitter as her son got older, after much consideration the other two hired government trained and certified babysitters.

Despite the difficulties hiring trustworthy babysitters, some Korean women felt that hiring private care providers such as babysitters or nannies was ideal. For example, although Narae (37 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) received childcare help from both her child's maternal and paternal grandmothers, she thought that childcare should be done by parents and non-familial care providers for two reasons. First, Narae believed that care work was taxing and thus should be done by someone who was being paid:

We wanted to get help from an outsider. That is why it was really difficult for us to ask childcare help from my mom and mother-in-law. Because childcare is really

exhausting, at least for me, someone has to do this exhausting work for us, but I felt really guilty asking family members to do that.

Second, Narae felt uncomfortable making extra care-related demands to her family members and felt that asking paid care providers to do these tasks would be easier (See Chapter 6 for more). Similarly, Joomi (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed her plan of hiring a babysitter to stop receiving care help from her mother-in-law while she would be on parental leave. Joomi said,

If I were to return to work, I would not trust a babysitter. But since I will be on a leave, I think a babysitter would be the best [option] because I will also be home. A babysitter would be helping out with the care labor while I am also there.... For example, when we bathe my baby, if my baby is not clean enough, it is hard for me to tell my mother-in-law to wash my baby again. But to a babysitter, I could tell her to bathe my baby again, because I am paying money to her. That way, I can use a babysitter's labor more easily [than my mother-in-law's].

Joomi's quote reflects that her complicated feelings about hiring a babysitter; she would have preferred her mother-in-law whom she could trust more than a babysitter while she went to work, but she would prefer to hire a babysitter if she was home because she could communicate her care demands more easily with a babysitter than her mother-in-law (see also Chapter 6).

Additionally, there was often disagreement within the family about hiring paid caregivers. For example, Jiyoung (37 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) said when her husband took parental leave to care for the child, his colleagues and her parents-in-law were upset. According to Jiyoung, even though her husband was perfectly fine with caring for his children, "Our friends and my husband's boss said I should have hired someone else if I needed help [with childcare]. Why should the father take leave so he might get negatively affected on his next promotion?" Jiyoung added that even though her mother-in-law refused to help with childcare based on the belief that childcare should be done within the immediate family, she was not happy that her son took leave; if Jiyoung could not do childcare by herself, she should have hired someone.

Jiyoung's case reflects two cultural norms in Korea. First, Jiyoung's experience documents the gendered expectation that only mothers take responsibility for childcare, especially among older generations. Rather than sharing childcare with her husband, Jiyoung's parents-in-law believed that childcare labor should be outsourced to someone else so it would not interfere with her husband's work. I argue that the disagreement about hiring a babysitter between these two generations reflects a shifting norm about childcare in Korean society; Jiyoung and her husband's

willingness to arrange childcare together, instead of relying on Jiyoung alone, suggests a shift towards a more equal division of care labor between women and men.

Second, the ideal worker norm in Korea does not necessarily assume that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare, but rather that childcare should not interfere with work. Jiyoung's quote shows that her husband's friends, colleagues, and families perceived that family (child) responsibilities and careers are not compatible. Thus, cultural and institutional norms about gendered childcare and work-centric workplaces in Korea often discourage fathers from taking parental leave (Lee 2022).¹²

Overall, beliefs and norms about hiring babysitters were complicated because while many women believed hiring babysitters was ideal, a majority of them did not do so because of concerns regarding the quality of childcare and disagreements with the family about who should be providing childcare. As a result, mothers typically kept childcare within family, which meant that if no one else were able to help, the responsibility fell to women alone.

Care Facilities

Women also felt that care facilities—like daycare and kindergarten—were an ideal option for childcare. All mothers in this study relied on care facilities at some point during the study.¹³ The popularity of care facilities aligned with the Korean government's emphasis on the use of care facilities over at-home care to encourage mothers' labor force participation (Shin et al. 2021). Accordingly, working mothers especially benefitted from the use of care facilities. For example, when asked about care providers during wave 3, Youngji (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that ideal childcare for working mothers was daycare or kindergarten. Youngji wished care facilities provided childcare for longer hours and with more flexibility. She added:

Ideally, I wish there is a work-site daycare, but my employer is not big enough [to offer that] ...When working, there are times when I have to pick up my daughter late.... Some kindergartens understand, but many do not.... I wish there is someone who can take the child with ease at all times. For example, when I go on a business trip to Seoul, I ask my mom or sister. But even then, it is not easy because I have to ask her a favor, coordinate times, and all... There are temporary care facilities in Seoul, but I could not use them because my address is in Daegu.... Some facilities

¹² Although I did not investigate men's use of parental leave, I analyze how childcare ideologies and workplace cultures influence women's career pursuits, including the use of leave policies in Chapter 5.

¹³ Mothers arranged childcare in conjunction with childcare facilities and other care providers they believed were ideal, whether it be themselves, other family members, and babysitters. See Table 2 in Chapter 3 for more information about participants' care arrangements.

say that they can provide temporary care on their websites, but when I call, they do not in reality.

Youngji's quote reflects her care belief that care facilities should be there to provide childcare at all times to accommodate women's diverse working arrangements.

In general, women were satisfied with the quality of childcare facilities. Minjin said at wave 3, even though she was initially determined to provide childcare herself with the help of her mother, she was glad that she enrolled her daughter at a care facility. Minjin explained:

I like that there is a good system in place [at daycare]. There are professional teachers, especially at [daycare] run by the government. There is a [mobile] application where the teachers keep posting pictures of our daughter playing. They also write every detail about her, like what time she took a nap. Overall, I have a trust in that, ok, even if I do not take care of her myself, she is having a good time.

As Minjin's comments show, sending her child to a high-quality care facility alleviated her concerns about being the primary care provider for her daughter.

Good Care Facilities

However, because the quality of childcare and operating hours at care facilities varied, women struggled to enroll their children at the best care facilities, which were often public (run by the government) or operated by their employers. For example, Joomi (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) spoke about her efforts to enroll her child at an ideal care facility:

I cried because I could not enroll my child in the daycare at my work (laugh). It was less than a 50% chance of lottery [to be able to enroll], but I failed. I would rather get rejected from college instead. The daycare at my work is great. Also, it is in the same building [as my office] so I would get to see my child whenever I want. I was crying so much (laugh). I felt like I deprived him of a life opportunity. The only thing good about COVID-19 is that, since many moms withdrew their kids' enrollment from a relatively good daycare in my neighborhood, I got to finally enroll him elsewhere [with a good reputation].

Joomi's quote indicates the overall competitiveness and challenges in getting into *good* care facilities. Joomi had absolute confidence in her company's daycare, which had limited spots for new enrollment. When she could not enroll her child there, Joomi sought other private care facilities with good reputations. She was finally successful following the drops in daycare enrollment due to COVID-19. When I asked whether she applied for public daycare given the popularity of those facilities among the participants, Joomi said:

There is zero opportunity to get into a public one in this lifetime (laugh). I tried to get on the waitlist once, but my number was on 300 something. Other moms said

that they get a call to enroll when their child is about to go to elementary schools. After hearing that, I gave up fast and enrolled at a private daycare. At least, it has a good reputation among moms.

Many mothers shared Joomi's belief that care facilities that were public or located at their workplaces were ideal and reported struggling to enroll their children there.

Overall, this section portrayed a strong norm of relying on childcare facilities among Korean mothers. Childcare facilities served a critical function for Korean women in providing childcare, in addition to mothers and other family members' contributions to childcare. This finding highlights the importance of quality, reliable, and accessible care facilities.

Government

Korean women spoke at length about the government's role in childcare. As reflected above in women's preferences for public care facilities, mothers felt that public care facilities should be expanded and better supported by policy. For example, Soomin (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said during wave 3 that, "[the government] focuses on the declining fertility rate, but I think it is also the government's responsibility to take care of the children who are already born."

Soyoung's (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) positive experiences with a public daycare facility demonstrates how the government could do more to support working families and their children. Across all three waves, Soyoung reported being satisfied with her child's public daycare. Soyoung explained,

The best part about public daycare facility is that there is no vacation. For dual-earner parents, a week-long vacation is a huge hurdle [for work] Also, since I have to go to work by 8 am, I have to take my kids to daycare by 7:30 am the latest. But since it [daycare] is public, I can take the kids by 7:30 am without feeling bad about it. My mother-in-law takes my kids home at 3:30 pm but in theory, we are guaranteed with care until 9 pm. They also provide care on Saturday. Since I work five days a week, I never took them to daycare on Saturday, but if anything happens on Saturday, I can bring kids to daycare. It is great that all of these things are guaranteed [because it is a public daycare]. Also, as much as it was difficult for me to enroll my kids here, it is really hard for kids to enroll here unless their parents are a dual-earner couple with at least two children. That said, since most of parents the are dual earner, their care system is similar to ours. It is not just my kids who go to daycare really early and late. Most of the kids there are like that. It would be kind of sad if it is just my kids who go early and stay late. But it is great because it is not. My kids also take that for granted since there are kids always. I am really

satisfied overall. Also, since they care for kids until seven years old, my first will graduate from here [can continue enrollment until age seven] until when he enrolls in school. My second son is also guaranteed a spot until seven. That said, it was tough to get into, but once we did, I am really satisfied, and the teachers are all great.

Soyoung's comments reflect the satisfaction many participants expressed in relation to government-run daycares. As Soyoung said, public daycares are especially useful for working mothers because they are required by the government to operate long and flexible hours that mirror Korea's long working hour culture. For this reason, many women in the study wished for the expansion of public care facilities.

Furthermore, women discussed their desire for the overall expansion of government policies and relaxation of eligibility requirements for already existing policies (see Chapter 5). In addition to working mothers, stay-at-home mothers wished for more help from the government regarding childcare. For example, Inseon (30 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) felt that childcare responsibilities should be shared between families and the government. One of Inseon's suggestions was that the government should subsidize her labor for childcare. Inseon argued, "Just like the government subsidizes the cost of kindergarten and daycare, it should provide more support for at-home care." Currently, the Korean government provides cash benefits for families with children younger than age six, if their children are not enrolled in care facilities like daycare or kindergarten (Seoul Support Center for Childcare 2022). This policy compensates families' care labor at home, which is typically provided by stay-at-home mothers. However, the amount of the benefit (about USD 100-200 per month) is much less than the minimum wage of full-time childcare workers (about USD 1,900 per month). Thus, in addition to this cash benefit, Inseon believed that the government should more fully share the responsibility for childcare by providing more financial and other resources for stay-at-home mothers. Overall, regardless of work status, Korean mothers assumed that the government should be responsible for supporting childcare (See Chapter 5). This belief differs from other societies such as the United States where childcare is understood as a family's responsibility, not the government's (e.g., Collins 2019), and shows that childcare ideologies vary across societies.

4.2.3 Changes in Who Should Be Providing Childcare

Korean women's beliefs about who should be providing childcare changed across three waves of data collection. Specifically, women changed their beliefs about who should be providing childcare because of the unfair and unattainable expectations of motherhood. For example, although Heejin (35 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) felt that a mother needed to be a primary care provider at wave 1, by wave 3 she no longer agreed. During the first wave, Heejin said she had to give up her career because of her family members' expectations that she should be the primary care provider for her daughter. Because of her family members' expectations, she thought she had to bear the care responsibility alone. However, Heejin said during wave 3:

I wish all family members can participate in [childcare]. Now that I think about it, the biggest reason [for my struggle] was that all [care] responsibilities were on mothers. When we go on a picnic for lunch as a family, with grandma, grandpa, and even other relatives, when a baby cries, they all look at moms. Then I have to do something. That was really tough for me. That expectation was crushing me so much. I felt like it was all my responsibility if something wrong happened [to my child].

Because Heejin struggled with the expectation that she was responsible for every aspect of childcare, her husband and mother started to participate more in care. Heejin added, "Now when I am tired, I tell our daughter to ask daddy to feed her. They [my family members] changed a lot [regarding childcare]. But I wish they were like this from before. They used to tell me [childcare] is your [my] responsibility because you are [I am] a mother." In sum, within the three-year study period, Heejin and her family changed their beliefs on childcare to distinguish that being a mother did not equate with bearing the complete responsibility for childcare. This change occurred after the family realized that the traditional norm of motherhood that renders childcare responsibility solely to mothers was not only unfair but also unattainable.

Mothers' care beliefs on who should be providing childcare changed across time, reflecting that childcare ideologies evolve even within a short period of time. I argue that it is important to document the changing nature of childcare ideologies because childcare ideologies influence women's, and families' childcare arrangement, influencing their family dynamics, career pursuits, and various aspects of their lives. Thus, we can better understand women's and families' life trajectories with an accurate understanding of childcare ideologies of a society.

4.3 COVID-19 and Childcare Ideologies

While the global COVID-19 pandemic influenced so many aspects of our lives, it also influenced Korean mothers' childcare ideologies. Compared to the pre-pandemic (in 2019) experience, all study participants reported that they had to arrange additional childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic (in 2020 and 2021). The increase in care demands stemmed from several sources including the government's stay-at-home orders, fewer opportunities for in-person care, and elementary schools' virtual learning due to concerns about COVID-19 transmission. Although the emergency childcare policy was available—in theory—for families without other sources of care¹⁴, not everyone was able or willing to use it. This resulted in considerable strain for working parents, especially mothers. For example, Hyejin (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) shared that her oldest child's elementary school did not provide the emergency care policy at all. As a result, Hyejin had to take her child to work with her. Because her child was taking his remote classes in one corner while she worked in another corner of her office, she said it was “much more difficult to focus on work.”

At the same time, this change in childcare demands provided participants an opportunity to reflect upon the existing beliefs and norms about childcare. Among 34 women who participated in at least one interview since the emergence of COVID-19 (2020 and 2021), 44% (n=15) explicitly discussed changes in their care beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes were in both directions; although mothers universally experienced an increase in care demands and time spent with children, some increased their childcare responsibilities while others decreased based on their assessment of their previous childcare arrangement. In addition, there was more awareness and more demands for the government to take responsibility for childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the sections below, I analyze these changes in detail.

4.3.1 Increases in Mothers' Care Responsibilities

The pandemic motivated women to increase their own childcare responsibilities, when women were dissatisfied with their prior care arrangement. For example, Woori (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) came to put more emphasis on her responsibility as a mother for childcare due to the pandemic. Initially, Woori was dissatisfied with her care arrangement in which

¹⁴ See Chapter 2 for more information about the emergency care policy in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic.

her mother primarily cared for her children. At wave 1, Woori spoke positively about grandparental care because of the emotional support the grandmother provided to her child and her trust in the quality of care. Likewise, at wave 2, Woori planned to continue receiving care help from her mother, explaining:

The absolute hours that grandmothers care for grandchildren in Korea is fairly long. It is not like [grandmothers] care for children during the day mom goes to work and parents take turns in the evening. Here [in Korea], we [parents] work long [until late at night] all the time, there are so many post-work events... It is a [care] system that we [parents] cannot care for children without grandmothers. We [my husband and I] need to go pick up our kids at the kindergarten by certain time but either of us can make it.

Woori's quote reflects her personal belief in and the general norm of relying heavily on grandmothers for childcare help. Woori further explained,

Sometimes we [husband and I] talk about how long we should be relying on my mom... especially when my dad is old and alone without my mom [because of childcare]. We were thinking, should we hire a babysitter now? But I think we are still afraid. If we hire a babysitter, what if something from the media [safety issues and abuse] occurs. Of course, the majority of babysitters will not be like that, but we would rather take days off from work to give mom a break. We haven't thought of hiring a babysitter or anyone yet.

However, after being more closely involved in her child's school activities while working remotely during the pandemic, Woori started to compare herself with other mothers from her son's class.

Woori said at wave 3:

I never felt this way before the COVID-19 pandemic, but I realized that I was not doing anything.... To be honest, if not for COVID-19, I would have never thought that my children were lacking this much. I would have gone to work on regular hours, my mom would be caring for them... During the remote learning period, [teachers] upload [learning] materials at 9 am. Then, [I see that other] mothers complete the activities by 11 am. I do not even have a printer at home, but [other] moms were doing so, so well. This is a very simple example. I had to go to my work to print the materials, bring them back after lunch, and rush my children to complete the homework saying [to my sons that] mommy needs to upload the pictures [of completed activities] too. Then, I was suddenly thinking, in the past six, seven years raising my children, were other mothers all great like that [in caring for their children]? Did I neglect my children because I work?

The above quote reflects that Woori started doubting her role as a mother and a caregiver since the pandemic. Woori added at wave 3:

I was thinking while other moms rely on babysitters, since I get care help from grandmothers, I was relieved about childcare. But in reality, I realized, [my kids] do not even know the alphabets well.... I kept thinking, if I was not working, would not I have done my duty as a parent? This COVID-19 pandemic became a huge turning point for me.

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for Woori to re-evaluate her childcare arrangement because of the interruption to childcare, which increased her time spent with her children. Woori concluded that her prior care arrangement—reliance on her children’s grandmother—was unsuccessful; therefore, she considered increasing her own responsibility for childcare. Although I presented only one case here to contextualize her experience in-depth, many other women who became dissatisfied with their childcare arrangement took more care responsibilities themselves. This finding suggests that the lack of adequate care resources during precarious times like the COVID-19 pandemic is not only harmful for children who do not receive appropriate care, but also because it may reinforce the gendered norm that women should take more care responsibilities.

4.3.2 Decreases in Mothers’ Care Responsibilities

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic also became an opportunity for women to scale down their care responsibilities, if they found the increase in childcare labor during the pandemic did not serve them or their children well. For instance, at wave 3, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that her care belief had changed from mothers spending more time on childcare before the pandemic, to not necessarily so during the pandemic. Soyoung also had been receiving care help from her mother-in-law across all three waves of data collection. At wave 1, Soyoung explained, “Working mothers feel guilty about the fact that we do not raise our children on our own. We feel guilty that we do not do enough for children ourselves, so we try to do more to compensate that [guilt].” Her discussion of guilt reflects the conception of motherhood in the literature in that mothers should fully devote themselves to their children regardless of whether they are working (Hays 1996; Jia 2014; Oh 2018). Soyoung continued to discuss these norms (wave 2):

I work so hard, working day and night as a dual-earner, but if our child is [sick], people blame the mother. Our child is not sick because I worked, but people, especially parents-in-law blame the mother, their daughter in-law [me]. Mothers, we feel guilty too. We blame ourselves that it is our faults for neglecting our

children.... Others, including my parents-in-law, question what I have done as a mother, [and they told me to] pay more attention to your children. That is how people think of working mothers.

Soyoung's quote reflects the belief that working mothers are not good enough mothers because they do not provide full-time childcare themselves. When I asked whether there are similar expectations on fathers in Korea, Soyoung responded:

Even though fathers also work, [people think] any issue with child is because of mothers. That is what Korean people think. If a child is sick, [people think] a mother may have eaten something wrong when she was pregnant. [People think] did a mother smoke a cigarette [when she was pregnant?] And even worse, when moms work, people ask if money is more important than your children. So, I have been contemplating about this [my role as a working mother].

Soyoung's quote reinforces the gendered nature of Korean cultural norms about childcare given that the harsh judgement on working parents is only applied to working mothers (see also Yoon 2016).

However, spending more time with her children during parental leave (wave 2) and while working from home during the pandemic (wave 3), Soyoung stopped feeling guilty about not providing childcare herself. When asked about her remote work experience at wave 3, she explained, "Working remotely at home while looking after children was not easy. In fact, it was crazier [than going to office to work]. I cannot focus on work. The kids were going crazy." Although Soyoung cared for her children at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, as she wished to do so during the first two waves, she decided that it was not sustainable after one month. Soyoung said at wave 3:

Spending more time on childcare is not ideal. Just because [I spend] more time [on care], it did not [have] a happy ending. It exhausted my children and me. Rather, it is better to respect my children's privacy and my own privacy.... Kids have their own privacy too. They have their social lives at the daycare and kindergarten. They have their own lives. We as parents have our own lives too (laugh). Everyone's life can be respected, and separated as long as we enjoy our family time together.

Working remotely during the pandemic provided Soyoung an opportunity to reflect on her childcare beliefs. Contrary to her previous understanding, increasing her time investment in childcare was not ideal for Soyoung. Although others around her, including her parents-in-law, still believed that she as a mother should be primarily responsible for childcare, Soyoung thought otherwise. After Soyoung spent more time on childcare as she was hoping to and as other people

were expecting her to, she concluded that it did not benefit her or her children more than sending her children to childcare facilities.

Overall, Soyoung and other women who increased their time on childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic also re-evaluated their existing care arrangements and their care beliefs. When women learned that the increase in childcare responsibilities did not necessarily generate more positive outcomes for their family, they changed their care beliefs to scale down their responsibilities for childcare as mothers. Complementing the findings from earlier sections, this finding also suggests that reliable, high-quality childcare benefits gender equality by alleviating women's care burdens, despite the general increase in childcare demands during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3.3 Government's Childcare Responsibility

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic made the role of government in childcare more salient because of the need for greater government assistance. All 34 women who participated in at least one interview since the pandemic began (waves 2 and 3) were influenced by the government's policy during COVID-19. For example, everyone received the emergency cash benefits from the government. Despite this, the Korean government did not provide adequate guidelines for childcare institutions during the pandemic (Shin et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2021). Several women discussed their demands for the expansion of the government's responsibility for childcare. For example, Woori argued:

In the past I used to think on the individual level. I never thought about why the government [or its role] is necessary to raise healthy children... But because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I realized how weak the government's [care] structure is... For example, all [care] facilities had a different policy during the pandemic. Some kindergarten allowed for in-person, some did not. Some kindergarten opened for only three hours, some only for four hours.... The government had one policy, but all [care] facilities under the government had different stories. I was like... at the end of the day, moms have to take days off from work to care for children when there is any problem, instead of trusting the government [to adequately arrange childcare in the times of crisis].

Woori's quote reflects how the inconsistent government policies related to childcare highlighted the deficits in the government's participation in childcare even more. In sum, Woori and many other participants experienced changes in care beliefs about their own responsibilities as mothers

as well as in their expectations for more childcare support from the government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4 Discussion

In this chapter, I asked the following questions: What does *normal* childcare look like? What is an *ideal* or *desirable* form of childcare? These were different questions than asking about what it means to be a good mother. In addressing these questions, I documented three themes related to Korean women's childcare ideologies. First, I documented what Korean mothers considered as *good* childcare. Mothers emphasized the physical safety and health of children as the most important aspect of childcare, followed by education, love and emotional support, quality food, parents' work-life balance, and fostering children's friendships. However, these beliefs were not static. Like any societal beliefs and norms, mothers' beliefs about good childcare also changed across the three years of data collection.

Second, I documented Korean women's beliefs on who should be providing childcare. Korean mothers preferred family members' to primarily contribute to childcare due to concerns about their child's safety and health. While some women emphasized mothers' primary responsibilities for childcare, women also felt that an ideal care arrangement included other family members (husbands and grandparents), indicating diverse, and shifting beliefs and norms about childcare in Korea.

In addition to family members, Korean mothers considered non-familial care options like babysitters, care facilities, and the government as ideal sources of childcare. Although women often felt babysitters would be ideal, many ended up not doing hiring them because of their concerns about safety. Korean women also widely relied on childcare facilities like daycares and kindergartens, although they preferred care facilities run by the government or their employers, because they had more flexible operating hours and a higher quality of care. Furthermore, women felt the government should expand its role in childcare by providing more childcare facilities and policy support, which is a unique contrast to many societies like the United States where there is almost no expectation of care support from the government (e.g., Collins 2019). Lastly, just as Korean women's beliefs on good childcare changed over time, their beliefs on ideal childcare providers and care arrangements changed over time as well.

Finally, I documented how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced Korean women's childcare related beliefs and norms. Because of changes in care arrangements during the pandemic, Korean women re-evaluated their prior care arrangements and 15 (44%, 15/34) women changed their care beliefs. When they were not satisfied with their previous care arrangement, some women increased their responsibilities for childcare as a mother. Other mothers whose responsibility for childcare increased during the pandemic reduced their responsibilities for childcare due to dissatisfaction with the arrangement and the effects on their families. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for mothers to rely on and demand the government's responsibility on childcare even more.

Overall, this chapter showed that although some women attributed childcare responsibilities primarily to mothers, there were also Korean women who did not associate motherhood with primary care responsibilities, and these ideas changed across time and context. This finding extends the literature on gender and family by demonstrating that intensive motherhood is not the only prevailing norm in Korea, unlike what previous studies in Korea have documented (e.g., Jia 2014; Oh 2018). In fact, there were diverse beliefs about what is *normal* and *taken for granted* about childcare in Korean society. Women discussed a wide range of beliefs and norms about childcare: from how much mothers were being held accountable for childcare, to how much different family members, private care providers, and the government should be involved with care. In these discussions, women reported that engaging less in childcare did not challenge their identities as mothers—or what it means to be a good mother—nor was it something they felt guilty about. Rather, women problematized the unfair and unattainable expectation that mothers should do everything for their children, while fathers were free from this expectation.

Furthermore, the gap between women's narratives about *ideal* childcare arrangements and their childcare arrangement in reality provided useful information about what is lacking regarding childcare in Korea. Specifically, this finding indicates the lack of social resources for childcare. Reflecting on women's understanding of *good* childcare, women in general did not believe that babysitters and private care facilities would be able to provide such care. Even though they could trust some care facilities, like the public and the employer-run daycares and kindergartens, availability at these facilities was limited. As a result, Korean mothers (and fathers) resorted to family members for care, which reinforced gender inequality within families because women of

the gendered dimension of care labor among family members (Glenn 2010; Moen and Roehling 2004).

In this vein, the concept of childcare ideologies is useful because it portrays childcare as a social problem. The incompatibility between work and childcare in Korea is not an individual woman's issue of whether they are a good mother. Rather, it is an issue of whether the society, and the government, provided adequate resources for childcare. It is an issue of whether cultural norms and social institutions had been unfairly imposing childcare responsibilities on women. It is an issue of whether the work culture enabled employees to have family lives (see Chapter 5). Based on these findings, I urge the sociological scholarship, and our society, to conceptualize childcare as a social problem, which needs to be addressed with structural changes in our society, not by further imposing care responsibilities to women.

CHAPTER 5. KOREAN MOTHERS' CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND PURSUITS

Working mothers around the world face challenges in pursuing their career aspirations. As a result, women are likely to scale down their career aspirations and experience downward career trajectories after childbirth (Bass 2015; Kim et al. 2016; Lee and Cheon 2009). A report from 2018 showed that 50% of Korean working mothers left their careers after their first birth and 47% of those who left gave childcare as the reason (Lee et al. 2018), which also advances our understanding that childcare arrangements are one of the primary reasons for work-family conflict (Moen 2011). Furthermore, toxic workplace culture and policies and the recent COVID-19 pandemic added more challenges to women's career pursuits (see Chapter 2 for more). Given that Korea already struggles with a lower rate of maternal employment than the average Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (OECD 2020), it is timely to investigate the factors deterring women from pursuing their careers. Thus, I investigate the following question in this chapter: What factors influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits in the context of COVID-19?

In the sections below, I address this question by analyzing three thematic patterns I found from the interview data. In doing so, I employ the gendered life course approach (Moen 2011) to show how women respond to macro-level societal changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as micro-level changes including individual beliefs about childcare and care resources. In the first section, I document how childcare ideologies that assume mothers' primary responsibility for childcare influence women's career aspirations and pursuits. Findings show that childcare beliefs that *do not* assume mothers' primary care responsibility motivated mothers to aspire to career success and pursue such aspirations. On the other hand, childcare beliefs that do assume that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare discouraged mothers from pursuing their career aspirations. I conclude this section with in-depth analyses of two participants whose career aspirations and pursuits changed at each wave based on changes in their and their family members' childcare beliefs. Overall, this finding helps us understand the close relationship between childcare beliefs and women's career aspirations and pursuit.

In the second section, I document women's experiences of workplace culture and policy. In doing so, I analyze women's narratives in what they perceive as good versus toxic working

environments. This finding offers insights on the types of workplace cultures and policies that encourage (rather than discourage) Korean working mothers to remain in the workforce. I also present the cases of women whose workplace cultures and policies improved within the three-year data collection period. These examples provide empirical evidence that workplace culture and policy *can* change for better, and document what that process looks like for women in this study. Based on this finding, I argue that policies *accommodating* working mothers should be replaced with structural changes in toxic working environments overall.

In the final section, I present how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced women's experiences in their career pursuits. The results show that while the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in negative impacts on women's careers in its first year (2020), its longer-term influence became more complicated. By the second year of the pandemic (2021), women discussed an increase in the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also highlighted some positive impacts. To add nuance to our understanding of this finding, I share empirical examples of women who experienced both negative and positive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their career pursuits. Overall, this section provides novel insights on the longitudinal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers.

5.1 Childcare Responsibilities and Women's Career Aspirations and Pursuits

We know that childcare arrangements are one of the primary reasons for work-family conflict (Moen, 2011). In this section, I focus on how the beliefs and norms about childcare influence working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits. In particular, I document how beliefs about childcare responsibilities influence working mothers' career aspirations during the precarious time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the diverse kinds of childcare ideologies outlined in Chapter 4, I focus on two types of care related beliefs in relation to women's career aspirations and pursuits. First, I found that care beliefs that *do not* associate motherhood with primary childcare responsibility supported mothers' career aspirations. That is, when mothers were not assumed to be the primary caregivers, they were able to aspire for success in their career and pursue such career aspirations including seeking promotions, taking on more projects, and preparing for upward career mobility. On the other hand, I found that care beliefs that assign childcare responsibilities to mothers discouraged mothers' career aspirations and pursuits. When mothers believed that they should carry the primary responsibility for childcare or were assumed

to do so by others, their career aspirations were diminished during the pandemic, as reflected in relinquishing career goals, losing passion for work, and opting out of careers. This finding was consistent regardless of the presence of other family members able to help with care, such as grandparents.

Importantly, I found that there were variations in childcare beliefs both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. That is, participants' career aspirations varied at baseline (wave 1) depending on their beliefs about childcare. At the same time, there were also changes in the same participants' pursuits of their career aspirations as their childcare arrangements and care beliefs changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below, I first describe experiences among participants who were able to pursue their career aspirations, followed by those whose career aspirations were tempered during the pandemic. Then, I provide an in-depth analysis of how women's career aspirations were influenced by childcare beliefs by documenting changes in participants' career aspirations and pursuits, as their care arrangements and care beliefs changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In sum, as much as the availability of childcare resources is important, beliefs and norms that do not equate motherhood with childcare may mitigate the challenges of the global pandemic in working mothers' career pursuits and family care.

5.1.1 Child Ideologies Not Assuming Mothers' Responsibilities and Women's Career Aspirations and Pursuits

The findings demonstrate that when childcare ideologies¹⁵ do not assume mothers' primary responsibility, mothers were able to pursue their career aspirations despite the economic instability due to COVID-19. For example, Youngji (39 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) expressed a strong desire to focus on her career more than childcare in all three waves. During the first interview, Youngji said, "I do not want to give up my dream [of a successful career] because of childcare." During the second interview, Youngji explained:

I am just me. Doing what I want to do is more important than being a mother. I feel bad for my child, but she [my child] will have her own ego after she is 10 years old [five years later] ... I want to be her friend, supporter, and grow together... I think we should move away from the old thinking that mothers should be sacrificing everything for their children.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4 for more on childcare ideologies.

Youngji's comments directly challenge the traditional belief that assumes mothers will sacrifice for their children, which reiterates the ideology of intensive motherhood (Hays, 1996). Instead, Youngji was a firm believer that she should not bear the sole responsibility for childcare, especially at the expense of her career. She further explained, "I do not want to give up what I want to do just because I have a child. Yes, having a child becomes an additional challenge, but it is not a barrier...I do not think I [should] compromise on that [my career]." Although Youngji's husband could not contribute to childcare during weekdays because he worked in a different city, he took full responsibilities on weekends. She said,

Men these days still tend to think that childcare is something they can help with, not something to do together ... At the beginning, my husband said, [childcare] is what mothers do. Whenever he took our daughter any place without me, he said people were looking to see where the mom is.... But I kept telling him that nobody cares (laugh) ... [Now] I just disappear on Sunday morning. I go watch a movie, go to a café at least for several hours.... Now he has his own system for childcare, and lists places to go with our daughter.

As Youngji described, her husband initially held a gendered idea that mothers—or women—should be primarily responsible for childcare. Youngji said it took much effort to convince her husband to participate in childcare: "My husband really refused the idea [of caring for our daughter by himself] at the beginning. We argued a lot. [But] I really fought for my own time [away from childcare]." Youngji's comments reflect her strong belief mothers should not be the only ones responsible for childcare. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, even though her daughter's daycare was closed for in-person care, it did not negatively impact Youngji's career. She was able to work remotely (full-time), enabling her and her daughter to be with her husband during the weekdays as well. In other words, she did not compromise on her career when there was an increase in care demands. Instead, she sought ways to share the increased care more equally with her husband.

Further, Youngji's career aspirations remained high despite the challenges of COVID-19, as she explained: "I want to work until the moment I die. Because I do not like the idea of retiring, I keep on studying too.... I want to list my company [where she is working as an employee] on the stock market.... I want to finish my master's thesis soon [while working full-time] so that I can go to a PhD [program]." Overall, Youngji's experience provides a clear example of the importance of care beliefs that do not impose care responsibilities on mothers for working mothers to sustain their aspirations and even improve their strategies for balancing work and family life despite the increased care demands due to COVID-19.

For another example, Jihee (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) started receiving full-time childcare help from her mother right before the first interview in 2019. Initially at wave 1, Jihee did not express many career goals: “I do not have much career aspirations. I like the way it is now. I do not care for promotions, or high pay.... At [my company], if I were to aim for a promotion, I need to give up so much of my family life.” Jihee’s comments reflect that aspiring to career success requires sacrifice in her time with family. For this reason, after four years of parental leave, Jihee was hesitant to return to her career; the possibility of being discriminated against for using a long leave policy tempered her career aspirations. Jihee said, “I wanted to get a promotion real fast (laugh), but since I went on the parental leave for so long, and additional leave when my husband had to go [work] as an expat, after that I gave up on getting promoted (laugh). I am thinking of working as long as I can.” Jihee’s quote reflects that she expected not to be promoted at work because of her use of leave policies, which were within her rights as an employee.

Jihee’s concern in being discriminated against for using the leave policy was based on the norms at her workplace. Jihee said,

I heard a rumor [about penalizing the use of leave policy] After returning from the leave, they [the company] station you [employee who used the leave policy] far from your home. According to the company, they said they do not do that intentionally. But according to the union rule book, the company is supposed to station employees close to their home when they return from parental leave. I am for sure not that close to my address. These days, you can legally use the parental policy later, if you did not use it all up at once, until the child reaches seven or eight. I see some people using that. I heard a rumor that the company also does not like that, although it is not official [that the company actually does so].

Jihee’s quote on the “rumor” at her work reflects that although there is no written policy discriminating against the use of parental leave, the normative belief that discrimination does occur discouraged the employees from benefitting from the legally protected policy (See the next section for more). Indeed, it is not that Jihee did not want to succeed in her career. Instead, she did not feel that she could succeed at her work unless she gave up her family life. That is, Jihee felt she must choose between work and family because her workplace was not compatible to pursue her career and have adequate family time. Jihee explained,

At the bank [my company], for women to become successful, we have to give up so many things from the family life. When I see women who are in a higher position like assistant directors, they have to accompany the director to play golf together on the weekends. I got to think that I do not want to give up spending time with my

two beautiful children. It is not worth having career success at the expense [of time with family].

As I discuss more in-depth in the next section, toxic working environments including the work culture that penalizes the use of leave policies and the dualism culture that expects employees to choose between their career and family discouraged her career aspirations. Given the context of her workplace culture, if Jihee were to choose between her career and family, Jihee would choose family for her children. Jihee said,

I wanted to quit [my job after the leave was over] since I wanted to care for our children myself. I cared for children [during the leave], I wanted to continue doing so. But, my parents were against it since I worked hard to get my job. They [her parents] said the kids may prefer me to stay at home while they [her children] are still young, but they [her children] would like me to work when they get older. My husband also wanted me to continue working for financial reasons.

Her quote reflects her underlying desire to be the primary care provider for her children. However, her family members did not believe that she should be the primary care provider just because she is a mother. Instead, Jihee's family members encouraged her to pursue her career aspirations. Jihee said, "My parents say, you can go work. We [child's grandparents] will take care of the children. My husband says he will do as much as he can to support me to work." Eventually, Jihee also subscribed to the belief that she did not have to bear the full responsibility for childcare because she is a mother. When I interviewed her for the second wave, she had more career aspirations and was pursuing her career success.

Being a mother is still my top priority, but my goal is being the best in my career for the sake of my children.... I kept thinking about quitting my job in the past. I was stressed out [about working] because I wanted to focus on raising my children. But now that idea has faded away. I am doing new work, studying more [for a promotion]. I have an interest in my work now. Because I started to think that I am doing something important, I have more ambition about it.

In another words, Jihee believed that being the best at her job was also good for her children because her children would be proud of her achievement. Jihee also added that earning a good income could better serve her children financially in the future. Jihee's quote resonates with the concept of *ideal* motherhood in China which expects mothers to perform unpaid household labor to their finest, while participating in wage work (Zhou 2020). According to this motherhood ideology, maternal employment benefits children, not necessarily mothers, because it is considered as educational (or inspirational) for children to see their mothers work (Zhou 2020). At the same

time, Jihee's experience also differs from *ideal* motherhood because she did not feel the need to be great at both realms of work and family.

At wave 3, Jihee continued to aspire for success in her career, and pursue such aspiration. Jihee said, "I have a new goal to learn more [about my field] than others [my colleagues], and get a new certificate for that." In sum, although the promotion became the source of change in her perspectives on work and childcare, with grandparental childcare help and her husband's contribution to childcare, Jihee started to believe that being a good mother does not mean that she has to be the primary care provider for her children.

Overall, beliefs and norms about childcare that do not assume mothers' primary involvement motivated mothers to aspire more for their career, despite the unstable economic context of COVID-19. Although I discussed only two examples here, this pattern was consistent across participants' who shared similar childcare ideologies. Thus, this finding extends past work by documenting that not all women downshift their career aspirations after childbirth (e.g., Lee and Cheon 2009). This study also complicates Kim et al's (2016) findings by documenting that motherhood itself was not a predictor of downward changes in career aspirations. Women in my study who supported or whose family members supported a care belief which does not associate mothers with primary childcare responsibility continued to pursue and even strengthened their career aspirations, despite the negative economic, social, and health conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.1.2 Childcare as Mothers' Responsibilities and Tempered Career Aspirations

When participants believed that they should be primarily responsible for childcare—what I call a "gendered care belief"—they relinquished their career aspirations or pursuits accordingly. At the same time, even when mothers themselves did not share this belief, if they perceived that their husbands, parents, or parents-in-law supported a gendered care belief, their career aspirations were discouraged. This finding was consistent regardless of whether mothers had care help from family members. That is, although there were available resources for help with childcare (i.e., family members), the belief regarding who should be responsible for childcare was a larger factor in mothers' pursuit of their career aspirations, or the lack thereof.

For example, Dasom (36 years old full-time working mother at wave 1, and stay-at-home mother at wave 2) lost her career aspirations within one year of the first interview. At wave 2, I

found that Dasom's husband could not work due to COVID-19. According to Dasom, despite his availability to contribute to childcare while Dasom worked, Dasom's husband did not believe childcare was his responsibility. Dasom said that he "felt embarrassed about being seen by [daycare] teachers" when picking up their child. That is, even though Dasom subscribed to an ideology that motherhood does not mean women should take full responsibility for childcare, her husband's support of a gendered belief about childcare responsibility—i.e., that men should not engage in care work—inhibited her pursuing her career. Dasom's case aligns with recent findings that changes in husbands' economic and labor force participation due to COVID-19 did not challenge traditional gender roles in the United States (Ruppanner et al. 2021).

As a result, although Dasom was working full-time and her husband was at home, she had to seek other care for her child. For example, while her mother-in-law was available to help during the pandemic, it was still Dasom's responsibility—not her *and* her husband's—to arrange her mother-in-law's help with care. Her experience resonates with the idea of a delegatory mother who delegates *her* responsibility of childcare to others (see Christopher 2012). Three days before the Wave 2 interview, Dasom quit her job. When asked about her career aspirations, Dasom said sighing, "I lost my career goals... I started losing some after getting married, then more after having a child... It looks like I voluntarily lost my career goals, but deep inside, I think it is more forced by others." She added crying, "I am someone's wife, and someone's mother, but I am Dasom... Being myself is most important [to me], but everyone keeps seeing me as someone's mother. Now I just have to be someone's mom." In this case, although Dasom believed that childcare responsibility should be shared fairly between parents, her husband's gendered care belief meant that Dasom ultimately had to sacrifice her career to take care of her child. Her experience challenges previous understandings of working mothers' opting out phenomenon; family *pulls* and work *pushes* women out of their career (Stone 2007). On the other hand, Dasom's husband *pushes* her out of work. That is, it is not her belief that she should be the only one caring for her child that motivated her to quit her job; rather, the beliefs of others, in this case her husband, pressured her to opt out of work. Her experience confirms a recent research on how gender inequality in the domestic sphere negatively affects U.S. women's employment, especially during the pandemic (Heggeness 2020). Overall, in addition to women's own beliefs, this example shows how family members' beliefs about care responsibilities are important for women's ability to continue pursuing their career aspirations.

Other examples also show that when participants' husbands insist on mothers' childcare responsibility, this often led women to relinquish their career aspirations. Although her husband actively participated in childcare and other housework, by the second interview, Mikyoung (33 years old at wave 1) had quit her full-time job because of her husband's belief that she should be the primary caregiver. During the first interview, Mikyoung was confident about her academic and professional achievements; she had a master's degree in political science and worked at the city government. At the second interview, however, her career aspirations had been decimated after she left a career that she was proud of. According to Mikyoung, her husband asked her to "take care of our daughter for two years [until our daughter gets a little older]. Then, he [her husband] will support me into whatever, opening a café, becoming a florist, or going to college again." Although opening a café or becoming a florist may be many people's career aspirations, they are not hers. She explained, "My career is dead" and "It feels like it [staying home] is melting me, grinding me, and killing me [her identity as a worker] every day. I wonder if I can ever re-live as myself again." Because her husband believed that she should be the one to care for their child during the early childhood years, Mikyoung not only opted out of her career, but was also forced to relinquish her career aspirations. Mikyoung's finding also complicates Stone's (2007) analysis on women's opting out that family *pulls*, and work *pushes*; it was her husband—not her work—that *pushed* her out of her career. Mikyoung's experience indicates that while workplace policies and healthy work culture are important not to *push* women out of work, beliefs and norms on childcare responsibilities are also crucial to retain women in their careers.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic posed an additional hurdle for Mikyoung and other participants who experienced career disruptions or diminished career aspirations. Although Mikyoung had to give up her career aspirations due to childcare responsibilities, she was hoping to secure a part-time position that would allow her to work and serve as the primary caretaker of her child. However, the economic crisis and frozen job market due to COVID-19 served as a barrier to her finding quality part-time work. Mikyoung explained: "I would like to start looking for freelance [part-time] positions, but because of COVID-19, it seems like not many places are hiring." In sum, when gendered care beliefs had already discouraged working mothers' career aspirations, the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated them even more. This finding also underscores emerging evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional challenges for working mothers due to increases in care demands and inequalities in care responsibilities between women and men, in

addition to severe health, economic, and social disruptions (Ahmed et al. 2020; UN Women 2020). I discuss the role of COVID-19 pandemic on Korean women's career aspirations and pursuit in more depth below.

5.1.3 Changes in Childcare and Career Aspirations

Career aspirations are likely to change over time and especially in the case of work-family conflict (Kim et al. 2016). In this section, I focus on two participants who experienced both positive and negative changes in their career aspirations during the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic as their childcare arrangements and care-related beliefs changed. Both participants increased their career aspirations because of better care arrangements by wave 2, but their career aspirations and pursuits were tempered by wave 3. The in-depth longitudinal analysis on how childcare beliefs influence mothers' careers underscores the importance of care-related beliefs in women's career aspirations and pursuits.

Narae

Narae (37 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) changed her career aspirations across all three waves as she changed her own belief about ideal childcare. As introduced in Chapter 4, although Narae received childcare help from the child's maternal and paternal grandmothers, Narae initially believed that childcare should be done by a child's parents and care providers who were not family members. Narae said, "We [my husband and I] wanted to get help from an outsider [that we can hire] Because childcare is really exhausting, at least for me. Someone has to do this exhausting work for us, but I felt really guilty asking family members to do that." She believed that the family members who are responsible for childcare should be limited to the child's parents. However, because her husband could not contribute much to childcare due to his full-time job, Narae regarded childcare responsibility as primarily her own. In sum, even though she received care help from her mother and mother-in-law, she considered that help to assist her in *her* responsibility as a mother, and sought ways to stop receiving their care help.

Accordingly, Narae compromised her career aspiration to fulfill *her* responsibility of childcare at wave 1. Being a part-time graduate student, Narae expressed her aspirations to study further. Narae explained, "I want to study more, maybe for PhD. My immediate wish is to pass the

Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE) exam¹⁶ to become a certified teacher. I actually do not want to be a teacher that much. But since teachers get off work early and have a vacation, I would be able to spend more time with my child.” Her quote reflects that although she aspired to pursue doctoral training, she chose a different career path because it would benefit her child. At the same time, she could not commit to studying for the KICE exam because of her childcare responsibility. That is, while she compromised on her original career, she aspired to become a teacher although she could not pursue her aspiration at wave 1.

At wave 2, I found that Narae was pursuing her career aspirations to become a certified teacher. She was no longer a part time worker, but a full-time student who studied for the KICE exam. This came with several changes in her child’s care arrangement. First, Narae explained, “Because of COVID-19, my husband has been staying at home. He is much more invested in childcare than I am now.” Because her husband had decreased workloads and was working remotely at home due to COVID-19, she took the pandemic as a chance to study for the exam. In addition, because her child was able to enroll in a public daycare earlier in the year, their overall childcare responsibility had decreased. Finally, her mother and mother-in-law contributed more to childcare. For example, her mother-in-law who used to live an hour away at wave 1, moved to her neighborhood “for childcare” by wave 2. Narae described her child’s care arrangement, “I am not part of [childcare]. I am [my contribution to childcare is] almost none... I feel like I will never have this opportunity [to study] again.” As her quote reflects, Narae changed her belief that she and her husband need to be solely responsible for childcare since wave 1. Instead, Narae started to think it was okay not to be primarily involved in childcare when there were available resources of childcare including her husband, daycare, and grandmothers. For example, at wave 1, Narae asked the child’s care-providing grandmother to send her a text message about any change in her baby, such as waking up or falling asleep, if she was not around her child. However, at wave 2, Narae said, “I stopped doing that [asking for messages] It interrupts my studying.... I do not pay much attention to how my mother-in-law takes care of my child anymore. I just assume that she

¹⁶ The KICE exam is the only government trusted certificate to become a teacher in Korea (Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation 2021). The KICE exam is highly competitive. For example, although the acceptance rate varies across region and specializations, the most competitive position from Seoul had about 3% of acceptance rate in 2020 (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education 2021).

will take good care of him since he is her grandchild too.” That is, Narae became comfortable with not having to constantly be in charge of childcare.

Coupled with her husband’s childcare engagement with her mother’s and mother-in-law’s, Narae was dedicated to studying for the exam full-time without worrying about her childcare arrangement. She explained, “I see that my friends, especially working moms, have so much problem about childcare due to COVID-19... but because my husband was not working [in the office because he was working from home], and both my mom and mother-in-law come help with childcare. So I had no problem.” Because her husband was available to be in charge of childcare, she no longer had to embrace the primary responsibility of childcare like she did at wave 1.

However, by wave 3, Narae’s career aspiration was tempered again. After the wave 2 interview, Narae started working as a contract teacher while also studying for the KICE exam. However, her career pursuit was stymied again due to childcare. Narae explained,

I stopped studying in October [of 2020]. I wanted to continue working... but I thought it was not good that grandmother [my mother] became the primary childcare provider. My child started to talk like her grandmother. My child asked, “What is this in English?” Her grandmother [my mother] could not help. There were several limitations like that [in my mom’s childcare] ... My mom became more exhausted over time too.... Then, I decided that it was better if I do childcare [instead of working] ... In my mind, I gave up [working] to fully focus on childcare.

Her quote shows that dissatisfaction in her mother’s care for her child and seeing her mother struggling with childcare motivated Narae to devote more of her time to childcare again. Her experience resonates with many other participants who received childcare help from grandmothers (see Chapter 6). As a result, Narae gave up on her aspiration to work.

In addition to her growing concern in receiving her mother’s childcare help, the COVID-19 pandemic added an additional hurdle to her career pursuits. Narae said,

Because COVID-19 was lasting so long, my kid could not go to daycare for a while. Initially I asked for my mom’s [care] help because I thought it would be only temporary. But since the COVID-19 [pandemic] lasted longer, it was too much for my mom to keep taking care of child [that long without daycare].

Ever since then, Narae quit her job as a teacher and stopped studying for the KICE exam entirely. Even though she planned to take the KICE exam as she discussed since wave 1, she ended up giving up the exam because of the risk of infection. The night before the exam, there was a COVID-19 outbreak in one of the testing preparation centers. This outbreak resulted in concern among many individuals who were scheduled to take the exam, and Narae was one of them. She explained,

I was debating [whether to take the exam or not] until the morning of the exam. I ended up not taking it. If I get COVID-19 or exposed [from the testing center], my child cannot go to daycare, my husband cannot go to work. Because my trauma [of struggling with childcare] from August, September, and October when my child could not go to daycare was so strong, I gave up thinking I would struggle too much if my child cannot go to daycare again. I am really sad about it. Maybe I should have taken it anyway. I think my mom was also sad when I told her that I will stop studying and do childcare instead.

Narae added that “I feel like I am going to want to look for a job. I need to suppress that at least until the end of this year. Maybe I can start something next year.” Her final quote reflects that she actively tried to halt her career aspirations against her wish so that she could focus on taking care of her child.

In sum, Narae’s career aspirations changed as her childcare ideologies changed over time. At wave 1, her career aspiration was tempered because of her strong belief that she and her husband should be primarily responsible for childcare. Because her husband could not contribute much to childcare due to his full-time work, she wanted to fully devote her time to childcare. By wave 2, she was able to commit to pursuing her aspiration to become a certified teacher. This came with the change in childcare arrangement. Her husband was able to contribute more due to a reduced workload and remote work during the pandemic. Because her husband was available to perform and oversee general childcare arrangements with the grandmothers’ care help, Narae no longer felt responsible for care. As a result, she was able to again pursue her career aspirations. However, because her husband could not contribute to childcare as much after returning to work in the office, and with growing concerns of COVID-19 infection, Narae changed her opinion about her childcare arrangement, and decided to become the primary care provider again. Accordingly, she gave up on her career aspirations and pursuits.

Narae’s experience showcases that childcare beliefs are closely related to women’s career pursuits, or lack thereof. Beliefs that associate motherhood with childcare discouraged Narae’s career aspirations and pursuits, while beliefs that did not associate her with being primarily responsible for childcare encouraged her to aspire to go further in her career. This finding highlights the importance of care beliefs in women’s career pursuits. Furthermore, her experience at wave 3 also highlights earlier findings that increases in care demands and inequalities in care responsibilities between women and men have challenged working women’s careers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmed et al. 2020). At the same time, her experience at wave 2 adds to the

literature that when women do not bear the increase in care demands compared to men, working mothers may continue to aspire for career success and pursue their career despite the economic and societal disruption that COVID-19 incurred. This finding further highlights the urgency in moving toward gender equality and an equal division of care labor during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bora

Similar to Narae, Bora (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) had positive changes in her career aspirations and pursuits at wave 2, but negative changes by wave 3 as her childcare resources and beliefs changed. At wave 1, Bora expressed frustration that she could not put in more hours at work due to childcare responsibilities, reflecting her strong career aspirations but not being able to pursue her aspirations. Bora described the incompatibility women often experienced between childcare responsibilities and their careers:

[My son] is my child, but I want to work. But if I work, I cannot care for my child.... [Childcare] affects my career a huge amount...[I] have to put my career to the second priority in my life. After childbirth, I need...to prioritize my child over work, but I do not want to do that because I am ambitious...My mom says not to think about my son at work, but...my husband and I are just thankful that my mom came to help because without her, I could not continue to work.

Bora's comment resonates with the literature that women are likely to scale down their career aspirations after childbirth (Bass 2015; Kim et al. 2016; Lee and Cheon 2009). Although Bora's mother was living with her family to help with childcare, Bora could not fully focus on her work because she felt indebted to her mother. Bora believed that her mother was helping with the care responsibility that should have been hers and her husband's. Bora wished that her mother could enjoy her life without having to help Bora and her husband. I discuss more about the relationship between childcare ideologies and grandmother care help in Chapters 4 and 6.

Moreover, although her husband wanted to share childcare responsibilities, he could not do so in reality because of his workplace culture. Bora said, "Since I am also working, he [her husband] believes that we should do everything together, whether that is cleaning, domestic work, or childcare...but since he gets off from work at 8:30 or 9:00 pm, by the time he gets home, our son is already asleep." Accordingly, because of her childcare responsibilities and obligations to her mother, Bora felt unable to seek out more career opportunities despite her aspiration to do so:

There is a department that I [would] really like to apply for... but they do not hire women. It is not like they are avoiding women overtly, but we all know that they

avoid mothers, because they cannot tell mothers to work late, on weekends or on holidays. Because I do not have anyone else to help with childcare, I am a little hesitant to apply for that department. I do my best not to bug my mom on weekends.... My mom also gets tired from childcare. You know, childcare is exhausting. Even after one hour, you are exhausted. Since I know that, I want to get home as soon as possible after work to help my mom. Working is hard because I need to think about my mom too.

In addition to highlighting Bora's sense of commitment to her mother and child, her comments underscore the discrimination that working mothers often face due to expectations that they are less competent and less committed to their jobs than men (see also Lee and Cheon 2009).

By wave 2, Bora was able to pursue her career aspirations because she gained more resources for childcare. Her husband became heavily involved in childcare because he stopped working due to COVID-19. Her mother and mother-in-law both came to live with her family to help with childcare and support Bora's career aspirations. Although Bora said she was physically more tired now than the last year, she is "a lot less stressed," and planned to apply for more challenging tasks that she could have done at the previous wave. Bora further explained that the current child arrangement was "much better than last year ever since my husband [became] the primary care provider. It is such a relief." Despite the economic challenge that his unemployment due to COVID-19 brought to the family, Bora explained that they were much happier with their childcare arrangement and her career trajectory. Bora explained,

It is much better for me that my husband is caring [for their son] at home. I get to focus on my work. I am thinking about applying for that department [where she wanted to apply during the first interview] ... This is the best time to [apply] because I will need to be totally immersed in my work for at least six months, learning new tasks.

Although COVID-19 resulted in unemployment for her husband and financial distress for the family, his focus on childcare allowed Bora to shift her focus to her career and resulted in greater happiness for both of them. Bora's husband planned to return to work after the pandemic. Yet, Bora added,

To be honest, I wish I can keep making money, and my husband to do part-time so he can primarily deal with childcare.... my husband thinks it is much better to care for our own child than working at a company. He wants to concentrate on spending more time and playing with [our] child.

Bora's experience illustrates that her husband's support in her career aspirations and his temporary unemployment due to COVID-19—which allowed him to take over childcare responsibilities—

facilitated her advancement at work. Additionally, since Bora was able to work extra shifts without concerns about childcare, her salary increased more than the previous year, which helped to compensate for the loss of her husband's income due to COVID-19. Bora's pursuit of her career aspirations led to financial rewards and even buffered the negative economic outcomes of the pandemic for the family. Most importantly, it also resulted in increased happiness for the couple because they were able to fulfil the childcare ideals that they supported.

However, by wave 3, Bora's career aspirations had diminished. Even though her husband was still unemployed due to COVID-19, instead of trying to get a job, he wanted to study to pursue his own career aspirations. Because of his lack of participation in childcare, Bora said at wave 3, "Now my mom and I take turns for childcare." In addition, Bora had to pick up additional shifts at work because of financial constraints. Bora explained at wave 3 that since her husband "quit [his job] last April [in 2020]. We received the unemployment benefits from the government until last October. We used that money for living expenses, but now that it is over, now I have to work almost twice more. In fact, even after doubling the shift, it [the household budget] is negative. It is exhausting." Bora's quote shows that while her husband pursued his career aspirations, she was burdened with childcare and financial responsibilities.

Even though she initially wished to work extra at wave 1, overworking continuously for financial needs started to exhaust her. Bora said at wave 3, she had to work late "every day except one day [a week] until 11 pm." That is, she worked full-time during the day and worked extra shifts until 11 pm four days a week. She added, "It is really exhausting. I have to go to work [for additional income] at least one day on the weekend." After working overtime continuously, Bora suffered from chronic headaches and had been taking medication for eight months. Even if she wanted to take medical leave, she "cannot because there is no income during the [medical] leave." Accordingly, when I asked her about her career aspirations at wave 3, Bora responded differently from the previous two waves. Bora no longer aspired to apply to the department she discussed in the previous waves because "I want to go somewhere [to the department] where I do not have to use my brain. I do not want to get stressed out.... The doctor said I should not get stressed out. What can I do?" Overall, Bora's career aspirations and pursuits have changed over time contingent to available childcare resources and her husbands' childcare beliefs.

Overall, Bora's career aspirations and pursuits shifted as her husband's perception of his responsibility for childcare and his actual contributions to childcare changed over time. At wave

1, while Bora and her husband believed in an equal division of childcare labor, because her husband could not do so in reality due to his long work hours, Bora struggled with managing childcare responsibilities and work. As a result, Bora had some aspirations to succeed in her career although she could not pursue them. At wave 2, when her husband embraced his responsibility for childcare and had additional care help from the child's grandmothers, Bora was able to re-envision developing her career. At wave 3, although her husband did not directly impose the care responsibility on Bora, because he relinquished his care responsibility to pursue his career, Bora and her mother had to share the care responsibilities. Consequently, Bora gave up on pursuing her career aspirations.

While this finding further strengthens the study's theoretical contribution discussed with Narae's case, it also complicates previous findings that high career aspirations are associated with higher confidence and achievements in one's career (Kim et al. 2016). For women, while higher confidence and achievements may matter in career aspirations, the care responsibilities based on gendered beliefs and norms becomes another constraint. While men may get to aspire to career success and pursue their aspirations whenever they decide to do so, women need to adjust their career aspirations based on available care resources.

5.1.4 Summary

By employing the gendered life course framework, I analyzed how the gendered belief on childcare influenced women's trajectories in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to numerous disruptions affecting various aspects of society including the economy, education, and childcare. Findings from this section suggest that beliefs about who should be responsible for childcare were critical to working mothers' abilities to maintain and pursue their career aspirations in the context of COVID-19. Whereas beliefs which do not associate motherhood with primary childcare responsibility allowed mothers to maintain and pursue their career aspirations, beliefs that assign primary childcare responsibility to mothers resulted in diminished career aspirations among working mothers during COVID-19.

Furthermore, this section contributes to extant research on work and family by highlighting the critical role of beliefs about childcare responsibility on working mothers' career aspirations. Previous research has documented that unequal gender expectations at work lower women's career aspirations (Correll 2004) but we lacked evidence about the role norms and beliefs might play in

women's career aspirations (see Bass 2015 for an exception). That is, while we knew that 100% of women in Korea who opted out of the careers after childbirth did so due to family related reasons such as childcare (Statistics Korea 2014), we did not have evidence about what influenced women's career pursuits for those who continued to work after childbirth. Overall, this section shows that women may downshift their career aspirations, not necessarily because they have low aspirations to succeed in their career to start with. Rather, they may do so because of beliefs supporting unequal gendered responsibilities for childcare labor, as well as the resources for care help.

5.2 Workplace Culture and Women's Careers

In this section, I analyze how workplace culture and policies influence Korean mothers' career aspirations. In doing so, I analyze general patterns in women's discussions of their working environments and compare women's narratives in good versus toxic workplace cultures. Overall, there were more women who worked in positive workplaces: 13 women (39%) discussed that their workplaces have a good workplace culture, while nine (23%) discussed having a toxic workplace culture at wave 3. Women in this study may be advantaged in their working environment because of their socioeconomic status (See Chapter 3 for more).

Good working culture motivated women's career aspirations, while toxic ones discouraged them. Not surprisingly, for example, Minsun (34 years old full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed her toxic workplace environment where she was disadvantaged from having taken parental leave. Minsun said at wave 1, "After returning from my maternity leave, I could not work extra hours as much as I used to pre-baby... My boss started problematizing my work hours even though I get all my work done." Because her boss was discontented in her use of parental leave, he discriminated against and penalized Minsun in several ways, including demanding her to work extra hours in the evening. Due to this kind of hostile experience at work, Minsun described her career aspiration as "discouraged." She added,

I used to be very passionate and ambitious... but now my concern is not being passionate enough. In the past, I would volunteer myself for new projects, but now I only do what I am being told to do.... I feel lazy about it. You know, just to pass time [at work]. And sometimes, I feel shamed about myself for feeling that way.

Her quote reflects her reduction in career motivation and ambition. It is okay not to be passionate or ambitious about one's career. However, according to Minsun, this was a negative change compared to her work experience before she went on leave. In other words, the discrimination and penalty that Minsun experienced for using the leave motivated her to seek employment elsewhere.

At wave 2, Minsun started working at a different company, and was completely satisfied with the new employer. She not only made a higher salary, but also was able to work flexible hours. According to Minsun, as long as she arrived at work before 6 pm, and worked at least four hours a day, she did not need to ask for a day off. Because anyone can use this policy at any time—not just mothers—all employees could benefit from flexible working hours. As a result, Minsun and her colleagues could freely schedule their own work hours because it was the norm.

The flexible working hours at Minsun's new company have been especially useful during the COVID-19 pandemic when her child's kindergarten was closed for in-person care. Thanks to the flexible working hours, Minsun took care of her child during the day, and went to work in the late afternoon after her husband came home from work. After the kindergarten re-opened, she went back to her regular schedule without any hassle. The flexibility to control her own work schedule not only empowered her as a worker but also enabled her and her husband to share childcare responsibilities equally. Finally, Minsun was not penalized for working flexible hours, because it was not a special accommodation for being a mother, but a work arrangement that was available for every employee.

As a result, Minsun aspired more for her career at her new job. Minsun explained that "Although I try not to get too greedy about [promotion] I try to focus on what I can do best for the time being. The higher up I go [on the corporate ladder], the more responsibilities I can take." Continuing to work at the same company, her career aspiration grew even more by wave 3. Minsun said, "I think I am really ambitious. If possible, I want to become an executive.... I want to work as long as possible, as best as possible, and as well-regarded as possible." Overall, Minsun's strong career aspiration at waves 2 and 3 was markedly higher than her ambitions at wave 1. Her case illustrates the importance of workplace culture in motivating or discouraging women's career aspirations and pursuits.

Below, I provide a more in-depth discussion of women's narratives in positive and negative working environments. Analyzing women's narratives, I found three prevailing aspects that participants consider as characterizing a "good" working environment, which motivated their

career aspirations and pursuits. They include 1) accessibility to use the reduced work hours policy, 2) flexible work schedule, and 3) having supportive colleagues. I also found four patterns in participants' discussion of toxic workplace cultures and policies, which discouraged their career aspirations and pursuits. These include 1) long working hours, 2) dualism culture which forces employees to choose between work and family, 3) penalizing the use of leave policies, and 4) gender-based discrimination at work. Based on these findings, I demonstrate what kind of workplace culture and policies benefit working mothers and enable them to continue with their career pursuits (vs. what discourages them). Finally, I document how some participants experienced changes in workplace culture over the course of the three years of data collection. By doing so, I show how workplaces could institute changes to better support their employees.

5.2.1 Good Working Environment

Based on women's narratives, there were three patterns in what women considered as a positive working environment. They include both the culture of a workplace but also the availability of and accessibility to certain policies. As discussed below, women discussed *good* working environments as tied to the use of reduced work hours, the use of a flexible work schedule, and having supportive colleagues.

Reduced Work Hours

Out of 37 women who participated in at least one wave of interviews, ten (27%) benefitted from the policy of reduced work hours. Although the exact policy varied across companies, it allowed women to work fewer hours (i.e., part-time hours) for childcare reasons. Participants shared two benefits of working reduced hours. For example, Bomin (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) returned to work at wave 3 after the use of maternal and parental leave for two years and six months. Bomin explained how the reduced work hour policy helped her adjust to work. Bomin said at wave 3,

Work is tough, but other than that, I did not have any trouble returning to work. It helped that we [employees at her work] can use a reduced "childcare" policy for one year after returning from parental leave. That means, I can work on a flexible [and reduced] schedule from 11 am to 6 pm or from 9 am until 4 pm. It is like a period to adjust back to work. I like that I can ease into work from [returning from] the leave.

Bomin's quote reflects that the reduced work hour policy helped her transition back to her career after a long period of maternal and parental leaves.

In addition, Bomin discussed the accessibility of using the policy. Bomin said, "Anyone can use it [the policy], no matter if you are a father or mother. I think any [employee] can use it until their child enrolls in the 3rd grade in elementary school. That is one year per child. But you do not have to use one year all at once. You can also use one month at a time, whenever you need it, but I just decided to use one year at once." In sum, her quote reflects not only accessibility but also flexibility in using the policy because the employee can decide the time and length of when to benefit from the policy.

Flexible Work Schedule

Out of 37 women who participated in at least one wave of interviews, four (11%) benefitted from the policy of a flexible work schedule. For example, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) applauded her company's policies providing flexible work schedules and reduced hours. Soyoung explained,

If I have to go see a pediatrician [with my children] and have to leave [work] an hour or two early, or if I have to take a half day off, I can just tell them [my boss] the same day... It does not matter whether you are a man or women.... We just let our colleagues know in our company messenger. I do not have to explain why I am leaving early in detail.... Nobody problematizes it because that is a taken-for-granted right for everyone.... It is really great that I do not have to feel bad or have to get permission from anyone. It is an [working] environment where I can use such policy [flexible work schedule and reduced hours] confidently.

Soyoung's quote reflects that her use of a flexible work schedule is employee-driven as opposed to employer-driven. That is, she did not need any permission from the employer to schedule her hours. Instead, as an employee, she was able to make her own schedule flexible. As a previous study shows that employee-driven flexibilities benefit employees' work-family management (Christensen and Schneider 2010), Soyoung was better able to pursue her career and her family life including childcare arrangement.

Soyoung's quote also demonstrates that because the flexible work schedule is available for all employees, not only mothers, Soyoung felt more comfortable using it. Resonating Moen (2011), Soyoung did not feel *accommodated* to as a mother. In this context, participants who were able to manage their work schedule because of their status as a mother wished it to be implemented to all

employees. For example, Yewon (39 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed the use of flexible work schedules throughout all three waves of interview. Yewon described,

It [flexible work schedule] is not a government [implemented] policy, but my boss asked each department to come up with suggestions [for work]. Back then, I was a manager or supervisor. I said, I want to work at this company for long, but I live too far away. [Because I live so far], my kid does not get to be with one meal with his parents per day. Even if you reduce my salary, I wish I can come to work one hour later than others. After then, I was allowed to start work one hour later than usual, although they decreased my salary [10%]. They [company] also asked all other married women to use the same policy for several years....I think I can use this policy as long as my child is a minor [under 18 years old].

While Yewon demanded and benefitted from being able to change her work schedule for her family needs, she also wished for improvement. Yewon said,

They [my employer] allow for the use of flexible work schedule by one hour but limited to married women with a child. That said, it is really visible [when someone used the policy] ... Because I am the only person who goes to work late [one hour later than others], I stick out. The new employees always ask around why she [I] gets to come to office late. When there are many people using the policy, there could be a consensus that oh, s/he is using the flexible work schedule. S/he will come to office at 10 am to 7 pm [instead of 9 am to 6 pm] It is difficult to receive unwanted attention like that.

Yewon's quote reflects that despite the advantage of a flexible work schedule, because this policy only targets a specific group of employees—married women with a child—rather than the entire workforce, it made her status visible. In a way, this kind of policy is what Moen (2011) would consider as an *accommodation*, which provides temporal alleviation to the problem without structural change. Accommodation like this does not alleviate working mothers' challenges in work-family life in the long term, because there need to be structural changes (Moen 2011). Soyoung and Yewon's experiences, also resonated by others with similar experiences, demonstrate that family-supportive policies that target all working parents, not working mothers only, may benefit working mothers more than policies targeting only mothers.

Supportive Colleagues

Women also discussed the importance of supportive colleagues in a good working environment. For example, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed her colleagues' support for her to continue working while being a mother. Soyoung said,

When I discuss my concern that maybe I have to quit my job since my [first] child goes to elementary school in two years, they [my colleagues] say, “Why quit? Just use the two-hour reduced schedule.” Now men also take it for granted [to use the policy] because I am in the same shoes with their [working] wives.

Her colleagues actively encouraged her to use the existing policies to continue pursuing her career. While the availability and accessibility of the policy were important, it also mattered that she had her colleagues support to use the policy. Having colleagues who were empathetic to working mothers’ concerns about managing work and care responsibility, not only provided emotional support but also contributed to the use of available policies. I would like to clarify that not everyone shared a similar experience of having supportive colleagues, as I will discuss more below. I did not study workplace culture on-site, therefore, future studies investigating the role of colleagues in women’s career aspirations and pursuits would be beneficial.

5.2.2 Toxic Workplace Culture

In addition to the patterns as good workplaces discussed above, I found four themes in participants’ discussions of toxic working environments: long working hours, dualism culture, penalizing the use of leave policies, and gender-based discrimination at work.

Long Working Hours

Resonating with the long working hour culture in Korea (OECD 2019b), the most common theme of toxic workplace culture was the expectation to work overtime. For example, Korean full-time workers work 46.8 hours on average per week (the OECD average is 42) (OECD 2019b). To continue their career in the long working hour culture, Korean working mothers worked later at night. For example, Sujin (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained,

[My colleagues and boss] send me emails at night and I work on the weekends. As a working mother, I need to do childcare, but I also cannot make a hole [postpone] on my work.... They [my colleagues] all see it [my work] ... and think that I must be exhausted. But since there are so many women and working mothers in this department, everyone is like that [working at night and on weekends], not just me. So it is not very special [that I work extra hours].

When I asked whether she had time to sleep, Sujin explained, “My work-life balance is awful, but phew... what can I do... My baby sleeps around 9, 10 pm. Then, I work for an hour after then. On weekends, I work two, three hours.” As Sujin’s quotes show, instead of working extra hours in the

evening with her colleagues, she worked later at night so that she could care for her children. This finding confirms previous studies documenting how the culture of long working hours challenges employees to manage their career and family responsibilities, and more so for working women because of gendered care responsibilities (Brinton and Oh 2019; Moen 2011). Although Sujin was clearly exhausted from work and childcare, she normalized her exhaustion because “everyone” else, especially women, in her department were in the same boat. Sujin was not an outlier among the participants. Indeed, the majority of full-time working mothers in this study resonated with Sujin’s experience. This finding highlights a larger pattern among Korean mothers: Korean women work longer hours than average women in OECD countries; 21% of Korean women work 50 hours or more per week, while the OECD average is 8% (OECD 2019b). With such a long working hour culture in Korea, a healthy balance between career and family life seemed to be unattainable, especially for working mothers.

“Choice” between Work and Family

The dualism culture expects employees to choose between their career and family and intensifies working mothers’ challenges in managing the two (Brinton and Oh 2019; OECD 2019b). In this context, when family care responsibilities were considered women’s responsibilities, women were more likely to leave the labor market to focus on motherhood (Ma 2013). Although many women in this study spoke about the dualism culture both directly and indirectly, I present Joomi’s case as an example. According to Joomi (37 years old full-time working mother at wave 1), everyone had to choose to fully commit to either work or family at her workplace. Joomi said,

Women need to make the choice in early- or mid-40s, and men in their mid-40s. When the company offers an option [to be promoted and fully commit to work], some women take that offer. Then, they fully delegate childcare responsibilities to someone else. Those who made this choice [to commit to work] keep going up the corporate ladder. At the same time, there are so many [working] mothers who do not make such decision. Most of them [us] choose children [over work]. Then, we have to consider quitting. So far in Korea, [working] fathers have that responsibility of the primary breadwinner. For them [working fathers], it is not necessarily a choice. It is something that they have to do [work over family] If I were the primary breadwinner, I would not even debate over [work and family]. But since someone has to do childcare, I will choose my child.

When I asked if it is possible to do both work and family, Joomi responded, “That is impossible, looking at all my seniors. They all make the choice between two. I mean, even if you go all-in

[fully commit] to your career, your child will not necessarily grow up bad. That is just the choice that [working] mothers need to make.” Toxic employers like Joomi’s assume that employees who value their family are not good workers.

However, at wave 3, when I asked about her discussion of *the choice* from previous waves, Joomi responded that she was less concerned. There were two reasons for this change: her new boss has been supportive of life outside work, and the remote work arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled more flexibility. Hence, Joomi said,

As long as my current workload and working conditions remain the same, I want to continue working here [at her company]. But if there are any changes, like increase in my workload, I am ready to quit my job whenever. If I can continue receiving care help from babysitters and mothers-in-law, it does not matter [I will continue working], but if not, I will quit.

Joomi’s quote shows that in the new working conditions at wave 3, she no longer had to *choose* between work and family; she was able to do both. While this change has been promising, she also mentally prepared herself for *the choice* in case she was forced to make the decision in the future. Because women are more expected than men to be responsible for family life (Glenn 2010; Moen and Roehling 2004), toxic workplaces like Joomis’ either *push* women out of their careers (Stone 2007) or require women to *assimilate* to an already-existing toxic work culture (Moen 2011). This finding echoes previous research from the United States that found that women were left with *unpalatable alternatives* of reducing work hours in the presence of work-family conflicts (Jacobs and Gerson 1998). Similarly, Korean women had to come to terms with their inabilities to be both *ideal* workers and mothers simultaneously.

Penalization for Using the Leave Policies

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Korea has comparatively generous family-supportive policies. A long maternal and parental leave policy is an epitome of such policies. In fact, Korea provides one of longest parental leaves among the OECD countries (OECD 2019b). However, although the leave policies are in place to legally protect employees’ return to work, they do not guarantee protection for workers from their employers (Tayler et al. 2004). For example, because Korean employers must pay the employees 100% of their wages during the 60 days of parental leave, Korean employers tend to discourage their employees from using these policies (Park 2018).

Participants in this study also experienced discouragement or penalization from using the leave policies despite their legal rights to do so.

Several participants discussed their workplaces' penalization for the use of leave policies. For example, Joomi also shared her experience of being disadvantaged by her manager for going on a parental leave at wave 1. This finding was a surprise to me because she worked at one of the biggest corporates in Korea, which is expected to provide good family-supportive policies by law because of its large size. Joomi explained,

While I was away for the parental leave, it was also the semi-annual evaluation period.... Turns out I got the lowest value on the evaluation. I was really pissed. I reached out to my boss and asked why. Then, my boss said, it is because the evaluation was based on the number of projects I participated in. But I was thinking, of course I do not have any projects because I was on the leave! I was speechless.... Of course, I could have confronted him about it, but then, it will be really uncomfortable when I return to work after the leave. I would have confronted if I was not going back to work. But since I have to work with him again, I had to suck it up.

Because of her company's policy that the last evaluation carried over during and after the leave, she received the lowest value for two years, which resulted in her salary deduction the following year. Joomi's experience shows that although the policy was in place to alleviate the employees' work-family concerns, workplaces could retaliate for the employees' use of the policy. Joomi's poor evaluation resulted in a salary deduction the following year. After this experience, Joomi was hesitant to use other family-supportive policies that were in place. Joomi explained,

There is a policy [of flexible working hours] in place. But nobody has used it yet. The HR website has an application information to use the policy. Since I will have to be the first one to use, there is too much risk.... The HR may encourage employees to use it. But my boss will not like it. At the end of the day, I will have to work with my boss, my team, and they are the ones giving me the semi-evaluation. It is not easy [to use the policy] at all.

Joomi's experience aligns with earlier findings that women's use of long leave policies was associated with career changes to less prestigious occupations in Korea (Ma 2014). Because of the discrimination and penalty for using the leave policy, Joomi experienced an unfair performance review, which disadvantaged her career.

Overall, Joomi's experience, resonated with three other participants, further complicates our understanding of the role of leave policies. Jang, Zippay and Park (2016) find that even if not every worker uses the parental leave program, the availability of the leave policy itself may provide

a positive psychological support for employees. However, a recent study finds that the presence of the family policy itself is not significant in reducing Korean mothers' work-family conflict (Kim and Parish 2020). Rather, accessibility to family policies was significantly associated with alleviation of work-family conflict (Kim and Parish 2020). Joomi's experience adds that in addition to presence and accessibility, previous experience of discrimination may influence women's future work-family concerns, and further, their career aspirations.

Moreover, this finding also complicates the previous finding that Korean working mothers feel a sense of guilt toward their colleagues; because the employers often do not hire any temporary employees, the colleagues are expected to take turns to work on behalf of those on leave (Goo and Chang 2018). Instead, like other women who used the leave policies, Joomi did not feel guilty for using the policy, because it is her right to do so. In fact, none of the participants from the study shared any guilty feelings or needs to give up their training or promotion opportunity. The Korean women in this study understood that it is their right to use the leaves, and any penalization, discrimination, or discouragement was unfair.

The only exception was Hyojung, (32 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) who emphasized the class-based eligibility of using the leave policy in her industry. Hyojung discussed the expectation at work and in her industry against the use of parental leave policies:

I went on the maternal leave because I worked at a big university hospital then. Because I was still training, I did not even get paid much. It is possible to go on the maternity leaves at a big hospital, even professors would, but nobody would use the parental leave policy because the social norm never allows for that. Regular companies can easily find a substitute [when their employees go on parental leaves], but it is really difficult to get a substitute doctor. The rest of physicians have to divide up the workload [of the person who went on the leave]. So it is impossible, ridiculous to go for a year-long parental leave.

When I clarified that regular corporate companies in Korea usually do not find a substitute worker as well, Hyojung was surprised, saying, "I thought they find a substitute worker because all my friends who work at companies [corporate] go on parental leaves. But when I see my doctor friends, nobody, not even one person went on the leave. They may just quit their job but not on the leave." In this regard, Hyojung's explanation for hesitancy to use the parental leave policy reiterates Goo and Chang (2018) who documented that Korean working mothers were hesitant to use the parental leave policies because they felt guilty toward their colleagues who were covering for their shift.

However, Hyojung added an additional reason that differed from Goo and Chang (2018). In addition to feeling guilty towards colleagues, Hyojung explained that because female doctors earn a higher salary than the average Korean woman, female doctors should not expect to benefit from such policies. When asked about her experience of family-supportive policies, Hyojung responded,

I do not know because I never even expected [to receive any support for childcare], I have not looked up. I assume that there is none for sure. Maybe there is a parental leave since I work at a public hospital. But since female doctors receive relatively high salary [compared to other occupations], my colleagues think that it is really bad and shameless to benefit from the maternal or parental leaves. Yes, it is okay to go on an unpaid leave, but usually, maternal and parental leaves are paid... I sometimes see people who use the maternity leave [after childbirth] but I have never heard of anyone using the parental leave. It is unthinkable. I have not thought of using the leave, not even once (laugh)... There is no social environment [norm within the industry] to ever use a parental leave.

Hyojung's quote supports the idea that women with high income should not deserve to benefit from family-supportive policies. However, this is an unequal gender norm that women are disadvantaged for earning a high income, while there is no punishment for men for doing so. Additionally, the paid leave policies—or any other family-supportive policies provided by the government—are guaranteed for all employees regardless of income status. Future research is needed to further investigate how intersections of class and gender create different kinds of barriers for pursuing family life beyond work. At the same time, Hyojung was an outlier in the sense that no other woman in the study discussed women's income status as lacking eligibility for the use of family-supportive policies. It is not clear whether this is specific to the medical industry, because other women in the study also shared similar educational, social, and economic backgrounds with her.

Sexism at Work

Sexism, or discrimination based on gender, at work deters working mothers' pursuits of their career aspirations as well. For example, Minjin (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) was a full-time working mother who quit her job for childcare at wave 2. Minjin tried to return to work after deciding to enroll her child at daycare, as she said, "I have applied to at least two, three positions every month" at wave 3. However, Minjin said she struggled with employment due to a sexist work environment. Minjin explained,

Because I used to work in the labor union in the past, I wanted to do something related to managing the relationship between employer and employees. But apparently, they only wanted men because they have to deal with tough [angry] employees. So I told them [hiring managers] to explicitly state that [they only hire men on the job post]. It is frustrating. I prepare so much [for the interview] but eventually they only want men. There are not many places to work, because I have a child. I cannot work late in the evening. There were only poor-quality jobs available.

Minjin's experience reflects that toxic workplace cultures deter women from returning to work after a career break due to childcare. As her quote suggests, gendered expectations on women's childcare responsibilities, coupled with the long working hour culture aggravated gender-based discrimination at work. After months-long rejections, Minjin started working for her brother who imports timber, even though it was not her career interest. Similarly, both explicit and subtle discrimination based on gendered expectations were still present in Korea, and deterred women's career pursuits.

5.2.3 Changes in Workplace Culture

Like any other social institutions and norms, workplace cultures are not static. Below, I present how workplace cultures changed within my three years of data collection. These changes stemmed from various factors, including normative changes within colleagues, structural changes, and participants' initiatives to bring changes. For example, Soyoung experienced improvements in her workplace culture. This change came with structural changes in new policies and changes in her colleagues' understanding of working mothers. As discussed above, although Soyoung was satisfied with her company's workplace culture in managing childcare as a working parent, she also mentioned that it has not always been the case. Instead, Soyoung discussed that there was an improvement in her workplace culture after returning from parental leave at wave 3,

My company was not like this [supportive] before. It changed after I came back from the leave. I told you before [in previous waves] that I struggled a lot with my first child.... Before [the leave], I had to tell [my boss] that I am sorry, I have to take a half day off because my child is sick.... Then I have to hear stuff like, that is why women raising kids are not okay, that is why women are not okay [to work with]. I used to think why do I have to live a life like this? But after I came back from the leave, there is a new system [structure] where all my colleagues are using this [flexible work schedule] naturally. I got to think, oh, this is not a privileged accommodation just for me. I do not have to feel bad about it. It is everyone's right to use the policy. In that regard, I really like my company.

Soyoung explained that this change in her workplace culture came with changes in her colleagues' perceptions of working mothers. Soyoung said,

It is great that my colleagues do not see me as a mother or woman. They see me as a colleague. It does not mean that they do not account for the fact that I am a mother. Because they [my colleagues] also have young children, they all understand my situation [as a working mother]. It [my work-life] has definitely gotten better after people's mindset [opinion] changed.

Soyoung's experience reflects that workplace cultures and norms could change in even as little as one year, the time period she was away for the leave.

When the workplace needs an improvement, employees can bring change as well. For example, Woori (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) took an initiative to bring change. Woori said,

The law changed [since my last childbirth]. The [revised] law allows for the use of reduced work hours up to one year for employees whose child is enrolled in the 2nd grade in elementary school [eight years old] or below. Now we have the reduced work schedule policy in place [by law], but no one has used it yet [at my work]. When I asked the HR [to use the policy], the [HR] manager could not find the solution [on how I can use the policy]. Hence, I suggested at the labor management meeting, that if they [HR] cannot find a way to implement [the reduced work hour schedule], they should extend the unpaid parental leave to two years.... So, if [my work] extends the parental leave from one year to two years, it is all because of me... If they do not accept my suggestion, I will try to use the reduced work schedule [because it is protected by law] even though my employer may say bad things about me.

Woori's quote shows that she pushed back against her employer's refusal for her to use the government's legally mandated policy.

Similarly, Minsun (34 years old full-time working mother) who was previously penalized for using the maternity leave policy, pushed back when she became pregnant with her second child. Minsun said, "I am at a more senior level now. If I were to be hesitant to use the maternity and parental leaves, other female colleagues who are junior to me would also hesitate to use the policies. So, this time, I told [my colleagues] confidently that I will use one year of maternity and parental leaves." Minsun's experience reflects her effort to challenge the toxic workplace culture that discourages the use of leave policies. Drawing from the gendered life course approach (Moen 2011), I conclude that these changes in workplaces are embedded within social changes like legal changes, behavioral changes like new policies, and changes in people's perspectives. At the same

time, these changes occur with working mothers' strategies to challenge the context of toxic work culture.

5.2.4 Summary

In this section, I documented workplace cultures and policies that influenced women's career aspirations and pursuits in both positive and negative ways. The good workplace culture includes reduced work hours, flexible work schedule, and having supportive colleagues. These factors helped women to aspire to career success and motivated them to pursue their aspirations. On the other hand, toxic workplace culture included long working hours, the dualism culture, penalizing the use of leave policies, and sexism. These factors discouraged women from envisioning success in their career and discouraged from pursuing their career aspirations. Finally, I documented that there were positive changes in workplace cultures and policies. This finding reflects that although it may feel daunting to change a toxic workplace culture, structural and behavioral changes can help bring improvements.

Based on these findings, I argue for two suggestions in promoting positive workplace cultures in policies. First, as other research has shown (Kim and Parish 2020), the availability of a family-friendly policy alone did not benefit working mothers, its accessibility mattered. Thus, while it is important to implement new policies, it is also critical to monitor accessibility in available policies. While several participants actively sought ways to gain accessibility to family-friendly policies, the lack of accessibility not only discouraged them from using the policies, but also from pursuing their career aspirations overall. Finally, because women were penalized for benefitting from the policy, there should be efforts to monitor and improve post-policy use experiences.

Second, the findings show that policies that target all employees benefitted working mothers more than the policies that were specifically aimed at working mothers. The policies targeting working mothers also assumes that only mothers are responsible for childcare, not mothers and fathers, and further reinforces the gendered belief about childcare responsibilities. Therefore, I suggest future family-supportive policies to be eligible to all workers, regardless of their parental status. For example, just like the Korean government promotes the use of parental leave by both mothers and fathers (OECD 2019b), it can also encourage the use of more family-supportive policies—such as flexible working hours—for all working parents, not just mothers.

5.3 COVID-19 Pandemic and Women's Careers

In this section, I demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced Korean women's career aspirations and pursuits. The COVID-19 pandemic had various direct or indirect impacts on women's work and family lives. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers was primarily negative, although the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic was complex. Employing a gendered life course approach, I contextualize working mothers' experiences in response to the macro-level change of the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, I analyze how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the participants' careers, accounting for different types of resources, including policies, social support, and cultural schemas, that are available to Korean working mothers.

Although participants discussed the negative role of COVID-19 in their career pursuits, I add nuance to our understanding by documenting how it led to favorable career outcomes for some, especially as the pandemic continued to last for more than a year. At wave 2, 12 participants (38%) discussed negative impacts on their careers due to COVID-19, while none said the COVID-19 pandemic had any positive influence on their career. Since the pandemic lasted for more than a year, more participants discussed the pandemic's negative influence in their career. At the same time, some adapted to the pandemic and experienced structural changes in the industry which led to positive changes in their career. At wave 3, 17 (52%) discussed negative changes in their careers, while nine (27%) discussed positive changes in their careers due to COVID-19. I argue that the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on women's careers was complex because among those who experienced changes, four (12%) experienced both positive and negative changes in their careers. Overall, this section is devoted to descriptive findings to document a) participants' positive changes in their careers due to COVID-19; b) negative career changes; and c) experiencing both positive and negative changes.

5.3.1 Positive Changes

The nine participants (27%) who discussed the positive impact of COVID-19 on their career shared three narratives. First, remote work arrangements enabled more flexibility for them to better pursue their career and manage family responsibilities like childcare. In fact, remote work arrangements were the most common change in careers during the pandemic. Out of 34

participants who participated in at least one interview during the pandemic (Wave 2 or 3), 18 participants (53%) worked remotely at some point. While remote work from home during the pandemic has brought mixed outcomes for working parents, I focus on the positives in this section. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic was favorable because it stopped the toxic working culture of *hoesik*, social gathering after work hours. Working mothers who had care responsibilities in the evening appreciated that they no longer had to carve out time for work after their hours. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic created new career opportunities. Although the pandemic posed economic crises in many industries, it also sparked growth in some, which I discuss more below.

Remote Work Arrangement

Participants discussed remote work arrangements as a positive outcome of COVID-19 for two reasons. First, it allowed for flexibility in managing their work schedule and childcare. Remote work was critical as many daycares or kindergartens were closed for in-person operations. However, even when the child was able to attend a care facility using the emergency care policy, participants spoke positively about being able to provide direct care to their children while working from home. Although the risk of COVID-19 infection was a concern, it was not the only type of health and care concern parents had for their children. Before the pandemic, when children got sick and could not attend a care facility, parents had to arrange last-minute care, which did not always work out. For example, Joomi (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed that the remote work arrangement helped with her childcare arrangement:

My child went to day care mostly using the emergency care policy. But when my child was sick, not even for COVID-19, like if he coughs or something, I wanted to be cautious and not send him to daycare.... Occasions like that, I have my sister-in-law drop by to play with him, but since I am mostly home [due to remote work schedule], I did not have to rely [on others for care help]. Maybe my child was a bit bored [while I am working] but I did not have to use my paid leaves.

Joomi's quote reflects that she was free from having to arrange childcare last minute when her child got sick, which was her concern before the COVID-19 pandemic as well. With the wide availability of remote work as an option, women were more flexible with their work schedule and childcare. However, participants found remote work useful as long as their workload was reasonable, and they had extra care resources to fall back on. I discuss how the remote work arrangement could be harmful to women's careers below.

Second, the remote work arrangement allowed participants to explore and develop new career opportunities. Because many educational and career opportunities transitioned online during the pandemic, participants were better able to pursue those opportunities. For example, Yunah (33 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) became a part-time worker by wave 3. Even though she sought opportunities to return to the labor market in diverse ways, Yunah could not actively do so because she had to look after her child at home. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was opportune for her career development after being a stay-at-home mother for several years. Yunah explained, “Since there are so many [classes] done over Zoom, I was able to take courses [virtually] and get certificates at home.... These are the courses that I would have had to attend in-person. Because of COVID-19, all courses transitioned to Zoom. [In that way], I benefitted from COVID-19.” As reflected by Yunah’s quote, the remote work arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic made work more accessible. Remote opportunities for career development were especially important because when Korean mothers return to work after birth, they are more likely to be in a temporary employment position than in stable employment with good social security coverage (OECD 2019b). Overall, the flexibility and accessibility of remote work arrangements helped mothers to remain or return to employment.

Challenging Hoesik

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for workers avoid *hoesik*, a social gathering after work hours. *Hoesik* is an example of toxic work culture in Korea which involves binge-drinking of alcohol (Çakar and Kim 2016). Although *hoesik* promotes, or coerces, unhealthy drinking behavior, it is considered as an important organizational event that all employees are encouraged to participate in to appear as an active member of organization, and to share ideas and to build networks (Çakar and Kim 2016). Because this after-work social gathering with colleagues occurs a few times a week, in addition to long working hours and long commuting times, it creates additional barrier in managing work and family life (OECD 2019b).

Fortunately, although unintentionally, *hoesik* was no longer possible during the COVID-19 pandemic because of social distancing restrictions and remote work arrangements. For example, Youngji (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said,

In a way, COVID-19 pandemic has been really good for working moms. [Because of COVID-19] all *hoesik* has been replaced [cancelled]. I am at a supervisor role that I have to listen to my employee’s struggles, buy them food and all [at *hoesik*].

But now I just buy them gift cards. I say let's talk in the meeting briefly because we cannot meet due to COVID-19. That's better for me since I do not have to make extra time for them.

Younji's quote reflects her relief that she no longer had to set aside additional time after work to arrange and pay for *hoesik* during the pandemic. When the *hoesik* culture contributes to a greater division between paid and unpaid work between men and women (OECD 2019b), the COVID-19 pandemic tackled such working culture that interfered with workers'—especially working mothers'—pursuit of family life.

New Opportunities

Although the COVID-19 pandemic incurred numerous negative changes in the economy, it also created new, albeit unexpected, career opportunities for some. For example, Minjin (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) who struggled to return to employment after becoming a stay-at-home mother to care for her child at wave 2, welcomed a new career opportunity stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic at wave 3. As discussed above, after having difficulty in the job market, Minjin started helping with her brother's business. Although the transition in her career was exhausting at the time, Minjin said the COVID-19 pandemic ignited a positive career outcome. Minjin explained, "We [my brother and I] do several things, but one of business is to supply wood for camping cars. We only provide one or two products, but that alone produced enough revenue since camping became so popular in Korea because of COVID-19." Because people could not travel abroad due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, the camping industry grew rapidly, which benefited Minjin and her brother's business. Based on her experience, Minjin was able to secure government funding for her new business. Minjin said, "Since the business is growing, I feel more confident.... I am much more satisfied [at my current career] than at my previous full-time position." Overall, the new business opportunity stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic motivated her career aspirations and growth.

For another example, Youngji (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) had a positive career experience because the COVID-19 pandemic expedited much growth in her professional field of home health care services. Youngji said, "There was a huge change in people's understanding of health care. Before [the pandemic], people did not care much about health care at home, like home-test. Because of that change [from COVID-19], we got a huge

contract with a global company. Career-wise, I am really grateful to COVID-19 pandemic.” Similar to Minjin, the changes incurred from the COVID-19 pandemic expedited Youngji’s career growth. In addition to Minjin and Youngji, participants and women’s husbands working in the digital or health industry experienced career success during the pandemic. In sum, although it was inevitable that the COVID-19 pandemic caused much financial hardship and economic crisis in many, it also led to growth in some industries.

5.3.2 Negative Changes

Despite positive career changes discussed above, the COVID-19 pandemic brought hardship in many women’s career pursuits. First, job security was the biggest concern among the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the economic uncertainty, part-time workers and freelance contractors were the first ones whose contracts got postponed or terminated. Second, many participants experienced an increase in their workloads because of COVID-19. When there was an increase in workloads, employers did not hire more employees to respond to those needs, but burdened pre-existing employees with more work. Finally, although the remote work arrangement led to positive outcomes for some as discussed above, they also added more childcare responsibilities, which interfered with work.

Precarious Job Security

The negative impact of COVID-19 was severe for part-time workers and freelance contractors who had less job security compared to full-time workers. For example, Seoyeon (41 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) had been out of work for six months by wave 2. Although she was a freelance art teacher, her contract has been repeatedly postponed. Seoyeon explained, “I was supposed to start in June... but since there was a new peak [in COVID infections], [I was told] to start later... it is indefinitely [postponed] now... It has been pushed off continuously after months after another.” When I interviewed her a year later, she continued to struggle with job security due to COVID-19. At wave 3, Seoyeon explained,

All my classes are pretty much [gone]. Before [the pandemic] I taught 10 classes on average, but now I only have one or two. Since the government keeps banning all [in-person] classes [as a part of COVID-19 response], no school wants to hire a teacher [for extra-curricular activity]. I really did not have any income (laugh). I [earned] just enough to pay for coffee. The most I got to work [since COVID-19]

was two hours per week. But starting two weeks ago, all the classes got suspended [due to COVID-19]. I am thinking what's the point of even working at this point when I still have to prepare for classes [to teach].

Seoyeon's experience reflects an extremely precarious job situation. Because she was a contracted teacher, Seoyeon was not given the option to teach remotely. When the government did not allow for in-person classes, Seoyeon was left without a job.

Even when women were able to continue working during the pandemic, part-time and freelance working mothers were constantly concerned about their job security. For example, Sooah (35 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) was a freelance graphic designer who had been working remotely before COVID-19. Because she was already working remotely, Sooah did not lose her contract during the pandemic. However, although freelance work is precarious by its nature as it depends on contracts, the COVID-19 pandemic added an additional concern for Sooah's future career outlook. Sooah explained, "Luckily, I [my career] was not hit [by COVID-19] directly. But my job is also not stable (laugh). If my current contract ends, I need to wait or look for the next one regardless of COVID-19. To be honest, I am worried about how I will get a next project once my current one is over." Sooah's experience demonstrates that although the pandemic did not end her career immediately, she was unsure how to pursue her career in the unstable economy during the pandemic.

Although I present only two cases here, all part-time workers and freelance contractors in the study struggled with their career stability and security during the COVID-19. This is important to document because Korean women are more likely than men to be in a part-time position after childbirth due to the gendered labor market and unequal division of household labor (OECD 2019b). Given that these Korean mothers were in precarious labor conditions pre-COVID-19, they struggled to pursue their careers during the pandemic.

Increase in Workload

Out of 34 participants who participated in at least one wave during the pandemic (Wave 2 or 3), five (15%) discussed an increase in their workload specifically due to COVID-19. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained at waves 2 and 3 that her workload increased tremendously because of COVID-19. There were two reasons for this. First, the COVID-19 pandemic created a new type of task that had been added to her original

workload. Wonmi said, “The government delegated distributing the COVID-19 relief funds to my company. Imagine, every citizen in this whole country calling us [my company] to apply [to receive the funds]. I was working literally crazy amount (laugh).” Wonmi’s quote shows that because of the government’s new policy and her employer’s contract, Wonmi and her colleagues were given extra tasks in addition to their regular tasks. However, despite the immense increase in workloads, instead of hiring more employees to manage increased workloads, the current employees were burdened with more work.

Second, the health risk of COVID-19 posed additional burdens. Wonmi explained, “There was an employee who tested positive in a [different branch]. They [the other branch] reduced their work hours [for their employees]. Since their [work] was delegated to us, we had to work extra shifts from early in the morning to late in the evening. It has been really exhausting months.” As Wonmi’s quote reflects, when her colleagues could not work because of COVID-19, instead of extending deadlines for work, the employer pressured employees to take on others’ extra tasks. Wonmi said, “I got paid for extra shifts... [but] I would rather not get paid extra and not work extra hours. I want to live a life that I can enjoy my evening, but I was not able to since I used to go home around 9 pm.” During the pandemic, she not only worked extra hours, but did more work during her work hours. Because she could get off from work only late in the evening, she barely had any time with her family, especially her two children.

For another example, Hyejin (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) experienced an increase in workload due to COVID-19 pandemic. Being an elementary school teacher, Hyejin said before COVID-19, “I only had to prepare for class according to the teaching plan.” However, at wave 2, Hyejin said, “Now I have to make separate materials [for remote class] and instructions accordingly. Since all classes are remote, I also had to create separate instructions for the parents. Overall, my workload has increased significantly.” As the pandemic lasted longer than a year, Hyejin experienced more increase in her workload during wave 3. Hyejin said, compared to wave 2,

My workload has increased so much, so much more. For example, we [my school] rents out digital device to students for remote classes. We [my school] also have to purchase a license for Zoom. All of these are my responsibilities (laugh). These all increased my workload because of COVID-19.... I have to make plans [and budget] accordingly, have a meeting, and get approval from my boss, and all that... Before, I did not know the entire school is dependent on this small number of people [including me].

Hyejin further explained that she was in charge of all students from first to sixth grade from her school. Her case indicates that COVID-19 created unique tasks, such as facilitating a remote learning environment. Fortunately, Hyejin did not have to worry about job security like Seoyeon did above, because she was a full-time worker at a public school whose contract is guaranteed until retirement. However, because her employer did not hire or provide additional resources to distribute the increase in workloads among employees, Hyejin and others like her were burdened with more work than ever.

Furthermore, the repetitive changes in government policies during the pandemic functioned as another hurdle for her work. Hyejin explained,

We have meetings and meetings every day. Even after we decide something from a meeting, if the Ministry of Education implements a different policy, we have to change accordingly.... I had to change my syllabus at least a dozen times. I make a change once, but then I have to revise it all over again [if the Ministry of Education's policy changes]. It is definitely stressful.

Hyejin's experience reflects that the COVID-19 pandemic created additional workloads and challenges. This resonates with Wonmi's experience above in that she experienced a significant increase in her workload due to COVID-19.

Overall, women experienced increases in their workloads during the pandemic. While it is understandable to experience changes in work arrangements because of unexpected economic changes during the COVID-19 pandemic, Wonmi, Hyejin and many others' experiences showed that employees expected to carry the burden of these changes. When the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in childcare demands (Korea Women Workers Association 2020), the sudden increase in workloads became even more concerning for working mothers, who are often faced with more care responsibilities than working fathers. This finding suggests that in addition to policy intervention in childcare support, there is an urgent need for policy intervention on labor conditions during the pandemic for working mothers' career pursuits.

Remote Work & Added Burden on Childcare Responsibility

While I presented the positive aspects of remote working arrangements above, women also struggled with having to perform childcare and work simultaneously while working remotely at home. For example, Mirae (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained that the remote work arrangement added an additional barrier to her career pursuit. Although Mirae

received childcare help from her mother-in-law, because of her mother-in-law's expectation for Mirae to devote herself fully to childcare while she was at home, Mirae could not work during the day (See more on Chapter 6 about Mirae and her mother-in-law's childcare arrangement). Mirae said, "I was working from home remotely due to COVID-19. [However,] during the day, I was expected to perform household labor [including childcare], I only got to work at night, after my children went to bed, and after midnight. It was good to work from home, but [it] sure was exhausting." Because of her mother-in-law's gendered expectation that a mother should commit to housework, she was not able to focus on her career when she wanted to.

Woori (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) added to the sentiment on the difficulty of combining remote work with childcare. Woori said,

When you are with [work when there are] kids, kids talk to their mom because they love being with their mom. Then, I end up getting mad at them. You know, I can only work when my kids are quiet. At the same time, because I feel bad for getting mad at them, I show them TV. Now, it is normalized for me to work [at home], and the kids assume that they can watch TV if they do not bug mommy (laugh). Overall, yes, there is more time with my children, but since I am working at the same time, I do not know whether my home is to be with my kids or where I have to work. I feel like there is no boundary anymore [whether home should be for work or for family].

Woori's experience echoes Mirae's, and many others' who struggled to manage childcare and working from home. The expectation for women to perform domestic labor prohibited Mirae and others like her to focus on their work. While I present only two cases here, the majority of women who worked from home struggled with childcare responsibilities while working at home. Although the remote work arrangement was positive for some (as discussed above), it was also challenging for others to pursue their career, especially when they did not have support for childcare and work at home.

The general pattern among the participants showed that their husbands did not contribute to childcare when they worked from home. For example, Hana (36 years old, part-time working mothers at wave 1) said that even though she struggled to work due to her childcare responsibility while working remotely from home, it was not the case for her husband. Hana said, "Because of COVID-19, my husband worked from home until recently. But it is really weird. When he worked from home, he worked as if he was working in the office. I wished that he could also care for our child and contribute to childcare," but he did not. Hana explained, "When my husband works from home, he goes into the farthest room [from my child's room and living room], then locks the

door.... He only comes out [of his room] to use the bathroom.” As a result, Hana was responsible for the majority of household labor even though her husband also worked from home. Hana’s experience indicates that even when both parents work from home, gendered expectations, and an unequal division in childcare and other domestic labor leads to an unequal division in careers as well. Because my sample is limited to mothers, I recommend that future research to investigate how men experience the balance between domestic labor like childcare responsibilities and their paid work when they work from home.

5.3.3 Both Changes

As I presented above, the COVID-19 pandemic led to both positive and negative changes in participants’ careers. While the negative changes were more pronounced than positive changes, four women experienced both positive and negative changes in their careers as the pandemic continued for more than a year. For example, Garam (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) was an event coordinator who experienced both negative and positive changes in her career due to COVID-19. At wave 2, during the initial stage of pandemic, Garam shared that COVID-19 made her career worse because “all the in-person events were cancelled due to COVID-19.” Garam explained, “My boss was pressuring me to produce results [revenue]. To produce results [revenue], I need to organize events, but they keep getting cancelled [due to COVID-19]. It has been hard because I have been doing all my work, with no result.” Although her employer should have taken the pandemic into consideration in her work performance, the onus of losing customers due to COVID-19 was on Garam, an individual employee.

However, to my surprise, Garam discussed that the pandemic was a good influence on her career at wave 3. Garam explained,

I was [also] responsible for the online portion of events. Before COVID-19, I was pressured to decrease the online portion, and increase the in-person event more. In a way, my role was reduced. I would say, my role [in the company] was unstable. But since all in-person events got cancelled due to COVID-19, all the events were made online. All of a sudden, I became important! Who would have thought? To be honest, before [COVID-19], I was a little depressed about my work getting belittled. However, now it is all changed [positively]. I started to think that I should not worry too much about future that I cannot foresee. Rather, I should continue what I do, and eventually it will all be okay. That is why I decided to continue working.

In a way, although Garam experienced negative career changes due to her employer's inadequate response to COVID-19 at the initial stage of pandemic (wave 2), the unexpected change in the industry due to COVID-19 led to a positive career outlook, which also motivated her to pursue her career longer (wave 3). Garam added, "People say COVID-19 caused a lot of struggle. But since the pandemic caused so many changes [in our society] in a short period of time, there are negative outcomes, but also good aspects. There are always both sides." Garam shared that she had a higher sense of accomplishment from work.

To summarize, the impacts of COVID-19 on women's careers were not all negative. Because the COVID-19 pandemic brought so many changes, both positive and negative, it had a multifaceted influence on women's careers. Garam, and three other participants, experienced negative changes in their career initially, but later experienced positive changes as the pandemic lasted longer. This finding also fits with the larger pattern in this sample; no one discussed positive impacts of COVID-19 on their career at wave 2, but nine did at wave 3. There could be several potential explanations for this change. People may have better adapted to the pandemic over time. As the pandemic no longer was a temporary social change, but a longer lasting change which lasted for at least two years, its influence sometimes also changed. Although these questions are beyond the scope of my data, future research is important for better understanding the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on women's careers.

5.3.4 Summary

In this section, I documented the complex role of the COVID-19 pandemic on Korean women's careers. As the pandemic lasted longer, its impact on women's careers also increased in both positive and negative ways. At wave 2, 12 participants (38%) discussed negative impacts, while one discussed positive impacts. A year later by wave 3, there was an increase in both negative (n=17, 52%) and positive impacts (n=9, 27%). The negative impacts were more pronounced among part-time and contract workers, indicating the importance of job security. Women also discussed an increase in workloads and childcare responsibilities during remote work. At the same time, for several women, the remote work arrangement resulted in a positive career outlook, which enabled more time with their children and flexible career opportunities. There were also other positive career changes due to COVID-19. Women discussed that the pandemic was better for their career because it challenged the toxic work culture of *hoesik*, and created new career

opportunities. Finally, I highlighted the case of participants who experienced both negative and positive career impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By doing so, I showed that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers is not only complicated but also evolving.

5.4 Discussion

This chapter extends past work by analyzing working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits with three thematic patterns. First, I analyzed how childcare ideologies influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations. Childcare ideologies that did not assume mothers' primary responsibility for childcare increased the participants' career aspirations and pursuits despite the context of COVID-19. In line with past research on motherhood, childcare ideologies that assumed motherhood to be equated with childcare responsibilities tempered mothers' career aspirations and pursuits. Thus, to return to the research question, the findings from this section show that childcare ideologies which do not equate motherhood with childcare motivated mothers to pursue their career aspirations.

Second, I analyzed women's narratives in positive and toxic working environments. The reduced work hours, flexible work schedule, and supportive colleagues fostered a positive working environment for women to aspire for and pursue career success. On the other hand, women discussed the following as resulting in a toxic working environment: a long working hour culture, the dualism culture, penalty in the use of leave policies, and sexism. Finally, by documenting changes in women's work cultures and policies, I highlighted the possibility of improvements in existing working environments. In sum, to return to the research question, the Korean women working in an environment with supportive (and non-discriminatory) colleagues and accessibility to existing policies may continue to aspire to and pursue their careers more than women whose workplaces are toxic.

Finally, I documented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers, aspirations, and pursuits. As expected from the literature (see Chapter 2 for more), more women experienced negative changes in their careers. The negative impacts included precarious job security for part-time and contract workers, increase in workloads, and remote work arrangements which made it difficult to manage work and childcare simultaneously. However, the role of the pandemic was not static. It evolved in both positive and negative ways as it lasted for more than a year. By wave 3, there was an increase in the pandemic's negative impacts on women's careers,

but also positive ones. The positive impacts included remote work which allowed for more time for childcare and career development, challenging the toxic culture of *hoesik*, and new career opportunities incurred from the changing economy due to COVID-19. The findings demonstrate that shifting to remote work from home may lead to different career outcomes depending on childcare resources and workloads.

In addition, these empirical findings show the shifting and evolving dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers. Thus, to answer the research question, while the COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts on women's careers overall, full-time working mothers who had job security, similar workloads as pre-pandemic, and care resources to focus on their careers while working remotely were able to continue with their career aspirations and pursuits. The final section also showed that gender and economic inequality were exacerbated due to COVID-19. That is, women who were already disadvantaged in the labor market without job security and care resources were disadvantaged even more.

Contributions

This chapter provides several contributions. First, this study responds to calls for longitudinal research on working mothers' career aspirations to better capture change over time, and to enhance our understanding of women's experiences with work and family after childbirth (see Kim et al. 2016). With three waves of longitudinal in-depth interview, I documented how and why working mothers' career aspirations remained consistent or changed over time. Furthermore, because the first wave of interviews was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, the study offers novel insights on how the pandemic influenced women's career aspirations by comparing the interviews from before and during the pandemic.

Second, this chapter demonstrates that it is not motherhood per se that hampers working mothers' career aspirations, but rather the childcare responsibilities that are associated with motherhood. While childcare indeed is an important factor in work-family life, the beliefs and norms about who should be responsible for childcare are even more critical in supporting or discouraging working mothers' career pursuits. Thus, it is unfair, and incorrect, to blame childcare for hurting women's careers; rather, we should problematize unequal and gendered beliefs and norms on childcare responsibility. Accordingly, I suggest that disengaging motherhood from the expectation of primary caregiving would be valuable for working mothers' aspirations and

ultimately their career trajectories. This argument adds to the larger discussion about how gender equality or gender egalitarian ideologies may lead to positive outcomes in women's careers, family relationships, and everyday lives.

Finally, this chapter offers insights on policy changes. In line with Kim and Parish (2020), the findings from the second section showed that the availability of family-supportive policies alone did not benefit working mothers, but accessibility was a key factor in doing so. Women shared being penalized or discouraged from using leave policies and reduced work hours. In addition, previous experience in being discriminated against and penalized led to more hesitancy or challenge in using policies in the future. The struggle to use policies also tempered women's career aspirations and pursuits. Thus, as much as implementing more policies are important, it is also critical to increase accessibility in already-existing policies, and improve working experience after using the policies.

Family-supportive policies should target all working parents. The findings from the second section show that policies that target working mothers only out-grouped mothers from the rest of employees. Drawing from Moen (2011), policies that aim for working mothers *accommodate* them to the working culture dominated by the non-mother employees. However, by doing so, these policies acknowledge that working mothers are not regular employees. Working mothers do not want to be singled out nor seek special accommodations for being a mother. Rather, they want to work in an environment where they can focus on their careers without sacrificing their family life. Thus, as Moen (2011) suggests for structural changes in work, policies should aim at improving the general working environment. Ultimately, a healthy working environment that enables all employees to thrive in both work and family life is also the best kind of work environment for working mothers.

CHAPTER 6. KOREAN MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH GRANDMOTHERS' CHILDCARE HELP

As discussed in Chapter 2, grandmothers' childcare help benefits working mothers in many ways. Women in this study discussed the most notable benefit of grandmothers' help as quality childcare; because mothers do not have to be concerned with the safety of their children when their children are taken care of by grandmothers, mothers can better focus on their careers. However, there are some disadvantages of grandmothers' childcare. For example, women who received grandmothers' care help expressed feelings of guilt for receiving help and were concerned about care-providing grandmothers' deteriorating health from taxing care labor. At the same time, the findings show that mothers report different kinds of benefits and disadvantages of receiving help from their own mothers (maternal grandmothers) versus their mothers-in-law (paternal grandmothers).¹⁷ For example, for mothers who received care help from maternal grandmothers, the general benefits include the ease of communications, help with other housework, better focus on their own work, emotional help, similar care style, willingness to help, financial help, and help with recovering from additional childbirth. On the other hand, mothers who received care help from paternal grandmothers discussed difficulties in communication, including resolving conflicts. As a result, the mothers who did not regularly receive care help from maternal grandmothers also sought help from their own mothers from time to time.

Overall, while there were more advantages than disadvantages of grandmothers' care help for working mothers in general, mothers preferred to receive care help from their own mothers versus their mothers-in-law. Mothers tended to turn to their mothers-in-law when their mothers were not available to help with care. In the rest of this chapter, I investigate the following questions: 1) What is the extent of grandmothers' care help for working mothers in Korea? 2) How is care work different for maternal versus paternal grandmothers? and 3) How did the COVID-19 pandemic influence grandmothers' involvement with childcare in Korea? In doing so, I devote the first section of this chapter to documenting descriptive findings on Korean women's narratives on the advantages and disadvantages of receiving care help from grandmothers in general. In the second section, I analyze how women's experiences vary when receiving care help from maternal

¹⁷ For the ease of language, I interchangeably use the participants' own mothers as child's maternal grandmothers and mothers-in-law as child's paternal grandmothers in this dissertation.

versus paternal grandmothers. In the final section, I document women's experience of receiving care help from grandmothers during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating that paternal grandmothers' care help was more precarious than maternal grandmothers.'

6.1 Grandmothers' Childcare Help

This section explores the following question: What is the extent of grandmothers' care help for working mothers in Korea? That is, how much do Korean mothers benefit from grandmothers' help with childcare? Resonating with Chapter 4, mothers discussed the advantages of grandmothers' childcare help in depth, although there were also disadvantages. In this section, I document empirical findings on women's narratives about the advantages and disadvantages of grandmothers' care help. In doing so, because the majority of participants in my sample provided compensation to care-providing grandmothers for their labor, I also analyze how Korean mothers conceptualize grandmothers' care help as labor, and reward care-helping grandmothers with monetary and other types of compensation.¹⁸

6.1.1 Advantages of Grandmother Care

I found five themes in mothers' narratives about the advantages of grandmother care. First, reflecting on the findings and discussion of ideal childcare from Chapter 4, mothers reported trusting that grandmothers would care for their grandchildren with love, ensuring children's safety and health. Second, mothers appreciated that grandmothers were flexible with their time to arrange care. Mothers were able to ask for help last minute or during non-regular hours such as on weekends and evenings, which they would not be able to easily do with care facilities or babysitters. Third, mothers reported satisfaction about keeping childcare within the family. In addition to the aspect of trust in loving care, family members were also more desirable than non-familial care providers because of their stable relationship. While non-familial care providers can quit and be replaced at any time, family members are more stable sources of care. Fourth, mothers appreciated that in addition to helping with childcare, grandmothers also frequently helped with other responsibilities at home like cleaning and cooking. Finally, because of all these benefits, mothers

¹⁸ In this section, I analyze women's experience of receiving care help from grandmothers in general, before analyzing the differences between maternal versus paternal grandmothers in the next section.

felt they were able to continue working in the paid labor force, and reported being better able to focus on their careers thanks to the grandmothers' care help.

In general, mothers discussed that despite some disadvantages of receiving grandmothers' care help (which I discuss in the next section), overall, it was advantageous to receive care help from grandmothers. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said grandmother care help is "absolutely the best. There are only advantages. It is arrogant and ungrateful for me to even talk about disadvantages (laugh). I feel like it's a sin that I am not allowed to even think about that [disadvantages] (laugh)." With grandmothers, mothers did not have to worry for their child's safety and health because they know that grandmothers will provide the best quality of care that they could. Wonmi's quote reflects that while there may be some disadvantages of receiving care help from grandmothers, because the overall advantage was so much greater, she felt it was wrong to even discuss disadvantages. Below, I discuss in detail mothers' discussions of the benefits of receiving grandmothers' childcare help.

Care with Love: Trust in Child's Safety and Health

As discussed in Chapter 4, mothers emphasized the value of trust in that the care provider will look after their children with love, attending to their children's safety and health. In this regard, women reported that grandmothers were the best care options when they and their husbands could not provide care themselves. Although I present only three cases here, every woman who received care help in my sample discussed caring with love as the advantage of receiving care help from a grandmother. For example, Mirae (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) discussed that "they [my child and my mother-in-law] are blood-related! (laugh) I trust [my mother-in-law]. Even if she disciplined [my child], she would discipline [him] with love. I am very satisfied with my child's emotional aspect." Mirae's quote shows that because of family relations, or blood-relations, she trusted that her child's grandmother would always care for her son with love. Mirae was confident about her child's emotional well-being thanks to his grandmother's unconditional love. For another example, Minsun (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that "I can trust [care-providing grandmother] 100%. She loves [my son] more than I love him. She only does the best for him." Overall, mothers felt extremely confident that grandmothers would only provide the best care possible because of their love for their grandchild.

In addition, mothers felt comfortable about communicating any dissatisfaction about care with care-providing grandmothers without fearing that the grandmother may hurt their child out of retaliation. For example, Hyojung (32 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said at wave 2,

I do not feel concerned about asking my parents for childcare. I can communicate with them well. Even if I complain about something... I can tell them whatever. No matter what I complain about, they [my parents] are not going to hurt my child. And it's not like it [my complaint] would ruin my relationship with my mom and dad. That's why I am sticking to them [for childcare help] like a parasite (laugh).

Hyojung's quote reflects that she would not be able to communicate freely with care providers who are not family members—like babysitters—because of fear that they may hurt her child in the case of conflict. This is different from earlier findings that Korean working mothers struggle to communicate their needs to care-providing grandmothers since they are in the position of receiving help (Kim et al. 2015). I devote more analysis to Korean women's nuanced experiences of communicating care-related demands with care-providing grandmothers in a later section.

Flexible Care Arrangement

Women also spoke about the advantages of making flexible care arrangements with their child's grandmothers. In line with the culture of long working hours in Korea, participants reported that it was common for them and their husbands to need to work until late in the evening, often unexpectedly. On these occasions, participants felt comfortable asking care-providing grandmothers to stay longer with their child, although they may find more difficulties of doing so with a non-familial care provider as discussed in Chapter 4. For example, Yeram (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said,

The best part [about grandmother care] is that it is full-time [available at any time]. Even if I hire a babysitter, they have contracted hours. Even if babysitters do residential care, they are not with you 24 hours. But I can ask [my mother-in-law] whenever. There are times that the kindergarten calls me during the day when I am at work. I cannot get a day off for a minor thing like my kid having some fever.... When I am working, I can barely check my phone. Occasions like that, I can always call my mother-in-law and she would care for my child right away.

Yeram's quote suggests that grandmothers' availability for unexpected occasions helped her commit to her career.

Grandmothers' flexible care availability became more valued during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said at wave 3,

One of the biggest concerns about COVID-19 in terms of childcare is children not being able to attend a care facility all of a sudden. Since my parents-in-law are always ready to help, in case of such emergency... I have a safety tool [for care] in place. I purposely chose my child's daycare as the one in my parent-in-law's apartment complex for that reason. But even before COVID-19, you never know when kids would get sick or what would happen, so dual-earner couples need a backup like this.

Soyoung's reason for relying on grandmother's care help was similar to Yeram's. However, as expected with an increase in care demands during the COVID-19 pandemic, grandmothers' flexible care availability was especially useful for working mothers in Korea.

Keep Care within the Family

There were two aspects of keeping care within the family. First, mothers appreciated the stable care arrangement with grandmothers, because non-familial care providers are more precarious and temporary. For example, Mirae (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained, "The biggest advantage [of grandmother's care help] is that [my] baby can be raised by a stable primary-care provider. If we were to hire a babysitter, there may be several changes in [who we hire as a] babysitter, and it would confuse [my baby]." In other words, Mirae enjoyed the stability in her care arrangement that resulted from having a family member care for her child rather than hiring someone through a temporary contract. Overall, women appreciated that they did not have to worry about having to hire and change new babysitters because non-familial care providers are likely to quit and move around their employment.

Second, mothers preferred spending their money on their family members instead of strangers when grandmothers help with childcare. For example, Sujin (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) has been compensating her mother for care help. In this regard, Sujin explained, "1.6 million Won (equivalent to USD) 1,327 [a month] is not a lot of money, but it is different giving it to a family member than to a stranger." Sujin's comments reflect that if she were to spend money on childcare, she would rather hire a family member to support financially versus a stranger. I return to this point below to discuss the aspects of compensation in more depth.

Help with Housework

Women reported appreciating that care-providing grandmothers generally helped with other aspects of housework when they helped with childcare. For example, Minsun (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that her mother not only helped with childcare, but also with cooking, laundry, and cleaning. She gave an example that “When I get home [from work], my mom cooks for us... And usually, [my mom] feeds my child even before we get home [from work]. While we [my husband and I] eat, my mom plays with my child.” Thanks to her mother’s help with housework, Minsun said, “I am managing work and childcare with ease (laugh).” For another example, Soomin (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1), who received care help from her mother-in-law, discussed that her mother-in-law also helps with other housework. Soomin said, “I do not have to do any cleaning or any housework at home. I am grateful to my mother-in-law for that.... she cleans and cooks while caring for my child.... I [used to] get stressed out about that [housework before I started receiving care help from her.” Overall, Minsun, Soomin, and many others in the study benefitted from help with housework in addition to childcare when grandmothers visited their houses during the day. This finding confirms previous findings that Korean grandparents help out with housework while helping with childcare to ease the burdens on their working adult children (Lee and Bauer 2013).

Support for Career Pursuit

Because of the advantages discussed above, mothers explained that grandmothers’ care help generally motivated them to continue pursuing their career. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that,

Childcare is really important to me, but at the same time, I cannot not pursue my career. If I had to choose between work and childcare, I would choose childcare. But since my parents-in-law are there to help me [with childcare], I do not have to give up my career. Without them, I would be struggling a lot because I will not be able to work even though I would like to.

Like Wonmi said, because grandmothers’ care help eased mothers’ concerns about childcare, it helped mothers to continue pursuing their careers. This was the case more for mothers who had a strong motherhood norm—those who believed that mothers should be primarily responsible for

childcare. As discussed in Chapter 5, women were able to pursue their career aspirations when they had fewer concerns about childcare thanks to grandmothers' reliable care help.

Summary

I documented five themes in mothers' narratives about the benefits of receiving care help from grandmothers, from quality childcare to career pursuits. The findings show that grandmothers are more preferred than other private childcare options, like babysitters, not only because of the quality of care but also because of their flexible schedule, which allowed mothers to focus on their careers without distractions. These findings are important because they provide insights into what current care resources are lacking. For example, women's narratives on why they rely on grandmothers suggest that existing care facilities and private care providers need to improve their quality of care and extend their care operation hours. Accordingly, the government should also invest in the improvement of care facilities as well as the expansion of care hours.

I would also like to point out that these advantages often overlap with each other. For example, because grandmothers provided quality childcare, mothers could better focus on their work without constantly being distracted by what would happen to their child during the day, allowing mothers to devote themselves more to their career pursuits. In sum, it is undeniable that care-providing grandmothers benefit mothers in many ways that care facilities—like daycares and kindergartens—and private care providers—like babysitters—are lacking. At the same time, women also reported disadvantages in receiving care help from grandmothers, which I discuss below.

6.1.2 Disadvantages of Grandmother Care

Despite the advantages discussed above, women also spoke about the disadvantages of receiving care help from grandmothers. I analyzed four thematic patterns in these narratives. First, mothers felt uncomfortable about being dependent on their aging parents because they did not feel independent enough as adults. Second, similar to the feelings of dependence, women struggled with the lack of boundaries with care-providing grandmothers. Because care-providing grandmothers interacted with women and their children almost daily, grandmothers were more closely involved in women's and their families' lives more than the mothers would have liked otherwise. Third, mothers expressed feelings of guilt; they felt bad about putting their aging

parents through taxing childcare labor. Finally, mothers reported conflicts about grandmothers' different childrearing styles. Below, I discuss these narratives in-depth.

Feeling of Dependence

Women struggled with feeling dependent on their aging parents even though they are adults themselves. For example, although Minyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) and her husband and child lived with her parents for care help at wave 1, she wished that her family could become "independent" from her parents. Minyoung said,

We [my husband and I] and our child, three of us, have to be independent as a [family]. But since they [my parents] are helping so much, we continue to rely on them. We feel like we cannot be independent on our own.... Eventually when our child grows up and does not need care anymore, my husband and I want to see our parents a little less. My husband said, let us please spend time by ourselves.... Our parents will not be alive forever. They will be ill one day. Then, we have to do things on our own, but it will be more difficult for us to do anything on our own then. We feel like we have to learn how to be independent now.

Minyoung's quote indicates that those who continue to receive care help from their parents, or in-laws, struggle with not achieving independence on their own. Those who lived closely or together with grandparents due to childcare were especially likely to express this sentiment. For another example, Woori (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1), who received care help from both maternal and paternal grandmothers, added to this sentiment. Woori said,

We do not have time for us four. You know, mother, father, and our two children are the family. When there is an issue, we have to decide on solutions on our own, but since both sides of the family are involved, we cannot decide based on our own opinion. We think about what the grandmothers would say about this, about even a little thing like where to go this weekend. When my mother goes back to her home, and when my mother-in-law does not come either, we are just on our own. We think about, ah, we should be living like this.

Woori's quote reflects that she and her nuclear family feel that they do not have their own independence as a family because of their close and heavy reliance on their child's grandmothers on both sides (maternal and paternal). The more women relied on grandmothers for care help, the stronger the feeling of dependence. These findings show that the lack of reliable childcare options for Korean women also negatively affects their own identities as adults and intergenerational family dynamics.

Lack of Boundaries

Similar to the feeling of dependence, women reported that their boundaries (and privacy) as an adult with their own family were sometimes not respected because grandmothers were closely involved in their lives due to childcare. For example, Hyojung (32 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said at wave 3 that she did not have a clear boundary with her parents because of their everyday interactions due to childcare. Hyojung said,

I am all grown up but they [my parents] keep intervening [scolding] (laugh). I guess they have to because I am their daughter, but there are things that they intervene [scold about] constantly. For example, since they prepare my meals, sometimes they do not like how I eat my food. [Whether I like it or not], they get to see my life up close. For example, since I have to go to work by 9 am... I try to leave early, but my parents want me to leave even earlier than that, so [they] scold me again, and I do not want to listen to that.

Although Hyojung is a grownup, with an esteemed career, in her mid-30s with her own family, she felt like she was being treated like a child by her parents. Hyojung thought that this was the case because her parents got to see her daily life while they cared for her two children.

Similarly, Sujin (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that although there are ample advantages of receiving care help from both her mother and mother-in-law, receiving care help from family members' can be difficult. Sujin said, "When my friends and I talk, we say, our lives can be easier if we hire a stranger [for babysitters instead of family members] You know we are all grown up, but our moms come and tell us what to do." Sunjin discussed that grandmothers' care help may be great for children. However, as her quote reflects, from her own perspective as a daughter of a care-providing grandmother, she would like more freedom to be an adult. Sujin's case illustrates that although grandmother childcare help benefits their grandchildren, it does not always benefit their adult children (parents).

For another example, Yewon (39 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) spoke about the lack of boundaries as a disadvantage. Yewon said,

The disadvantage is... because we are living so close by [to my mother-in-law due to childcare], my child would go tell her [paternal grandmother] about everything. For example, he [my son] would go tell her about what we ate for late night snack the night before. Then, [my mother-in-law] would say smiling, but still, is it not bad to feed your child late at night? You know, things like that.... Like he would tell her every time my husband and I argue. My mother-in-law gets to know about things that she does not need to. I tell my son not to go tell my mother-in-law [about

everything], but at the same time, I do not want to tell my son not to talk about certain things with his grandmother.

Like Hyojung and Sujin, even though Yewon wished to have a clearer boundary between her family and her mother-in-law, it was unattainable because they depended on her for childcare. However, unlike Hyojun's and Sujin's experiences, Yewon felt her boundary was violated even though the care-providing grandmother was not necessarily trying to overstep the boundary. For her, it was her child who shared his family life with his grandmother. As reflected from Yewon's experience, the lack of boundary in grandmothers' care help seems almost inevitable. That is, these women are unable to attain appropriate independence from their parents because of their reliance on them for childcare.

Feeling of Guilt

Women who received care help from grandmothers expressed feelings of guilt. They felt bad that their elderly mothers or mothers-in-law needed to be a part of taxing childcare labor. For example, Yunah (33 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) received care help from her mother. A year later at wave 2, she planned on starting a part-time career, but was considering how she could receive less care help from her mother. When I asked what made her hesitant, Yunah explained,

I feel bad from receiving [care] help [from my mom]. You know it is exhausting. It is not easy to care for a child. It is very energy consuming. Childcare is not being able to sleep when you want to, not being able to rest when you want to, not being able to eat what you want to. I cannot even drink my coffee whenever I want because I have to go by my child's schedule. So it is irresponsible to ask my parents to do such [difficult] work.

Yunha's quote highlights her guilty feelings that her elder mother was tied to physically demanding childcare, especially sacrificing her own free time to enjoy her retired life. Similarly, Narae (37 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) echoed these feelings of guilt for receiving care help from both maternal and paternal grandmothers. Narae explained, "I thought asking for [care] help was burdening my mom and my mother-in-law, because childcare is so difficult. At least it was really difficult for me. I was very sorry that I had to ask my mom and my mother-in-law to do such difficult tasks instead." Likewise, because mothers understand how

difficult and exhausting childcare labor was, they felt guilty asking grandmothers to partake in care work.

These findings provide more detailed narratives on earlier findings that Korean working mothers feel a sense of guilt when asking grandmothers to help with childcare (Goo 2017). From this study, it is not clear whether the care-providing grandmothers were reluctant about helping with childcare, because I only interviewed mothers. However, the data confirm that mothers continue to feel guilty towards care-providing grandmothers for involving them in exhausting care labor. They also extend Lee's (2013) study, which found that due to the emotional burden and stress associated with childcare, Korean grandmothers preferred to work for pay rather than caring for their grandchildren.

Difference in Childrearing Style

Women also discussed being dissatisfied because grandmothers tended to raise children with an “outdated” care philosophy and without discipline. First, women felt that differences in their childrearing styles were disadvantages of receiving care help from grandmothers. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said even though receiving grandmother care help was tied to many benefits, she was stressed out due to the differences in her and her mother-in-law's childcare style. Wonmi explained,

I guess it is impossible for my mother-in-law to play with [my children] all day long. She started showing them TV. It used to be just a bit, but later my kids were watching TV for long [time]. I guess grandma could not win over the kids [to turn off the TV].

Even though Wonmi tried to communicate with her mother-in-law about limiting her children's TV time, according to Wonmi, her mother-in-law said, “What else do I do [with kids]? It is not like kids can read books all day... Well, we [my husband and I] grew up watching a lot of TV. She raised us [my husband] like that so I guess that is what she is used to.” Although Wonmi was sympathetic to her mother-in-law who was unfamiliar with childcare techniques other than showing TV, Wonmi also wished that her mother-in-law would take a more contemporary childrearing method. Likewise, many mothers said they were not satisfied with the “old” or “outdated” childrearing methods that care-providing grandmothers tended to stick to.

Furthermore, the lack of discipline was women's biggest concern about grandmothers' childcare help. For example, Jihee (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained,

“Kids these days, and especially kids raised by grandma and grandpa, definitely do not listen [are not disciplined] My parents are definitely easy on our children. The daycare teacher also told me that kids raised by grandparents tend to be that way [less disciplined].” As Jihee’s quote shows, women felt that caregiving grandmothers lacked discipline. Indeed, earlier studies on grandparental childcare in Korea show that different nurturing styles and values between Korean parents and grandparents might create family conflict, potentially yielding lower subjective well-being and greater emotional burden for grandparents (Goodman and Silverstein 2006; Musil et al. 2011). This study finding builds on previous research by documenting that the difference in care methods is troublesome not only for grandmothers, but also mothers.

Summary

To summarize, I found four thematic patterns in women’s narratives on the disadvantages of receiving care help from grandmothers. They include inappropriate dependence on their aging parents (children’s grandparents), the lack of boundaries, feelings of guilt, and the differences in childrearing styles. These findings add nuance to the complicated nature of intergenerational care. For example, whereas grandmother care primarily benefitted children, women experienced disadvantages. However, women reported that these disadvantages did not outweigh the overall benefits of grandmothers’ care help as discussed above.

6.1.3 Compensating Grandmothers’ Care labor¹⁹

The majority of Korean mothers in my sample provided monetary compensation for care-providing grandmothers. I devote this section to providing more details on how Korean women compensated care-providing grandmothers for their care work. This information may provide important insights into how often unpaid care work could be paid, even within the family. Among the 32 women who received grandmother care help at wave 1, 23 (72%) provided monetary compensation to care-providing grandmothers. Among them, 17 (74%, 17/23) provided monetary compensation on a regular basis, using direct deposit. This is consistent with previous findings that adult children provided monetary compensation for childcare to care-providing grandmothers in Korea (Lee and Bauer 2013) and in China (Chen and Liu 2012, Chen, Liu & Mair 2011). While

¹⁹ In this section, I converted the currency from Korean Won (₩) to US Dollar (\$).

these earlier studies document the presence of financial compensation, to my knowledge to date there is no research that documents the narratives and decision-making processes in intergenerational compensation regarding childcare. Thus, in the section below, I show why and how Korean mothers come to compensate care-providing grandmothers for their contributions to childcare.

Negotiating the “Market Value”

Korean women compensated care-providing grandmothers for their care labor in order to avoid the grandmothers’ feeling like they were being taken for granted. Because grandmothers were happy and willing to help with childcare, the compensatory amount tended to be lower than “the market value” of hiring a private babysitter. The compensation amount varied for maternal and paternal grandmothers. The average amount of monetary compensation was about \$1,000 for participants’ own mothers, and \$650 for mothers-in-law. Regardless of how small the amount was, women and their husbands were willing to provide financial compensation to care-providing grandmothers when they could. For example, Narae (37 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) explained, “I asked my mom directly saying, Mom, I can only pay you \$500 [per month]. Would you be able to help with childcare?” Narae’s process of requesting childcare help was almost like hiring a babysitter and negotiating their salary, instead of asking for a favor for free.

In addition, just like employers would pay their employee by the hour, Narae adjusted the amount of compensation accordingly. Narae explained at wave 3 that she now paid her care-providing mother \$700 instead of \$500 because her mother had spent more hours on childcare since wave 2. Because her mother-in-law’s care help was less frequent, Narae compensated her mother-in-law on an irregular basis: \$100-200 from time to time, and \$10,000 when her parents-in-law moved.

Minsun (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) is another example of a participant who negotiated compensation based on the care hours. Minsun had been paying her mother \$1,500 per month consistently at the first two waves for her care labor. However, at wave 3, she discussed her plans for changing the amount of pay because of the changes in their care arrangement due to her maternity leave for her second pregnancy. Minsun said,

Because I started my maternity leave, I told her that I would give [my mom] \$1,500 until the end of May. From then, I told her [I would] give \$1,000 a month because I am losing income [due to maternity leave] Also, she will not need to come

[for childcare] during the day [because I am home]. She just comes in the evening to help with food. But since she still spends time [with us] and is tied [to us], I want to [continue] compensating her.... When my second [child] gets older and when I return to work, I will ask her to look after two [children]. Then, I will pay her about \$2,000 a month. We have not confirmed it yet, but that is my plan. I have been telling her that since before I got pregnant.

Overall, Minsun, like Narae and many others in the study, negotiated the amount of monetary compensation with the care-providing grandmother, just like they would if they hired babysitters.

Symbolic Compensation

When the care-providing grandmothers did not necessarily see their care help as sources of income, some of the monetary compensation was more symbolic. That is, women received the money back if the grandmothers were financially comfortable. For example, Jihee (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) gave her mother \$1,200 every month for childcare help. When I asked her how she decided on the price, Jihee explained, “I asked around. It seems like other people give somewhere between \$1,000 and \$1,200 [to the care-providing grandmothers].” However, although Jihee’s mother received the money for her care labor, she gave all the money back to Jihee. Jihee explained, “I told her [my mother] I will give you this much every month [for childcare]. But my parents do not use that at all. They made a bank account for us and asked to deposit money to that account. In a way, she has been saving all of that money to give back to us.”

That is, although Jihee and her mother were not against the idea of financial compensation, it was rather symbolic. Jihee paid her mother to show appreciation for care help. Jihee’s mother received the money for her labor. However, because her mother did not spend the money but returned all the money back to Jihee, her mother did not receive any money in the end. At waves 2 and 3, Jihee said her transaction with her mother had continued the same way; Jihee paid her mother, but her mother deposited it all right back to Jihee’s account. Jihee explained at wave 3, “We [my husband and I] are giving her money for taking care of our children and helping with her finances because she is retired. But since my dad did not retire yet, I guess they do not need that money.” Because Jihee’s mother was financially stable, rather than accepting the money, she returned it to Jihee. At the same time, Jihee continued paying her every month to show her appreciation for care work, even though there was no financial loss or gain on either side.

Similarly, some paternal grandmothers who were financially stable gave back the money as well. Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said at wave 1:

We [my husband and I] reward her [my mother-in-law] financially of course, but not much. [We give her] \$1,200 a month... We have been paying her every month since [our son was] 15, 16 months old until now. [My mother-in-law] said she has been giving all this back this month.

Like Jihee's mother, Soyoung explained that her care providing mother-in-law gave all the money back when Soyoung started her maternity leave, because she would lose some income during the leave period. At wave 2, she did not receive any care help because she was on leave and caring for her children herself. At wave 3, she received care help from her mother-in-law again after returning to her work, but she stopped paying her. Soyoung explained,

[My mother-in-law] told us not to give her money anymore. She said she never planned on receiving money from the beginning. She only received money in case we would feel bad for asking for care work for free. She explicitly told us to stop, so we do not give her any money anymore. Instead, we try to take her out to eat, buy her gifts, fruit, or whatever as much as we can, but we do not give her anything for childcare on a regular basis anymore.

In a way, Soyoung's mother-in-law understood that Soyoung and her husband would feel guilty about asking for childcare help. To alleviate their feelings of guilt, her mother-in-law received the money, but only symbolically. Although, Soyoung stopped paying her mother-in-law after that, her husband and Soyoung continued to seek other ways to show appreciation for helping with taxing care labor.

Other Forms of Compensation

Women also rewarded care-providing grandmothers in other ways, such as giving gifts, paying for their groceries, and helping with bills. For example, Woori (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) compensated her care-providing grandmothers with money and other gifts across all three waves. Woori explained,

We direct deposit \$1,500 every month. A babysitter is usually a bit higher than this, but when moms [grandmothers] help with care, they get a little less [pay than babysitters]. But it is actually more costly [to receive help from a grandmother than a babysitter]. When my mom is tired, we pay for her massage.... When she seems bored on weekends, we arrange a trip together. And since we live together, we pay for her food. Of course, we also give her our credit card to use. When you give a credit card to a babysitter, they do not buy their clothes with it, right? But my mom

buys her cosmetics and whatever. So, money-wise, it is more expensive than hiring a sitter... although officially, it is less than what we would pay a babysitter.

Worri's quote reflects that when care-providing grandmothers closely interact with the family, there are other costs that would not be incurred when hiring babysitters. This was the case because it is easier for a financial boundary to be blurred with family members than in a business relationship. In a way, care-providing grandmothers are both family members and employed babysitters. At wave 3, Woori said,

We spent a big chunk of money to buy a house. Since we lacked cash to give to my mom (laugh), I told her, mom, we are sorry, we budgeted wrong this month. I will pay your check next month when I get my [next] paycheck. Of course, I thought she would say okay because she is my mom, and I know she does not care for our children for money... but I was too complacent about it.... I thought I can give her [the money] whenever. But a month later, she asked when she would get paid for the previous month (laugh)... I told her that I will deposit the money right away. Two, three months later, my mom brings it up again saying, her paycheck once got delayed [previously]. I got to think no matter how close we are, and even though she is my mom, I need to give her money on the regular schedule, sharp (laugh).

Woori's quote indicates that the pay schedule for her care-providing grandmother was almost like a business contract. At the same time, Woori explained that although her mother perceived the monetary compensation almost like a paycheck on a business contract, the contract was unclear because they are family members. She said at wave 3:

My mom went on a vacation [a break from childcare] for a month. If she was gone from the first to 31st of August, I can skip this month's payment. But she went from July 20th to August something. Since she is my mom, since she is my parent, I could not calculate by days [hours] in case she would be disappointed. She may say it is fine not to pay her [for days she was on a vacation], but we presumed that she may get offended.

In a way, Woori struggled about whether to be strict about the "business" days or not because her mother and she were family members rather than in a business relationship.

Because Woori was satisfied with the quality of childcare she received from her children's grandmothers, she continued to receive care help from her mother and mother-in-law despite the financial burden. Woori explained:

At least I am not concerned [about] my children, I do not feel uneasy about childcare at all. But as time passes, I keep thinking it is too costly. We need to save money... There are so much incurring costs involved since we are not just giving her \$1,500... There is so much cost that would not be necessary if we hired a babysitter. We cannot tell my mom [about that] because then that is too petty.

As discussed above, because of the additional costs involved with compensating grandmothers, Woori felt that she and her husband ended up spending more money than they would if they hired a babysitter. In a way, having high quality childcare that she and her husband could trust was very expensive.

Furthermore, women discussed the expectation to provide elder care for the care-providing grandmother in the future in return for the childcare help. The expectation and willingness to take care of the care-providing grandmothers in the future was especially prevalent among mothers who could not provide monetary compensation due to financial hardship. For example, Minjin (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) and her husband want to care for her parents who sometimes help with childcare, when her parents age. Minjin explained at wave 1, “since [my mom] helped with childcare so much... I promised her [that I will take care of my parents] and my husband agreed as well.” Even though Minjin could not compensate her care-providing grandmother monetarily because of their financial limitations, Minjin and her husband wanted to return the favor by taking care of her parents later in life. Likewise, other women in the sample discussed their plans to take care of their aging parents in the future, although the types of care varied from physical care to financial support for their retirement.

Compensation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The economic crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges for the women and their husbands to continue compensating the care-providing grandmothers for their labor. For example, among the women who continued to receive care help from grandmothers, seven decreased the amount of compensation because of financial hardships and changes in care arrangements during the pandemic. For example, Bora (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) decreased the amount of compensation from \$1,000 at wave 1 to \$400-\$500 at wave 2. Bora explained that this change was due to changes in her career during the pandemic. As a freelance translator, she lost much of her income during the pandemic because many of her career opportunities to translate in-person were cancelled due to social distancing restrictions. Although she translates virtually at times, she said she lost the main source of her income, which comes from in-person opportunities. Due to this change in her career, she started caring for her child more often, and now her “mom only comes [for childcare] 2-3 hours as day” at wave 2, as opposed to

“full-time” at wave 1. In other words, because of her financial struggle and the decrease in her mother’s care hours, Bora decreased the compensatory amount accordingly.

At wave 3, Bora’s household had even more financial challenges because her husband had been laid off from work. Bora’s mother also had health issues which stopped her from providing childcare help. As a result, Bora stopped giving her mom any financial compensation. Likewise, Bora and six other women who experienced financial difficulties due to COVID-19 reduced or stopped paying for grandmothers’ care labor. Women who relied less on grandmothers for childcare during COVID-19 also compensated less or stopped their compensation accordingly.

Summary

The findings from this section show that Korean mothers provided financial and other forms of compensation in appreciation to care-providing grandmothers. This information builds on previous studies that document the presence of monetary compensation to care-providing grandparents in Korea (Lee and Bauer 2010) and China (Chen and Liu 2012; Chen et al. 2011). My findings add to this literature by showing why and how mothers compensate care-providing grandmothers. Women compensated for the care labor that grandmothers provided; just like employers and employees would negotiate a salary based on the market value of their labor, Korean women and grandmothers negotiated how much to compensate based on how much care grandmothers helped with. I argue that this is a notable finding because women’s care work is typically considered as voluntary participation, which does not need to be reciprocated (Glenn 2010). This finding from Korea demonstrates how often unpaid and undervalued caregiving work *can* be paid and valued. This may be especially relevant in societies with aging populations like Korea because it suggests how society can embrace aging populations not only as those to be taken care of, but also as care workers, while valuing their often-unpaid care labor.

However, because the family relationship was not like a business relationship, the financial boundary was often unclear. Grandmothers who were financially stable sometimes received the money only symbolically. Sometimes women themselves experienced financial difficulties. This finding is different from previous literature, which shows that the amount of compensation for care-providing grandmothers is far less than what they would pay for public or private childcare facilities (Lee and Bauer 2010). The findings from this section show that although the financial compensatory amount may be less than the “market value,” the incurred costs such as gifts,

restaurants, paying bills, and the expectations to care for aging parents in the future were certainly not less than what they would be paying to their babysitters. Finally, although some women decreased the amount of financial compensation due to financial hardship and less reliance of grandmothers' care help during the COVID-19 pandemic, those who could afford to compensate the care-providing grandmothers continued to do so.

6.2 Maternal vs. Paternal Grandmothers

This section explores the following question: How are mothers' experiences of receiving care help different when they rely on maternal versus paternal grandmothers? Women reported different kinds of dynamics when receiving care help from maternal versus paternal grandmothers. Table 1 below summarizes my codes on participants' narratives about advantages and disadvantages of receiving care help from maternal and paternal grandmothers. Although the qualitative codes are not statistically representative of the sample, they show a general analytic pattern among participants. On average, women who received care help from maternal grandmothers spoke more about advantages than disadvantages, although the advantages decreased over time while the disadvantages increased across waves. On the other hand, women who received care help from paternal grandmothers spoke more about disadvantages than advantages.

Table 3. Codes Comparison between Women Receiving Care Help from Maternal Grandmothers versus Paternal Grandmothers

	Maternal Grandmothers				Paternal Grandmothers			
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Average	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Average
Advantages	71%	60%	56%	62%	37%	22%	37%	32%
Disadvantages	29%	41%	44%	38%	63%	78%	64%	68%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: The number of women who discussed advantages and disadvantages changed at each wave because there were changes in childcare arrangements across time. In addition, I coded women's narratives of advantages and disadvantages of receiving care help from either grandmother based on their past experiences and general sentiment, even when women did not regularly receive care help at the time.

Simply put, mothers had better relationships and more positive experiences in childcare arrangements and career pursuits when they received care help from their mothers versus from

their mothers-in-law. For example, Bora (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) who received care help from her own mother spoke about her preference. When I asked why she asked her own mother to help with care, but did not ask her mother-in-law, Bora explained, “That is because [my mom] is my own blood, my family! Even if [mother-in-law] is my husband’s mom, she is still a stranger. Of course, it is uncomfortable” to closely interact with her. For this reason, mothers in general asked their own mothers for care help first and then asked their mothers-in-law if their mothers could not help.

On the other hand, women who received care help from paternal grandmothers (mothers-in-law), expressed difficulties in communication and the general care arrangement. The changes in the number of women who received care help from paternal grandmothers across three waves of data collection may be an indication of such dynamics. As discussed in Chapter 3, there was the greatest change in the group of women who received care help from their mothers-in-law, compared to those who got help from their own mothers. Although women who received care help from paternal grandmothers reported benefits tied to these care arrangements, they discussed disadvantages in paternal grandmothers’ care help more in depth. This finding aligns with previous research showing that Korean husbands and wives feel more comfortable asking favors from maternal grandparents (wife’s parents) than from paternal ones (Lee 2011). This pattern also resonates with the general pattern in grandparental caregiving in Korea: The Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare documents a growing proportion of Korean parents relying on maternal grandparents for childcare help, compared to paternal grandparents²⁰ (Lee et al. 2019). Overall, women who received care help from paternal grandmothers expressed more disadvantages than those who received maternal grandmothers’ help.

In this section, I build on the previous literature by demonstrating how Korean women’s experiences differed when they relied on maternal versus paternal grandmothers for childcare help by comparing women’ narratives about care arrangements with maternal and paternal grandmothers. Below, I analyze seven thematic patterns in women’s comparison of maternal and paternal grandmothers: different motivations to help, different communication styles, conflicts, husbands’ role (or lack thereof) in mediating relationships with paternal grandmothers, support (or lack thereof) in women’s career pursuits, and not being able to “fire” care-giving grandmothers.

²⁰ Data from 2018 show that 22% of Korean parents received childcare help from maternal grandparents—an increase from 16% in 2012—whereas 16% received help from paternal grandparents in 2018 (15% in 2012) (Lee et al. 2019).

In doing so, I challenge the literature showing that free or inexpensive childcare from kin and grandmothers undoubtedly benefits women, by showing instead how gender inequality between husbands and wives also influences intergenerational relationships unequally.

Motivations for Help

Women reported that their mothers (maternal grandmothers) were more willing to help with childcare than their mothers-in-law (paternal grandmothers). For example, Minjin (38 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) compared the willingness to help with childcare between her mother and mother-in-law. According to Minjin, her mother said “seeing my daughter’s child makes the child more like my grandchild” compared to her paternal grandchild (son’s child) and that she “feels more attached” to Minjin’s child versus her other grandchildren. This is different from the context of China where paternal grandmothers have been more likely to help with childcare than maternal grandmothers because of the patriarchal nature of filial piety, which prioritizes paternal relations over maternal lineage (Chen et al. 2011). While Korea has traditionally been characterized as a Confucian society that values filial piety like China, Minjin’s quote shows that the modern Korean society does not do so anymore.

Minjin further described that her mother “is always willing to help. There is no excuse like I do not have time, I am tired, or I am busy. [My mother] always helps as [childcare help is her] top priority no matter what.” According to Minjin, her mother was motivated to help her with childcare because, “My mom’s priority is me. My husband’s priority is our child. My mother-in-law’s priority is my husband.” Minjin’s quote shows that when childcare is associated with women’s responsibility, maternal grandmothers were more willing to help with childcare than paternal grandmothers. This finding complements previous research from Korea, which documented that from the grandmothers’ perspectives, they were more motivated to help their daughters’ children than their sons’ children because the childcare responsibilities were less pronounced for their sons (Lee and Bauer 2013).

Other women compared the difference in motivations for helping with childcare between their own mothers versus their mother-in-law more explicitly. For instance, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) gave an example of when she had to work overnight when she was pregnant as a computer engineer. Soyoung explained at wave 1,

Three weeks ago, I had to work overnight even though I am pregnant. I ended up passing out in front of my husband and son [from exhaustion]. That said, the next time I had to work over night, I asked [my mother-in-law] that I need to sleep a bit [in the evening] before heading back to work for the night [and to take care of my child at her place instead of mine]. I had to drive to Yongin [a city an hour away from her town], there were lots of tasks, and difficult ones. But my mother-in-law ended up bringing my son back home!... I got home from work at 5 pm. I had about an hour or two to sleep before heading back to my night shift. But I could not rest because my child and mother-in-law were home.... I could not even rest for one or two hours alone... My mother-in-law thought what was the harm when my son loves his mommy [me] and wants to play with mommy [me]. Maybe my mother-in-law thinks I do not care about my child when I rest. Since she is my mother-in-law, she prioritizes my husband and her grandson, and not me. If it were my mom, and I told her that I have to work the night shift [after a full day of working during the day], no matter how much my son wants to play with me, she would not let him bug me. My mom would tell me to go and sleep as much as you can. But my mother-in-law says, why is it so difficult to play with your child when he wants mommy.

Soyoung's experience was very similar to Minjin's. She felt that while her mother-in-law helped with childcare, her priority was the child's well-being rather than Soyoung's. Soyoung said she was shocked about her mother-in-law's attitude and wished that she could get care help from her mother instead, even though her mother could not do so since she lived in a different city. For this reason, when Soyoung gave birth to her second child, she and her newborn moved in with her parents for two months to recover from childbirth; she did not feel that her mother-in-law would look out for her well-being during her recovery. Soyoung explained, "There is no one like my mom to take care of me."

Overall, those who received care help from their mothers-in-law expressed that their own well-being was not important whereas their husband's and children's well-being were prioritized. This often led to conflicts in the family. Women who continued to receive care help from their mother-in-law often discussed their desire to receive care help from their own mother instead. This finding extends previous research that Koreans feel more comfortable asking for care help from maternal (wife's parents) than paternal (husband's parents) grandmothers (Lee 2011), and shows why Korean women prioritized receiving care help from their own parents versus in-laws. That is, when childcare is regarded as women's responsibility, the unequal division of care labor between men and women extends to unequal care division between maternal and paternal intergenerational family members (grandmothers in this case). That is, in women's life courses, women are not only

burdened with childcare as mothers, but also with care for grandchildren when they are the mothers of adult women, which perpetuates gender inequality.

6.2.1 Communications

Women were also more comfortable communicating with their own mothers than their mothers-in-law about childcare demands. Out of 13 women who received care help from their mothers-in-law at wave 1, 11 discussed their difficulties interacting and communicating with their mothers-in-law. For example, Mirae (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that:

When I get home from work, I want to relax because home is our family's [my nuclear family's] space. But my mother-in-law does not leave until later in the evening. If it was my mom, I can just lie down on the couch, but with mother-in-law I cannot do that. I cannot relax when she is around.

Mirae said that although she politely suggested that her mother-in-law leave earlier in the evening after Mirae got home, her mother-in-law stayed longer. In fact, Mirae's mother-in-law seemed to have more authority in childcare than Mirae herself. Mirae said, "My mother-in-law is very particular and stubborn.... for example, she does not allow feeding any imported fruit to my children.... because [she thinks] there is too much pesticide on fruit imported from abroad." Although she tried to convince her mother-in-law that she could wash the fruit thoroughly, her mother-in-law remained adamant. Mirae said she accommodated her mother-in-law's opinion because of her contribution to childcare. Mirae added, "Sometimes I think that my children are not mine, but hers. At this point, I just try my best to understand her." While some may think that this is due to a generational difference, Mirae explained that communicating with her mother-in-law was difficult because her mother-in-law was not her own mom. Mirae said:

I feel uncomfortable with her [mother-in-law] because we are not family by blood. We did not share any blood. I saw on some TV show where women refer to their mothers-in-law as mom.... Even if I call her [mother-in-law] mom [which I do not], I would feel uncomfortable and awkward around her [mother-in-law]. I think it is the same for everyone. Interacting with your mother-in-law is always difficult.

As Mirae's quote indicates, she expressed difficulties in communicating with her mother-in-law freely, casually, and honestly because the in-law relationship is based on marriage. Furthermore, the seniority of a mother-in-law adds an additional barrier. Because of Korea's Confucian familism,

there is a hierarchy by age and generation within the family (Chang and Song 2010).²¹ Accordingly, Korean women are not in an equal relationship but rather a hierarchical one. When women felt more comfortable about breaking this age hierarchy with their own mother because they are closer with their own family members, they did not feel as comfortable with their mothers-in-law because they are after all, their husbands' families, not their own. In this context, it is understandable that communicating with mothers-in-law daily about childcare requests may be taxing, especially when there is a disagreement. I would also like to highlight that even though I only present a few cases here as examples, this was an overall pattern among my sample. As I discuss more below, such difficulties in communicating with their mothers-in-law motivated women to rely more on their mothers for childcare, which increased the care burdens on maternal grandmothers.

For a different example, Seoyeon (41 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) said she gave up her efforts to communicate honestly with her care-providing mother-in-law. Because Seoyeon's mother could not help with care, she received care help from her own sister and her mother-in-law. However, her experience of communicating care demands was different between them. Seoyeon said:

There is nothing I can do [about her mother-in-law.] When my sister takes care of my children, I tell her what to do and what not to do clearly. But to my mother-in-law, I cannot [tell her what to do] because I am also worried that she [her mother-in-law] would say that she will not help with childcare anymore.

Seoyeon's quote shows that she felt comfortable communicating with her own sister to make care-related requests, but not with her mother-in-law. The last sentence in her quote reflects that her mother-in-law could stop helping with childcare any time. At the same time, Seoyeon believed that her sister would not give up on helping with childcare that easily, knowing Seoyeon would struggle with childcare while working without her help. As shown in the previous section, because paternal grandmothers were less willing to help with childcare than maternal grandmothers since they do not perceive childcare as within their children's (sons') realm of responsibility, women feared that they would lose the care help from their mothers-in-law if they had a disagreement. As Seoyeon's quote shows, women were able to communicate their childcare-related demands more freely with their maternal family members because they did not fear that they would lose their help.

²¹ The Confucian familism culture also values family devotion over individual needs, although modern Korean women have fewer beliefs in this culture compared to an older generation (Chang and Song 2010).

6.2.2 Conflicts

Because of the reasons described above, women who received care help from paternal grandmothers tended to have conflicts with their mothers-in-law; among 13 participants who received childcare help from their mothers-in-law at wave 1, nine reported conflicts with her mothers-in-law. For example, Soomin (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) experienced severe conflicts with her mother-in-law while receiving childcare help. At wave 1, Soomin and her parents-in-law lived in the same building, but on different floors, so that Soomin and her husband could receive childcare help. Soomin discussed how her conflicts with her mother-in-law were due to different philosophies on childcare:

My child used to not talk at the daycare last year. I was worried that it would be selective mutism, but he got much better after going to a different daycare this year. But since he was not talking much still, I took him to the [speech] therapy twice. You know it is quite expensive, about \$100 per session. My mother-in-law was scolding me saying he will get better naturally when he grows up. But you know, I am a nurse at the psychiatric ward. As a nurse, I believe the initial intervention is important, and I wanted a diagnosis as early as possible. But since she [mother-in-law] kept saying why spend money, we had much conflict about it.

As reflected in her quote, Soomin did not feel that her mother-in-law respected her childcare philosophy as well as her professional expertise as a psychiatric nurse. After much conflict with her mother-in-law, Soomin and her child were staying with her parents for several weeks at the time of wave 2 interview. By wave 3, Soomin and her child moved in with her parents (maternal grandparents) while her husband continued to live with his parents. Soomin explained at wave 3, “I send my child to my husband only on weekends. Or we [my husband, child and I] would travel together for the weekend or something.” That is, Soomin and her husband lived separately due to endless conflicts between Soomin and her mother-in-law over childcare issues, although they planned on getting a house together the following year. Soomin said, “I barely talk to my in-laws anymore, because we argue every time. Hmm... sometimes I am like should I contact them, but also I get angry [at them]. Then, I say [to myself] let us not see them, my life is most important.”

Despite living separately from her husband, Soomin was satisfied with the new living arrangement. Soomin explained at wave 3, she was “relieved overall, not just at home with childcare, but also with work and mentally.” Soomin further added, “When I was living with my parents-in-law, I hated going home. When our conflicts were the worst, I was really thinking, I

have nowhere to go after work.... Why do I hate going home when it [home] was supposed to be my mental haven?" Soomin compared her relationship with her own mother versus mother-in-law:

It is different talking to my mom and my mother-in-law. With my mom, no matter how much we argue, we get over it soon. But with my mother-in-law, if there is an argument, it lasts long in my heart because I think she is not my family.... When I tell my mother-in-law about anything that I am dissatisfied with, it hurts both ways. My mother-in-law is hurt, and I get hurt, but that [conflict] does not get resolved, but adds up instead.... Eventually, I try not to talk to her [mother-in-law] about my dissatisfaction, and eventually, I stopped talking to her and started avoiding her.

Soomin's quote reflects the general pattern in women's experiences of receiving care help from both maternal and paternal grandmothers. It is not that there is no conflict when maternal grandmothers help with childcare. Rather, when there is a conflict, women were easily able to resolve it with their own mothers, while they could not so with their mothers-in-law because they felt more comfortable communicating with their own mothers, as discussed above.

Indeed, Soomin explained that she felt at ease talking to her mother, which positively influenced her experience of the childcare arrangement as well. Soomin said, "I am comfortable talking to my mom whenever I want. I can call her whenever, whenever I need her, whenever I wanna see my baby. I also feel comfortable asking her a favor." Accordingly, Soomin felt more comfortable with the care arrangement when receiving help from her mother, compared to receiving help from her mother-in-law. Soomin said at wave 3,

I have a better, stronger bond with my child [after living with my parents]. For example, when I was living with my parents-in-law, I was hesitant to go to their house to pick up my child, because I do not want to interact with them. But now that [my child is with my parents], I can call my parents even during work [to ask about how my child is doing]. With my parents-in-law, when I [call] to ask how he [my child] is doing, they thought I was accusing them.... They said something like do not worry, we have him under control, even though I called because I was curious what my baby was up to, what he was doing. Instead, my parents-in-law thought their daughter-in-law was trying to scrutinize us. But with my parents, there is nothing like that. I can call [them] whenever I have time, do video calls even at work. I got to better understand my child, what he likes. Now that I get to have more time with him, and I feel like our bond is stronger.

To summarize her quote, the positive relationship with her mother also positively affected her childcare management. Although Soomin's conflict with her mother-in-law was on the extreme end among the participants, it was a general pattern that women had better relationships and easier resolutions in the cases of conflicts with their mothers than with their mothers-in-law. Despite

these conflicts, women continued receiving help from their in-laws because paternal grandmothers were the best caregiving option available for quality childcare as discussed in Chapter 4, not necessarily because working mothers wanted to. Women often did not have any other options than relying on paternal grandmothers because of a lack of high quality and reliable care resources.

However, I would like to clarify that paternal grandmothers do not only have negative influences while maternal grandmothers only benefit women. When women and paternal grandmothers maintained a healthy relationship, paternal grandmothers' care help also benefitted women. Similarly, when women did not have a comfortable relationship with their own mothers, they had a better experience of receiving care help from their mothers-in-law. Minyoung (35 years old full-time working mother at wave 1) is an example. Minyoung and her husband changed their son's care provider several times across three waves of data collection. Minyoung's family lived with maternal grandparents at wave 1 for care help, lived on their own at wave 2, then lived with paternal grandparents at wave 3. At wave 2, Minyoung's family moved out of her parents' place because Minyoung and her husband thought they no longer needed grandparental care help. However, I was surprised to find that her family moved in with paternal grandparents at wave 3. At both waves 1 and 2, Minyoung mentioned that she was hurt because her mother-in-law explicitly said she did not want to help with childcare, reflecting earlier discussions of mothers-in-law's lack of willingness to help with childcare. When I asked about her reason for moving in with her husband's parents at wave 3, Minyoung explained, "I guess they [my parents-in-law] changed their mind. I think they were uneasy that their son was living at her wife's family. They said they are okay about us moving in for a year a two, as long as it is not forever." Just like Korean women do not feel comfortable communicating and interacting with their in-laws, Minyoung's parents-in-law thought that their son—Minyoung's husband—would not enjoy living with his in-laws—Minyoung's parents. In other words, even though her parents-in-law were reluctant about offering care help initially, they eventually decided to help out with housing and childcare by letting Minyoung's family move in with them to help their son.

When I asked why she did not move back into her mother's place instead, Minyoung explained:

It was exhausting to live with my mom. When living together, we [my husband, son, and I] had to be cautious of the way we behave.... My mom can get angry. She only wants to do the way she wants to do. We could not even turn on the A/C when it was steaming hot, because we [were told] to save electricity (laugh). If we

maintain a good distance [boundary], we can have a wonderful relationship with my mom. But since we were living together, we [my husband and I] felt that our relationship with my mom was getting worse. Plus, my mom was struggling too. Now that we are not living together, we get along better.

Minyoung's quote reflects that the lack of boundaries from co-residing with care-providing grandmothers can aggravate conflicts. Minyoung said she preferred living with her mother-in-law because there was a clearer boundary between them. Minyoung said,

My mother-in-law has always had her boundary clear. Now that we are living here [at her parents-in-law's house], I feel respected. When I was living with my mom, my mom would ask me so many questions when I get one package delivered. Since my mother-in-law does not care [about childcare], she only helps once in a while I think my mom was overwhelmed because she wanted to help even though we did not ask for help. My mother-in-law does not help or even care [to help] until we ask. On my end, it was really hard to ask for help [to my mother-in-law]. But now that we live together, she [my mother-in-law] helps more.

Minyoung's experience indicates that having a clearer boundary with her mother-in-law helped maintain a healthy relationship and resulted in less conflict. Even though her mother was more willing to help, having too much proximity exhausted Minyoung's family. Overall, Minyoung's case contradicts many other participants' experiences—like Soomin's—who had negative experiences living with their care-helping in-laws. Minyoung's case demonstrates that paternal grandmothers' care help can also benefit mothers as long as their relationship maintains a respectful and healthy boundary.

On a different note, Minyoung's case also demonstrates that care work was done among women in the family regardless of whom mothers lived with. At wave 1 when Minyoung lived with her parents, it was she and her mother devising care work, not her husband or her father. At wave 2, when it was just her own family, she was primarily providing care work. Finally at wave 3, when she was living with her in-laws, care work was done between Minyoung and her mother-in-law, not her husband or her father-in-law. This is similar to previous findings from China that grandparental childcare help is a result of negotiation among daughters- and mothers-in-law on how to distribute childcare and household labor, rather than a dyadic parent-child relationship (To 2015). In other words, whether there was more or less conflict with care-providing grandmothers, the gendered responsibility for care remained constant.

In sum, women primarily communicated with care-providing grandmothers about childcare. In doing so, women felt easier talking to, and experienced fewer conflicts with their own

mothers, compared to their mothers-in-law, although women also benefitted from paternal grandmothers' care as long as they maintained a healthy, respectful relationship. This pattern again adds to earlier findings that Korean husbands and wives feel more comfortable asking childcare related favors from maternal grandparents (wife's parents), than from paternal ones (Lee 2011), and may explain the growing number of maternal grandmothers' participating in childcare in Korea (Lee et al. 2019). In addition, because a similar pattern was found in the United States (e.g., Glenn 2010), it is likely that the same narrative could be applicable in other societies where caregiving labor is primarily considered as women's.

6.2.3 Husbands' Roles in Mediating Women's Relationships with Paternal Grandmothers

Because paternal grandmothers are husbands' own mothers, husbands played a key role in mediating women's relationships with their mothers-in-law. When women experienced conflicts with their mothers-in-law, they often relied on their husbands to intervene, because they did not feel comfortable communicating conflicts with their care-providing mothers-in-law directly as discussed above. For example, Sooah (35 years old part-time working mother) said at wave 1, "My husband is great at mediating my relationship with my in-laws. When there is something that I feel uncomfortable communicating directly with my parents-in-law, my husband does a great job of being the bridge [mediating]. He defends me in front of his parents a lot." With her husband's involvement, Sooah became more comfortable interacting with her mother-in-law compared to other participants. Sooah added, "Although I do not want to call her [mother-in-law] as my mom.... at least I can communicate with her directly if it is a minor thing and make more difficult demands through my husband." Sooah described that she had a good relationship with her mother-in-law overall. It was not that she did not like her mother-in-law, but it was difficult to communicate with her because she was elderly and she was not familiar, unlike her own parents. Sooah's husband's role as a mediator continued at waves 2 and 3. For example, Sooah explained at wave 3:

I do not like giving juice [to our child] because of its high sugar contents. But my mother-in-law apparently gives [him] one [bottle] every day! I was shocked (laugh). I told him [my husband] that his mom is giving juice [to our child] every day, and asked what we should do (laugh)... And [for another example] I was watching TV, but apparently our child knows about this Robocar Poli show. I was like, how do you know about Poli? My mother-in-law showed him the animation! I told my husband that he [our son] should not be watching this show yet. [To my husband], what are you gonna do [about his mom]?... I keep hassling my husband (laugh). I

cannot talk to my mother-in-law the way I nag my husband. He has gone through a lot (laugh).

Echoing the findings from earlier sections, Sooah's quote reflects how women struggled to communicate with their mothers-in-law freely because of the difficulties of dealing with elders who are not their own family members. In a situation like this, husbands played a critical role in mediating the relationship between a daughter-in-law (mothers) and their mother-in-law (paternal grandmothers). This finding again shows the importance of men's involvement in childcare. As shown in Chapter 5, when men were involved in childcare and did not assume women's primary care responsibilities, women were able to have strong career aspirations and better pursuits. To expand on this finding, when men were involved in childcare, it also alleviated the challenges associated with intergenerational family relationships, especially when paternal grandmothers helped with childcare. That is, since husbands felt more comfortable talking with their own parents, compared to women talking with their parents-in-law, husbands' involvement in childcare was crucial in navigating care arrangements with paternal grandmothers, and reduced women's conflicts with care-providing paternal grandmothers.

However, unfortunately, not all husbands were able to mediate such relationships. According to my sample, women discussed that husbands sometimes become defensive about having to mediate women's relationships with paternal grandmothers because the wives' mothers-in-law are their husbands' own mothers after all. For example, Soohee (32 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said at wave 1 that her husband did not understand why she was getting so stressed out when her mother-in-law, or her husband's mother, was already doing so much by helping with childcare. When I interviewed her at wave 3, Soohee said that she went through a divorce between waves 1 and 3. Although there were other conflicts with her husband, Soohee explained that her conflict with her mother-in-law and her husband's lack of mediating their relationship were key reasons for her divorce. Soohee explained, "[My mother-in-law] called when I was working during the day, and suddenly told me to come home by 7 pm because she hired a new tutor. I was upset. I understand why [she hired a new tutor], maybe she trusted [the new tutor more] but she should have consulted with me first." Overall, Soohee was upset that her mother-in-law made a decision about her child's education without talking to her. When Soohee told her husband then about it, Soohee said, "He was siding with his mom. He kept saying how I was ungrateful about his parents were helping. He did not even listen to me. I know it was really trivial,

but we were arguing because of that and eventually got divorced.” Soohye’s case was rather extreme in that she was the only one who got divorced among 34 participants who participated in at least two interviews. However, her case was not out of the ordinary in that husbands’ lack of involvement in mediating the relationship between mothers and their mothers-in-law led to family conflicts.

The conflicts between women and their mothers-in-law often turned into conflicts between a couple—women and their husbands. For example, Soomin’s (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that her tension with her care-providing mother-in-law negatively influenced her relationship with her husband. When Soomin shared her conflicts with her mother-in-law with her husband, according to Soomin, her husband said “...deal with my mom [Soomin’s mother-in-law]. Why are you telling me all this?” Soomin added, “I wanted my husband to side with me, but I am not now. Maybe I would do the same. If there is any conflict between [my husband] and my mom, I would side with my mom unless she [my mom] did something really bad.” Soomin’s reflection demonstrates that conflicts with paternal grandmothers posed an additional challenge for couples, because of their beliefs that family-by-blood is more important than family-by-marriage.

Similarly, Mirae (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained, “My husband was doing his part in mediating the conflict between me and my mother-in-law. [I think] he was getting annoyed that he *had to* come home early [from work] and mediate the two [me and his mom].” Mirae added, “We recently had a huge fight about it. [Her husband said] that he understands everything... but she [my mother-in-law] is still my mother [my husband’s mother]. Even if you tell me good things about her, it gets old, but since I only hear bad things all the time, it makes me mad. It is like you are talking bad about my mom.” Like Soomin, Mirae felt that the tension between her and her mother-in-law due to childcare issues also spilled over to her relationship with her husband. In a way, when husbands were not involved in communication with paternal grandmothers because they did not partake in childcare responsibilities, women were in a situation of having to manage both childcare responsibilities and complicated family dynamics. Interestingly, women who received care help from maternal grandmothers did not report that their relationships with their mothers negatively influenced their relationships with their husbands, because they were able to resolve any conflicts themselves.

Because women wanted to avoid conflicts with their husbands, they stopped talking to their husbands about their relationships with their mothers-in-law. For example, like Soomin and Mirae, when Sujin (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) told her husband about her conflict with her mother-in-law, her husband got upset. Sujin said, “When I told him once [about the conflict with her mother-in-law], we had a huge fight. My husband said, where is your mother then [to help with childcare]?” Her husband thought that Sujin should not have any conflict with his mother because she helped out with childcare, especially when Sujin’s mother could not. After this incident, Sujin said she felt uncomfortable discussing her relationship with her mother-in-law with her husband. She added that “the solution [to avoid conflict with her mother-in-law] is for me to quit working [to stop receiving care help] or... to get a divorce.” Overall, when husbands failed to, or refused to intervene in women’s conflicts with their mothers-in-law, women struggled more. Because I did not study husbands in this study, it remains unclear why some husbands were more likely than others to intervene. However, what is clear is that when women interacted with their mothers-in-law due to childcare, husbands played an important role in maintaining a healthy intergenerational childcare arrangement.

6.2.4 Support in Women’s Career Pursuits

While women spoke about the benefits of grandmother care help in continuing their career pursuits in general in the first section of this chapter, there were differences in the types of work-life support they received from maternal versus paternal grandmothers. For example, Sujin (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) who received care help from both maternal paternal grandmothers discussed this difference. Sujin said,

[With both grandmothers’ care help], I can focus on work [during the day], but I cannot work late. Especially when it is my mother-in-law’s turn to do care, I cannot work late even more. You know, childcare is still women’s responsibility in Korean society. It is acceptable for my husband to work late, but if I work late, it is like I have to be sorry towards my mother-in-law. The longer I stay at work, the longer she is working [on childcare].

When I asked if it was not the case for her own mother, Sujin said, “I do not really feel that way towards my mother, but I do for my mother-in-law.” Sujin’s quote reflects maternal and paternal grandmothers may hold different, gendered expectations on care responsibilities towards her and

her husband. It is not clear if her mother-in-law directly told Sujin about her expectation, but Sujin felt that there were different expectations based on cultural norms about gender in Korea.

In a similar context, when paternal grandmothers helped with childcare, women did not necessarily feel that their career pursuits were supported. For example, Soyoung (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained at wave 3,

They [parents-in-law] ask me how long I plan on working, [because] my first [son] starts elementary school next year. They said, you are not thinking about working, are you? I think that since my parents-in-law only have sons, they only get to think from their sons' perspective. They do not want their sons to work alone [as a single earner]. These days, dual-earner family is a must. They understand that we both have to work. There are no parents-in-law who do not like their daughter-in-law working, because they do not want their son to suffer [making money] alone. My mother-in-law said... when they think about their grandsons [my sons], they want me to stay at home to do childcare. Once the kids are old enough, I can go back to work.

While her parents-in-law approved for Soyoung to work to bring income home to alleviate their son's financial burden, they only wanted Soyoung to work to the point that it did not interfere with childcare. According to Soyoung's quote, it seemed as if her parents-in-law did not care much about her career aspirations. Soyoung said she responded her mother-in-law saying,

I wish it is that easy [to quit working]. Once my career is interrupted, I cannot go back to my career [as an IT engineer] other than working as a cashier at a supermarket or waitress at restaurants. [I told them] do you think I worked my butt off and suffered through my career after two children just to quit? I know that I cannot quit and return to my career six, seven years later in my late-40s.... Do you think I go to work and have fun? It is not like I can work forever. I need to work while I can.

Although Soyoung discussed her high career aspirations in the interviews with me, she said that she had to justify to her parents-in-law that she could not quit for financial reasons, not because she enjoyed her career. This finding is similar to a previous study which showed that Korean working mothers constantly feel the need to justify the sense of *deservingness*, or the need to continue working to be able to receive childcare help (Oh 2018). However, what my study adds to the literature is that Korean mothers felt the need to justify their work more to their mothers-in-law than their mothers. Soyoung added, "A daughter-in-law is a daughter-in-law. You cannot change that. A daughter-in-law cannot be a daughter. Parents-in-law cannot be my parents. I gave up on that. I do not expect them to [treat me like their daughter] and I do not do [treat them like my parents] in return." Soyoung explained that her parents-in-law's lack of support in her career

pursuits was because she is not their *own* daughter. For this reason, Soyoung believed that she would not need to justify her career pursuits if she received care help from her mother instead.

In addition, even when paternal grandmothers were supportive of women's career pursuits, difficulties in communication, and different childrearing styles with mothers-in-law discouraged women's career pursuits. For example, Dasom (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) quit her job by wave 2 interview. Even though her husband and Dasom tried to persuade her mother-in-law to respect their own childrearing style, they could not resolve the problem. Dasom said,

For example, she [my mother-in-law] feeds the type of food and snacks that I would not feed my child. But since she helps with our childcare, we could not complain about it every time.... Even if I tried to talk to her, I could not do it with ease because you know, I am cautious.... I asked my husband's opinion and [told him to] go talk to her [about not giving the snack] because she is his mom. The problem is, he is not good at his job (laugh). He understood the issue with me, but when he went to scold his mom, he could not.

As discussed above, like other women who received care help from paternal grandmothers, Dasom struggled to communicate freely and honestly with her care-providing mother-in-law. To make things worse, her husband was not successful at communicating her childcare demands with her mother-in-law. Eventually, Dasom was frustrated with her mother-in-law's childcare style and decided to provide care herself. Dasom explained at wave 2,

If I was more comfortable with my mother-in-law, or had more similarities in our childrearing style, I think I could have continued with my full-time work. It is not like I quit because I did not have enough childcare support. Other people may question why I quit my job when my mother-in-law helps with childcare. However, I have my own childrearing style, and I guess it is not 100% same as my mother-in-law. It is not about quantity, but quality of care help.

Because Dasom felt that her mother-in-law's childcare was not up to her standard, and she did not feel successful at communicating her needs, Dasom quit her job to stop receiving care help from paternal grandmother. That is, the disadvantages of receiving care help from paternal grandmothers discussed previously also negatively affected Dasom's career pursuits. Other women who had severe conflicts with their mothers-in-law had similar experiences as well.

In general, while grandmothers' childcare help is presumed to help with women's career pursuits by alleviating their concerns with childcare, this finding shows that paternal grandmothers' care help may lead to more work-life conflict for women because of more interpersonal conflicts

at home. I argue that this finding re-iterates the importance of investigating the in-law dynamics in studying intergenerational caregiving help.

6.2.5 “Can’t Fire Her”

Seven women who received care help from paternal grandmothers at wave 1—but none of those who received care help from maternal grandmothers—discussed in later waves that not being able to stop receiving care help from their mothers-in-law was a disadvantage. For example, Dasom (36 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) who was not happy with her mother-in-law’s childcare style, discussed that she could not fire her mother-in-law since she is her family. To avoid conflicts with her mother-in-law as discussed in the previous section, she sought alternative care options. Dasom explained at wave 2, “I thought about hiring a babysitter [instead of relying on my mother-in-law], but if I told my parents-in-law [about hiring], they would be crazy [upset] about it. Because they live close by [and want to help with childcare], they may question why we would hire a stranger to care for our baby.” As her quote indicates, even though Dasom wanted to stop receiving care help, she did not feel that her parents-in-law would respect her decision. Whether they actually respected her decision or not, the fact that Dasom felt this way demonstrates how difficult her communications and interactions with her in-laws were, resonating with the findings from earlier parts of this chapter.

For another example, Sujin (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) also said at wave 2,

It is great that [my mother-in-law] loves my children, adores them, and offers to help. But to be honest, I want to hire a babysitter because I am not comfortable with her [because I am not close to her]. But she [my mother-in-law] said no. In a way, she imposed her opinion on me, even though I can make my own decision. It is up to me to decide whether to receive help from my mother-in-law or to hire a babysitter, but she said [she was] absolutely not okay with relying on strangers [when she can provide care herself] and insisted to help. I guess I am grateful because I understand her intention, but I hate it because I do not want it [her help].

Similar to Dasom, Sujin wanted to stop receiving care help from her mother-in-law, not necessarily because she had conflict with her, but because she did not feel comfortable in their relationship. Unlike Dasom though, Sujin communicated her intention, which as Dasom expected, was rejected. As Sujin said, even though she has the right to make her decision, the care-providing grandmother

did not agree with Sujin's. Because of her mother-in-law's seniority, Sujin had to give up her opinion.

Interestingly, none of mothers who received care help from maternal grandmothers discussed that they wanted to stop receiving care help. This may be so because mothers in general felt comfortable communicating with their own mothers as demonstrated above, highlighting the overall benefits that Korean women feel from maternal grandmothers' help, that they do not experience with paternal grandmothers.

6.2.6 Summary

Women's experiences in receiving care help varied when the help was from maternal (their mothers) versus paternal grandmothers (their mothers-in-law). Women reported that they felt that maternal grandmothers were more willing to help with childcare than paternal grandmothers. In addition, women had an easier time communicating with their own mothers than their mothers-in-law. In the case of conflicts, women were also able to resolve conflicts with their own mothers more easily than their mothers-in-law. Because women did not feel comfortable communicating their care demands directly with their mothers-in-law, they relied on their husbands to communicate instead. However, when their husbands failed to do so, there were more family conflicts. Finally, even when they wanted to stop receiving care help from paternal grandmothers, they could not do so. All these factors together resulted in women feeling less supported in their career pursuits when receiving care help from their mothers-in-law, compared to their mothers.

In general, despite the general understanding in the literature that grandmothers' care help benefits women (e.g., see Glenn 2010; Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez 2013 for U.S., Hank and Kreyenfeld 2003 for Germany, and Chen, Liu, and Mair 2011; Ko and Hank 2014 for China), these findings demonstrate that paternal grandmothers' care help could lead to interpersonal conflicts within families, and aggravate women's work-family experiences. Because of the disadvantages including family conflicts incurred with paternal grandmothers' caregiving, women preferred maternal grandmothers' care help more than paternal grandmothers' help. Below, I show how paternal grandmothers' caregiving is more precarious than maternal grandmothers' and analyze how such precarity in paternal grandmothers' caregiving resulted in women's loss of care help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.3 COVID-19 and Grandmothers' Childcare Help

This section explores the following question: How did the COVID-19 pandemic influence grandmothers' involvement with childcare in Korea? The COVID-19 pandemic negatively influenced mothers' reliance on care help from grandmothers, although mothers continued to receive care help when possible. Finally, while the increase in time spent together among family members during COVID-19 contributed to stronger family bonds, it also aggravated family relationships when there were existing family conflicts pre-pandemic.

6.3.1 Changes in Grandmothers' Care Help during COVID-19 Pandemic

There was an increase in women who received care help from both maternal and paternal grandmothers during the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, although there was a decrease in the prolonged period of pandemic: from 8% at wave 1 to 13% at wave 2, then 9% at wave 3. This change reflects how women relied on both grandmothers to adjust to the sudden increase in care demands when the pandemic first started. As the pandemic lasted longer and care facilities went back to in-person operation, the mothers returned to their initial care arrangements before the pandemic.

At the same time, there was an increase in those who lost grandmothers' care help since wave 1: 22% at wave 1, 31% at wave 2, and 30% at wave 3. There were several reasons for the loss of grandmothers' care help. The most common reason was that participants changed their career status from full-time to part-time or from part-time to stay-at-home during the pandemic; therefore, they did not need grandmothers' care help anymore. In addition, grandmothers' deteriorating health and husbands' increased participation in childcare motivated mothers to rely less on grandmothers for care work.

The changes in grandmothers' care help during the pandemic were also different for maternal and paternal grandmothers. For example, the percentage of women who received care help from paternal grandmothers was 38% at wave 1, but decreased to 19% at wave 2, although it increased to 24% at wave 3. On the other hand, the percentage of those who received care help from their mothers remained fairly consistent: 41% at wave 1, 37% at waves 2 and 3. The concerns of COVID-19 risk among older adults may have motivated mothers to rely less on grandmothers for childcare help. However, it is noteworthy that the proportion of paternal grandmothers who

helped declined since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, while that of maternal grandmothers remained constant. This difference reflects that the care help from paternal grandmothers was more precarious than that of maternal grandmothers; when women had to forgo care help, they were more likely to give up help from paternal grandmothers than from maternal grandmothers, resonating the discussion from the previous section.

6.3.2 Continuing to Receive Grandmothers' Care Help

Although the risks of COVID-19 infection prevented some women from receiving grandmothers' care help, women continued to receive grandmothers' care help when possible. For example, out of 20 participants who received grandmothers' care help in between the first two waves (between 2019 and 2020), 16 (80%) continued to receive help, and four (20%) stopped since the pandemic began at wave 2. Among 16 participants who continued to receive grandmothers' childcare help at wave 2, five (31%) explained that they did not have any other option for childcare. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained, "I could consider [to stop receiving care help from grandmothers] if I stopped working. But since we cannot have that as an option, my mother-in-law insisted to provide more care so that my kids do not have to go to kindergarten [during the pandemic]."

Similarly, when asked if she considered to stop receiving care help from her mother because of COVID-19, Jihee (34 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) asked me in return, "Then, who would provide childcare?" Jihee further explained, "Because of COVID-19, it is funny [does not make sense] to hire someone new other than those who were already helping with care. I could take time off if I could, but I cannot since I transferred to a different team recently." She also added, "We [she and her husband] assumed that my mom will continue to help with childcare [during the COVID-19 pandemic]. To be honest, I thought it was fine to send our children to daycare during the whole pandemic, but did not for the first month because my mom did not feel comfortable." Although these women understood that grandmothers were at higher risks of COVID-19, they did not have the luxury of not receiving care help from already care-providing grandmothers.

Four women continued to receive care help from grandmothers because their care-providing grandmothers were being extra careful to avoid COVID-19 infections. For example, Joomi (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said:

As soon as the pandemic started, the whole family stopped going anywhere (laugh). To be honest, the elders are more vulnerable [to COVID-19 infection], but they [my care-providing parents-in-law] did not think about that. They were only worried about what if they get it [COVID-19] from somewhere and spread to our children. They cut off all social ties, not even religious activities. That is why I was not concerned because I know that we are all staying at home.

Joomi's quote shows that when care-providing grandmothers were cautious about COVID-19 infection, women also continued to receive care help.

Five responded that they were not too concerned about COVID-19 infection. For example, Sooah (35 years old, part-time working mother at wave 1) explained that "I knew that my mother-in-law does not go anywhere. Even if she goes somewhere, it is all in the neighborhood. Since we did not have any positive case here [in their neighborhood], I was not worried [about COVID-19 infection]." Sooah's example indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic did not necessarily increase care-related health concerns as long as risks were under control.

Furthermore, some women were at higher risk of COVID-19 infection from their work compared to their children or care-providing grandmothers. For example, Hyojung (32 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) said that since she worked in the hospital, she was "more vulnerable" than her elderly care-providing grandparents. In cases like this, women did not have any reason to stop receiving care help from grandmothers.

6.3.3 Grandmothers' Care Help during COVID-19 Pandemic

To accommodate the increase in care demands due to COVID-19, some care-providing grandmothers increased their time spent on childcare during the pandemic. For example, Heejin (27 years old, stay-at-home mother at wave 1) explained that she did not send her child to a daycare for six months because of the risk of COVID-19 infection. Heejin explained at wave 3,

I had my child [took care of my child at home] since late January [2021]. But it seemed like everyone else was sending their children to daycare... I started sending her [to a daycare] again since last week [in July] because my child is getting older and enjoys being outside. I also felt like a daycare is safer than taking her to a café, restaurant or even a playground... because even if you get COVID-19 with bad luck, at least you can trace where you got it [if my child goes to daycare].

Because Heejin could not be available for childcare full-time, she asked her mother to meet the increased care demands during the pandemic. Heejin added, "I think my mom was struggling a lot. I was struggling too, but my mom must have been really struggling. Now we are thinking, we

should have just sent her to the daycare (laugh) at least since March [2021].” At the same time, she added that she was waiting until July to be hot enough so that “the daycare starts running the air conditioner.” That way, even if her child “wears a mask all day, the air is cool [to ease her breathing].” She added, “April and May were not hot enough.” Heejin’s quote reflects that because of concerns of wearing a mask and COVID-19 infection, she chose an alternative care option of her mother to help with childcare.

Kyungha (35 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) had a similar experience. Her mother had been helping with childcare since the first wave. Although her mother only helped during the day at wave 1, to accommodate the increase in childcare demands due to COVID-19, her mother lived with her child at wave 2. By the time of wave 2 interview, it had been five months that Kyungha’s daughter had been staying with her maternal grandmother. Although she and her mother lived close by, it was a big decision for her daughter to live with her maternal grandmother, away from her parents. However, because Kyungha’s daughter started her first grade at elementary school, and the elementary school only administered online learning instead of in-person operation, Kyungha’s mother had to help with classes starting at 9 am every day while Kyungha was at work. By wave 3, Kyungha’s child moved back with Kyungha and her husband because the elementary school had started in-person education by then.

As much as the increase in care time due to COVID-19 had been a toll on working mothers, it also had been challenging for care-providing grandmothers. For example, Wonmi (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) did not send her children to kindergarten for two months because of COVID-19, but only started sending them to kindergarten because her care-providing mother-in-law was mentally and physically exhausted from all the care work. Wonmi explained at wave 2, “We kept [my children] at home [without sending them to kindergarten], but by late April [2020], it was getting too much. When the kids are home all day, you have to keep telling them not to run around. Since my mother-in-law lives on the 26th floor, we felt bad for our downstairs neighbor. The kids were getting stressed out. So was my mother-in-law.” During the two months that the kids were home all day, Wonmi’s mother-in-law was caring for them alone the whole time. Wonmi explained, “at the beginning it was okay, but how can I explain... I could see that she was getting more and more stressed about childcare [as time passed.]” Eventually, Wonmi insisted to “send the kids [to kindergarten] even if her my mother-in-law said not to” due to the risk of

COVID-19 infection. Overall, women discussed that their care-providing grandmothers struggled with more time spent on childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.3.4 Family Conflicts

When women's reliance on care-providing grandmothers increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were two different patterns in their family relations. Women who maintained positive relationships with care-providing grandmothers before the pandemic reported that their family relations became even stronger by spending more time together as a family. For example, Joomi (37 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) explained that she had better family relations because she got to spend more time with her family due to COVID-19. Joomi added:

Since my parents-in-law were [worried] that they could get [COVID-19] and re-infect our children, they cut out their outings [social relations] extremely. They cut off all social meetings and religious activities. Since we cannot see other people and only spend time with family because of COVID-19, the family bond got stronger. Because we cannot take our children anywhere for fun, we just go to our in-laws one week, and to my parents the other week.

Because her care-providing grandparents limited their social activities to decrease the risk of COVID-19 infection for their grandchildren that they had been taking care of, the family got to spend more time together, which fostered a stronger family relationship.

On the other hand, women who did not have positive relationships with care-providing grandmothers before the pandemic reported more family conflicts during the pandemic because of the increase in time spent with grandmothers. To delve into Mirae's case further, Mirae explained at wave 2 that her difficulties of communicating with mother-in-law caused severe family conflicts. Mirae said, "Because of COVID-19, I was working from home [since March, 2020]. Because I was spending more time at home, there were more conflicts with my mother-in-law. [If not for COVID-19], I would see her [only] in the morning and evening." However, although her mother-in-law was there to assist with childcare, it did not decrease Mirae's care responsibilities. According to Mirae, her mother-in-law expected her to perform her job as a mother and a wife when she was not at home, even though she was working remotely from home. As a result, Mirae explained, "During the day, I did housework. After my kids go to bed, I was [working] until late at night."

Because working on her job only at night was not sustainable, Mirae eventually sought to get childcare help from her mother instead. After her second childbirth between the first two waves of interviews, she stayed at her mother's house for three months, while her mother-in-law cared for her first child. However, after she returned home, Mirae explained, "The relationship [with her mother-in-law] got awkward. Hmm... she [her mother-in-law] stopped talking [to me]. I did not [talk to her] either. We did not talk much unless we had to... There seems to be no conflict, but not talking itself is a conflict." In other words, for those who did not have a healthy relationship before the pandemic, their relationship only got aggravated after spending more time together.

Furthermore, having both grandmothers to help with care did not necessarily lead to better family dynamics. For example, Bora (30 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) asked her mother-in-law to come stay with her family, because her mother was struggling with the increase in childcare demands during the pandemic. However, she regretted having both her mother and mother-in-law there for childcare without delineating clear expectations. Bora explained at wave 2, "When they [her mother and mother-in-law] were together, because my mother-in-law is not sharp-witted, she was just watching TV and doing her make up all day. My mom was pissed. Since she [my mother] could not confront my mother-in-law [to be polite], she was taking it all out on me." During the month and a half when both grandmothers were living together, Bora said, "My mom was doing her part-time work during the day, and doing childcare after work... I would be stressed too if I were my mom." Because Bora was concerned about causing family drama, she only shared her mom's discomfort with her husband months after both of them left. Bora said she was "stressed for months" although she initially hoped that having both grandmothers would alleviate her and her care-providing mother's stress about the childcare burden. Like Mirae's, Bora's experience indicates that more time spent together as a family does not necessarily lead to better family relationships. Rather, these examples show that there could be more family conflicts if there were pre-existing conflicts and unclear expectations among family members.

This pattern is notable for better understanding women's family dynamics over time in relation to care. Based on the previous section, we know that women struggled more with childcare arrangements and family conflicts when they received care help from paternal grandmothers than maternal grandmothers. Building on this finding, this section shows that women who were already struggling with paternal grandmothers' care help were likely to struggle even more during the COVID-19 pandemic when their access to other care options was limited and they had to rely more

on family resources, such as grandmothers. That is, maternal and paternal grandmothers' caregiving influenced women's experiences differently during the COVID-19 pandemic, which further highlights the importance of investigating natal versus in-law family relationships separately when studying gender and family dynamics.

6.3.5 Summary

This section shows that there were many changes in grandmothers' care help during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, there was an increase in women who received care help from both sides of grandmothers at the initial stage of COVID-19 (wave 2). However, there was also an increase in the number of women who stopped receiving care help as the pandemic progressed. Women scaled down their reliance on grandmothers for care when they decreased their career responsibilities during the pandemic either voluntarily or involuntarily. Interestingly, among women who lost grandmothers' care help during the pandemic, more women stopped receiving care help from their mothers-in-law, compared to their mothers. Building on the findings from the previous section, the difficulties of communicating and interacting with in-laws motivated women to rely less on paternal grandmothers during the pandemic.

Overall, this section provided several novel insights pertaining to grandmothers' caregiving during the pandemic. Many women also continued to receive care help from grandmothers for several reasons. First, if they did not have any other viable care options, they continued to rely on grandmothers' childcare. Second, if women were already co-residing with care-providing grandmothers before the pandemic, they continued to receive grandmothers' care help. Finally, women continued to receive grandmothers' care help because they were taking necessary precautions to prevent COVID-19 infection, or some did not feel that the danger of COVID-19 infection was severe. According to women, grandmothers who continued to provide care help during the pandemic spent more time on childcare compared to their caregiving hours before the pandemic because of a general increase in care demands during the pandemic. Lastly, while the greater reliance on grandmothers' childcare during the pandemic led to stronger family bonds among women who already had positive relationships with caregiving grandmothers before the pandemic, such change aggravated family conflicts when women and care-giving grandmothers experienced conflicts before the pandemic.

6.4 Discussion

In this chapter, I documented three thematic patterns in Korean working mothers' experiences of receiving grandmothers' childcare help. First, I documented that grandmothers' caregiving incurred more benefits than disadvantages from women's perspectives. The primary advantage was grandmothers' trustworthy, reliable, and flexible childcare that enabled women to better focus on their careers without the distraction of constantly being worried about their care arrangement. Although the literature has focused on the benefits of grandmothers' care help on adult women (see Chapter 2), this chapter also documents the disadvantages that mothers experience from grandmothers' care help, despite many benefits.

Furthermore, I documented how Korean women compensated grandmothers for their care labor. This finding builds on previous studies that documented the presence of compensatory transactions for intergenerational caregiving (e.g., Chen and Liu 2012; Chen et al. 2011). Just as an employer and employee would negotiate salaries based on the market value, Korean women and grandmothers negotiated how much care-providing grandmothers would be compensated based on the frequency and amount of childcare labor. I argue that this is an important finding because women's care work is generally considered as voluntary participation that does not need to be reciprocated (Glenn 2010). However, this empirical finding demonstrates how often unpaid and undervalued caregiving work *can* indeed be paid and valued and suggests how society can embrace aging populations not only as those to be taken care of, but also as care workers.

In the second section, I documented that while there were general advantages in grandmother care, women experienced more disadvantages when receiving care help from their mothers-in-law (paternal grandmothers) than from their mothers (maternal grandmothers). This was because mothers felt more comfortable communicating their needs with their own mothers than their mothers-in-law. While doing so, I documented that mothers' experiences of their childcare arrangements were different when they received care help from their own mothers versus their mothers-in-law.

However, I would like to be clear that women's preference for maternal grandmothers' care help over paternal ones did not mean that maternal grandmothers were always beneficial while paternal grandmothers were always problematic. It is not logical to assume so because the same grandmothers could be maternal to their own adult daughters, but paternal to their adult sons.

Women had positive experiences when receiving care help from paternal grandmothers when there was a healthy boundary and clear communication demands.

Instead, I analyze this pattern based on gendered care responsibilities: when childcare is considered as women's responsibility, grandmothers who are closer to the primary care provider—which is women in the majority of families—would provide more benefits for women. Because women tend to be closer to their own mothers than their mothers-in-law, women have more positive experiences when maternal grandmothers help with childcare, compared to paternal ones. Furthermore, women received more support in their career pursuits from their mothers than from mothers-in-law. As several participants echoed, this was so because paternal grandmothers' primary interests were their adult sons—participants' husbands—, while maternal grandmothers' primary interests were their adult daughter—participants themselves.

In the final section, I documented mothers' experiences of receiving care help from grandmothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. As expected from the previous literature (see Chapter 2 for more), there were many changes in grandmothers' care arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women who scaled down their career responsibilities, relied less on grandmothers because they had more time to provide care themselves. However, women who lived with grandmothers before the pandemic, and those who did not have other alternative care options continued to receive care help from grandmothers. Some women continued to receive grandmothers' care help because they were taking necessary precautions to prevent COVID-19 infection, or some did not feel that the danger of COVID-19 infection was severe. Finally, the quality of women's relationships with care-providing grandmothers influenced stronger family bonds versus more family conflicts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, as reflective of the different caregiving patterns between maternal and paternal grandmothers, women continued to receive care help from their own mothers during the pandemic and care help from mothers-in-law was more precarious during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With these findings, I showed how society can embrace aging populations not only as those to be taken care of, but also as resources who can provide care help, and further, how such dynamics may vary between natal family members versus in-laws (see also Schatz and Ogunmefun 2007 for the example of South Africa; Teerawichitchainan, Prachuabmoh, and Knodel 2019 for Southeast Asia). Based on this chapter's findings, I recommend that future research further investigate the variation in the role of grandparental childcare involvement on adult children. For

example, if mothers had better experiences with their own mothers (maternal grandmothers), do fathers have more positive experiences when their own mothers (paternal grandmothers) help with childcare? And does it vary depending on husband's involvement with childcare? Also, are there different patterns of family dynamics when the caregiving help is provided by maternal versus paternal grandfathers? Finally, do grandmothers experience more care burdens when they have daughters versus sons? An investigation of these questions using large representative datasets, as well as more qualitative interview data would be useful to advance our understanding on intergenerational family caregiving.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to better understand how beliefs and norms about childcare are tied to women's work and family lives. Because the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic brought economic and societal disruptions—including changes in the labor market and childcare arrangements—understanding working mothers' experiences with work and childcare was timely and critical. I investigated women's lives in Korea because Korea is characterized by its fairly generous family-supportive policies and a high proportion of working women, but a relatively low maternal employment rate. Given this context, I was able to investigate the social factors—such as beliefs and norms—that deterred mothers' career pursuits despite the presence of policy support. Empirically, I investigated the following questions: 1) How do beliefs and norms about childcare influence Korean women's career pursuits and care arrangements? 2) What factors influence Korean working mothers' career aspirations and pursuits in the context of COVID-19? 3) How does grandmothers' care help influence Korean working mothers' career and childcare experiences? To answer these questions, I used three waves of longitudinal qualitative in-depth interview data (n=102) collected from before (2019) and during (2020 and 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Chapter 4, I documented diverse beliefs and norms about childcare. More specifically, I documented Korean women's beliefs and norms about what good childcare looks like, and who should be providing such childcare. *Good* childcare encompassed a wide range of topics including physical safety and health of children as the most important aspect, followed by education, love and emotional support, quality food, parents' work-family balance, and fostering friendship. Because of concerns about children's physical safety and health, Korean women preferred to keep childcare with family members who they know would not pose harm to their child. While some women emphasized mothers' primary responsibility for childcare, many others felt that childcare should be distributed between family members. More specifically, women discussed the role of grandmothers in caring for children, and emphasized the importance of sharing childcare responsibilities among both parents (fathers and mothers). Finally, Korean women had a widespread belief that the government should do more to support childcare by expanding childcare facilities and policy support. Overall, while Korean women often relied on family care support due to safety concerns, they hoped for greater support from the government as they felt that was ideal.

However, these beliefs were not static. Like most societal beliefs and norms, mothers' beliefs about good childcare, as well as who should be providing childcare, changed across the three years of data collection. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Korean women re-evaluated their pre-existing care arrangements and a substantial number changed their care beliefs. When women were not satisfied with their previous care arrangement, they increased their own responsibility for childcare and decreased others' involvement in childcare. At the same time, engaging in extensive childcare labor during the COVID-19 pandemic—which many women described as exhausting—motivated women to decrease their childcare responsibilities. Importantly, the decrease in women's care responsibilities did not challenge their identities of being good mothers, because these women did not believe that good motherhood required women to take primary responsibility for childcare. With these findings, I argued for the conceptualization of *childcare ideologies* that are different from motherhood ideologies.

In Chapter 5, I analyzed Korean women's career aspirations and pursuits focusing on childcare ideologies and workplace environments. The findings from this chapter showed that childcare ideologies that do not equate motherhood with primary childcare responsibilities motivated Korean women to pursue their career aspirations. Additionally, Korean mothers working in environments with supportive (and non-discriminatory) colleagues and accessible policies were better able to pursue their careers as compared to women in non-supportive workplaces. Work-related factors such as reduced hours, flexible schedules, and supportive colleagues fostered a positive working environment and facilitated women's career pursuits and success. At the same time, toxic working environments tended to deter women's career aspirations and pursuits. These environments were characterized by a culture of long working hours, a dualism culture that prioritized work over family, penalty in the use of leave policies, and sexism. When family responsibilities *pulled*, and workplaces *pushed* women out of the workforce, Korean women were left with *unpalatable alternatives*, and forced to choose between undesirable options (Jacobs and Gerson 1998), including giving up their career aspirations or giving up their family responsibilities. In these environments, Korean women often relinquished their career aspirations, and came to terms with their inability to meet the conflicting societal ideals for workers and mothers.

Furthermore, I documented the shifting and evolving dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic for women's careers. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts on women's careers.

Women who were already disadvantaged in the labor market because of a lack of job security—such as part time workers and freelancers—and those without childcare support were the most negatively affected by COVID-19. On the other hand, full-time working mothers who had job security, similar workloads compared to pre-pandemic, and reliable childcare during remote work were able to continue with their career aspirations and pursuits. Based on these findings, I argued for the importance of childcare beliefs that do not equate motherhood with childcare responsibilities, fostering supportive workplace environments, and enhancing women’s job security for Korean women to continue with their career aspirations and pursuits after becoming mothers.

In Chapter 6, I documented Korean women’s experiences of receiving childcare help from their child(ren)’s grandmothers. The findings showed that grandmothers’ childcare help incurred greater advantages than disadvantages. The primary advantage was the quality of care. Thanks to grandmothers’ trustworthy, reliable, and flexible childcare help, mothers were better able to focus on their careers without the distraction of worrying about their childcare arrangement. At the same time, mothers experienced more disadvantages when receiving care help from their mothers-in-law (paternal grandmothers) than from their own mothers (maternal grandmothers). Mothers felt that maternal grandmothers were more willing to help and provided more support for working mothers as compared to paternal grandmothers. Mothers were also more comfortable communicating their childcare related needs to their own mothers than their mothers-in-law. Overall, this finding adds nuance to our understanding of intergenerational care help by demonstrating that while grandmothers’ childcare help benefits working mothers in general, paternal grandmothers’ care help can lead to interpersonal conflicts within the family, and aggravate women’s work-family experiences.

Finally, I analyzed how women’s reliance on grandmothers’ care help changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mothers who scaled down their career responsibilities during the pandemic relied less on grandmothers because they had more time to provide care themselves. However, mothers who lived with grandmothers or those who did not have alternative care options continued to receive care help from grandmothers. Reflecting the greater advantages of maternal grandmothers’ care help, women who depended on their own mothers often continued receiving that care help during the pandemic. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic posed an unexpected interruption in women’s existing care arrangements, childcare help from paternal grandmothers

became more precarious. Overall, I argued for the importance of grandmothers' care help in working mothers' career pursuits and highlighted the value of analyzing gendered intergenerational family dynamics in care help to better understand the challenges working mothers face.

7.1 Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation contributes to sociological scholarship in several ways. For example, this dissertation is one of the first to situate Korean childcare issues within the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is important because the pandemic has had numerous direct and indirect effects on work and family dynamics, including economic challenges due to unemployment; cultural, behavioral, and technological challenges tied to remote work and education; and changes in intergenerational relationships and dynamics due to the disproportionate health risks of COVID-19 for older adults. This dissertation also has implications for policy because I analyzed how government policies on childcare, work, and COVID-19 influenced women's experiences of their childcare arrangements and career pursuits in Korea. Below, I discuss this dissertations' four contributions to the literature.

First, this dissertation contributes to the sociological literature on the family through the conceptualization of *childcare ideologies*. In separating childcare ideologies from ideologies of motherhood, this dissertation advances our understanding of the meanings attributed to childcare and their impacts for women's work and family lives. Given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work and families, and the gender inequality tied to these dynamics, this is an extremely timely issue. Beyond ideologies of motherhood, issues related to childcare are deeply integrated into several areas of extant scholarship in the sociology of the family literature, including studies related to fatherhood, intergenerational relationships, work-family conflict/balance, and fertility intentions and behavior. By distinguishing childcare ideologies from motherhood ideologies, I challenged the practice of conceptualizing childcare as a part of motherhood because—as my findings show—childcare is not the concern or responsibility of mothers alone. Instead, with this dissertation, I encourage future research to conceptualize childcare more broadly, by including the discussion of political interests, social and cultural norms, and intergenerational familial care, among other relevant factors.

Second, this dissertation adds to the literature on work-family dynamics. By investigating how mothers' career aspirations and pursuits are tied to childcare ideologies, this dissertation advances extant knowledge on working women's labor force participation after childbirth and their uses of government-provided childcare policies at work. By demonstrating how mothers experience organizational support (or the lack thereof) and utilize government policies in managing work and childcare, I highlighted how societal factors like work environments and government policies are manifested in Korean mothers' career aspirations and pursuits. This information is critical for understanding why women often leave the workforce after having a child, despite the generous policy environment (see for example, Stone 2007; Collins 2020). In addition, this dissertation showed how qualitative in-depth interview data can overcome the conceptual and methodological limitations of previous studies which often employ large-scale survey data on behavioral outcomes to investigate family adaptive strategies (Moen and Wethington 1992).

Third, this dissertation adds to the literature on intergenerational family relationships. Although the lifespans of Koreans are increasing, Korean young adults today are less willing to provide care for their aging parents and are having fewer children (Chang 2020). This dissertation provided a case study to examine how society can embrace aging populations not only as those to be taken care of, but also as resources who can provide care help, and further, how such dynamics may vary between natal family members versus in-laws (see also Schatz and Ogunmefun 2007 for the example of South Africa; Teerawichitchainan, Prachuabmoh, and Knodel 2019 for Southeast Asia). As individuals in many post-industrialized countries rely on grandmothers for childcare help (e.g., see Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez 2013 for the U.S, and Ko and Hank 2014 for China), the findings may be applicable more broadly in other societies with aging populations for considering how to strengthen intergenerational family relationships.

Furthermore, this dissertation shed light on gendered intergenerational family dynamics as it portrayed differences between paternal and maternal grandmothers' involvement in unpaid childcare labor. This dissertation contributes to the dearth of literature investigating differences between maternal and paternal grandmothers in their roles as caregivers and the impacts on working mothers' careers and childcare management as well as intergenerational family dynamics (see Lee and Bauer 2013; Zhang et al. 2019 for exceptions in Korea and China subsequently). This finding is useful because it explained why Korean mothers rely heavily on grandmothers for childcare help. It also provides insight into the changing patterns of grandmother help documented

in past research: maternal grandparents' support for childcare has increased over time, whereas the level of paternal grandparents' support has remained consistent over time in Korea (Lee et al. 2019). Overall, this information motivates future studies to further investigate differences in maternal and paternal intergenerational family dynamics.

Finally, this dissertation offered a novel case for analyzing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on working mothers' career pursuits and family life. By comparing observations from before and during the pandemic, this project enabled a natural experiment of how the pandemic influences working mothers' navigation of arranging and managing childcare, including grandmothers' care help, as well as their career aspirations and pursuits. This information is essential for designing policies to better anticipate future health challenges and to assist working women and their families when these challenges emerge.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

Given that childcare arrangements are one of the major reasons that young Korean parents opt out of childbearing (OECD 2019), it is crucial to develop policies to promote working conditions where childcare does not become a barrier to women's fertility and career trajectories. Based on the findings, I recommend policy improvement in two realms: workplaces and childcare.

7.2.1 Policy Recommendations for Workplaces

To start with policy recommendations for workplaces, I draw on Moen's (2011) argument about the importance of seeking work-time policy transformation, rather than assimilation or accommodation. Specifically, Moen (2011) argued that although some family-friendly policies may temporarily alleviate working mothers' concerns about childcare, they do not ultimately change the toxic culture of long working hours, which prevents both fathers and mothers from fully managing both work and childcare. Supporting accommodating family-supportive policies without fundamental structural changes may further exacerbate gender inequality, which renders family responsibilities to women (Moen 2011).

Echoing Moen (2011) in the context of Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic, I also argue that transformative, rather than assimilating or accommodating, work policies are crucial more than ever. Specifically, I suggest that workplace policies related to family support target all

working parents instead of targeting working mothers specifically (Collins 2019; Moen 2011). The findings from Chapter 5 show that policies that target only working mothers resulted in stigma and the out-grouping of mothers from other employees. While policies that accommodated working mothers temporarily relieved women's concerns in managing work and childcare, these policies insinuated that working mothers were not regular employees. According to Chapter 5, working mothers did not want to be singled out or given special accommodations for being mothers. As a result, women sought to work in an environment where they could focus on their career without sacrificing their family life. This finding complements previous studies that found that policies that target *mothers*—not employees in general—may encourage women's labor force participation, but also increase gender inequality at work because these policies may discourage employers from hiring women, especially at high-paying positions (e.g., Mandel and Semyonov 2005). Thus, as Moen (2011) suggests in regards to structural changes in work, policies should aim at improving general working environments. For example, I advise the Korean government and workplaces to expand the policy of flexible working hours to all employees. The findings from Chapter 5 showed that the ability to control one's own work schedule empowered Korean women to better pursue their careers and childcare responsibilities. This policy may be especially useful during the COVID-19 pandemic given that 36% of Korean working parents experienced a gap in childcare during the height of the pandemic (KICCE 2020). Ultimately, a healthy working environment, which enables its employees to thrive in both work and family life, is also the best kind of work environment for working mothers.

At the same time, studies have also documented the negative consequences of gender-neutral family policies. For example, gender-neutrality in family policies can discourage men from taking advantage of the policies (Armenia and Gerstel 2006). Additionally, when men take advantage of these policies without taking on more family responsibilities at home, like childcare, these policies ultimately may not help women (Antecol, Bedard, and Stearns 2018). In regards to the current study, although all women used parental leave policies, only three of the study participants' husbands took paid leave. Thus, policy changes must be accompanied by normative changes to increase gender equality at both workplaces and in families.

7.2.2 Policy Recommendations for Childcare

In the realm of childcare, I recommend three major changes. First, I recommend policy improvements to the package introduced by the Korean Presidential Committee on Ageing Society and Population Policy (PCASPP)²². The PCASPP policy package includes the following: (a) increasing financial support (about \$3,000 total) for newborns, (b) expanding parental leaves for both parents (rewarding a maximum of \$3,000 if both parents use the leave for at least three months each), (c) expanding public care facilities and at-home care support, (d) increasing financial support for households with two or more children, and (e) expanding employment opportunities for elders (PCASPP 2020). Although these new policies have benefits, I suggest the following would further improve these policies. First, expanding the use of parental leaves (b) is promising. However, as shown in Chapter 5, it is not only important to provide leave policies, but also to ensure that the policies are well practiced, and importantly, do not penalize the employees for its use in any way. Resonating Kim and Parish (2020), the findings from Chapter 5 showed that the availability of family-supportive policies alone did not benefit working mothers; accessibility and a lack of stigma were key factors. Thus, I recommend the Korean Ministry of Labor to arduously monitor and penalize companies that discourage their employees from using leave policies, in addition to expanding the policies.

Expanding public care facilities and at-home care support (point c of the PCASPP) has the potential to greatly benefit working parents. As discussed in Chapter 4, although public daycares and kindergartens provide quality care with licensed teachers, mothers faced challenges enrolling their children in public care facilities due to their limited availability. To subsidize the lack of public care facilities, I recommend that the government incentivize private companies to provide childcare facilities at work. To reduce the cost, the government could subsidize the companies with tax benefits. Korean mothers were less trustworthy of private and small-scale care facilities, as the quality of care was not guaranteed (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, employers' care facilities were well-regarded because the quality of care was constantly monitored by the company, and importantly, the facilities' hours matched the company's working hours. For these reasons, women discussed the popularity, yet difficulty, of enrolling their children at workplace care facilities, in

²² With direct supervision of the president of Korea Moon Jae-in, this presidential committee evaluates, develops, and implements policies, in cooperation with other ministries, to address the issues of low fertility and aging populations in Korea (PCASPP 2020).

addition to public ones. In an example from my data, Mikyoung (33 years old, full-time working mother at wave 1) relocated to a different neighborhood for the specific aim of enrolling her child at the kindergarten operated by her husband's company, even though it resulted in a considerable financial burden for her family. She elected to do this because she felt the care facility at his work was both higher quality and more accommodating. Mikyoung said, "Teachers [at the kindergarten at her husband's company] have a different [better] understanding of working parents than [other] daycares." Mikyoung discussed that even though relocation cost her family hundreds of thousands of dollars in the housing market, it was worth the move to be eligible to enroll in the company's care facility. Mikyoung's experiences reflect a broad pattern among the participants, who held childcare facilities at workplaces in very high regard.

Moreover, I recommend that the Korean government embrace grandparental care of their grandchildren as a form of work. Since Korean grandmothers already partake in childcare work, the government could promote childcare related employment opportunities among elders. In addition, the Korean government could acknowledge grandparents' at-home childcare as paid labor, and compensate it with cash, tax benefits, or vouchers. For example, the Korean government already provides cash benefits for families with children younger than age six (86 months), if their children are not enrolled in care facilities like daycare and kindergarten (Seoul Support Center for Childcare 2022). Although the amount of cash benefits (about USD 100-200 per month) is much less than the minimum wage of full-time childcare labor (about USD 1,900), and varies across cities, this policy compensates families for their childcare labor, which is mostly performed by stay-at-home mothers. While the Korean government should increase the amount of this cash benefit to at least match the full-time minimum wage per month, it should also provide similar kinds of compensation to care-providing grandparents. This is important because the majority of participants in this study relied on childcare facilities during the day and grandmothers in the afternoon and evening. This way, the government could acknowledge the often unpaid and undervalued childcare labor as paid labor, as well as alleviating childcare concerns and increasing employment opportunities for grandmothers.

Finally, I recommend expanding the operating hours at childcare facilities and at after-school care programs at elementary schools. For example, the PCASPP criticized the problem that current childcare facilities' care hours did not match with not only working mothers' long working hours, but also with work hours for full-time occupations (40 hours per week) (PCASPP 2020).

Accordingly, the committee promised to provide additional governmental policy and financial support to both public and private kindergartens to match care hours with working mothers' hours until 2020 (PCASPP 2020). Nonetheless, my interview findings (conducted from 2019 to 2021) showed that the same problem persists. Even though a majority of Korean mothers send their children to kindergarten or daycare, public or private, they still need to hire a care provider or rely on grandmothers because of short care facility hours. In an example from my data, Jihee (34 years old full-time working mother at wave 1) said,

I am lucky because my mom is helping, but it would be so much better if the care facilities would take care of our children a little longer [hours.] Maybe then, my mom can sometimes take a break, instead of caring from Monday to Friday... Although in theory kindergartens provide care until 7:00 pm, but in reality, not many places offer such long hours unless you have a really special case or [it is a] special [kind of] kindergarten.

Both Jihee and her husband worked at companies that support "good work-life balance" since they both get home around 7 pm. However, since their two children get home around 4 pm, they still had to rely on her mother's help. Jihee's concerns about the gap between childcare hours and her working hours were real, but they were also likely to become more serious in the future. Jihee added, "There is a saying that working mothers quit their work when their kids enroll in an elementary school... Kindergartens are fine since [my kids] can stay until 4 pm, but at the elementary school, they will get home around noon." Similar to other participants' experiences, discussed from Chapters 4 to 6, Jihee's concerns demonstrate that expanding care hours to match with full-time working hours is essential, and such needs are not limited to parents with infants and young children, but also to those with older children in elementary school. Thus, I recommend that the government expand care hours to match with average working parents' work hours.

Overall, work and childcare are closely tied. In order to improve the childcare crisis, the Korean government needs to adopt policies that target structural problems such as long working hours in addition to expanding childcare resources. At the same time, the Korean government should employ a meticulous and effective prevention plan for employers disadvantaging mothers for using such policies.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

I recommend two types of future research based on this dissertation's limitations and findings. First, I suggest future studies employ a more heterogeneous sample. As discussed in Chapter 3, the sample for this dissertation was fairly homogenous: all participants were highly educated, middle, and upper-middle class women in their 30s and 40s residing in urban areas. Everyone was in a heterosexual marriage, and only one woman experienced a divorce by wave 3. Because of homogeneity in the sample, it was not clear what kinds of socio-demographic characteristics may be related to the differences I found in participants' care beliefs. Potential factors could be related to different upbringings, including different kinds of socialization, to various gender ideologies from school, family, friends, media, etc. For example, those who attended co-ed public school would have been exposed to different gender ideologies and may have developed different care beliefs, than those who attended private women-only schools. Furthermore, because I only interviewed women, it was not clear what may have influenced participants' parents' and husbands' care beliefs. Participants' family members' educational backgrounds and different socialization processes could also contribute to different care ideologies. In addition, because single mothers and women in same sex relationships have different kinds of childcare resources, they may experience different beliefs and norms about childcare than women in heterosexual relationships. Thus, I recommend future studies incorporate a diverse sample including women from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and other family members including husbands and care-providing grandparents. This sort of study design would enable a deeper understanding of childcare ideologies and their development.

Second, I recommend future studies further investigate gendered family dynamics in grandparental childcare. The findings from Chapter 6 showed that mothers have different experiences when receiving care help from maternal versus paternal grandmothers. While this information provides novel insights about differences in gendered intergenerational family dynamics, there are more questions to be answered. For example, if mothers have better experiences with their own mothers (maternal grandmothers), do fathers have more positive experiences when their own mother's (paternal grandmothers) help with childcare? Or does it vary depending on the husband's involvement with childcare? Furthermore, how does this vary for maternal and paternal grandfathers?

In addition, I suggest future research investigate if and how caregiving grandmothers' experiences differ when providing maternal vs. paternal childcare help. Given that Korean women experienced different kinds of benefits and disadvantages in their career pursuits and childcare arrangements with maternal versus paternal grandmothers, grandmothers may have different experiences depending on whether they are helping with their sons' versus their daughters' children. Such differences may encompass a wide range of outcomes from physical and mental health, career pursuits, to leisure time. Thus, I recommend future studies examine potential differential effects for paternal versus maternal intergenerational childcare help for grandparent populations.

7.4 Conclusion

This dissertation has shown how beliefs and norms about childcare influence women's careers and family lives in South Korea. In doing so, I contextualized women's experiences within the workplace and government policies in Korea, as well as the novel COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from the empirical chapters portrayed a complex picture of childcare ideologies and demonstrated the importance of distinguishing childcare ideologies from motherhood ideologies. Although childcare was closely tied to mothers' lives, motherhood was not always equated with primary childcare responsibilities. In fact, fathers, grandmothers, non-familial care providers, and the government all played key roles in women's views of childcare and, more broadly, in childcare ideologies. High quality, reliable, and flexible care resources became especially critical for women to pursue their careers when the COVID-19 pandemic brought disruptions not only to the broader society and economy, but also to women's existing care arrangement. Thus, with this dissertation, I urge scholars to broaden the discourse on childcare to encompass familial care, social and cultural norms, and political interests.

APPENDIX A. WAVE 1 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (2019)

A. General Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Could you tell me about your family? (Probe: Are you married? Do you have children? If so, how many children? How old are they?)
3. How would you describe your relationship with your children?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your spouse?
5. Do you work?
 - If yes, what type of work do you do?
 - If work for part-time, what type of work do you do, and did you ever work full-time?
 - What made you transition into part-time career?
 - If not, did you work before? If worked before, what made you stop?
6. (If the respondent has a spouse) Between you and your spouse, how do you divide the care work and other domestic work, in terms of time and the types of work? (Probe: hours spent on cleaning, who does the laundry, who cooks, who takes the children to daycare/school, etc.)

B. Care Providing Grandmother/ Care Provider

7. Who provides the most childcare work while you are at work? While you are not at work?
 - For stay-at-home mothers: Are you the main childcare provider? If not, who provides the most childcare work?
8. What were your other childcare options that you were considering? (Probe: if receive help from maternal grandmother, ask if the respondent considered receiving help from paternal grandmother, and vice versa. Also, asked if they considered other care options such as hiring a private/public babysitter and using private/public daycare facilities if not already used one.)
9. If you had more than one option, how did you decide which one to ask for childcare help? (Probe: how much did your spouse contribute in making the decision)
10. Could you describe your relationship with the care-providing grandmother? *
11. How do you communicate with the care-providing grandmother? (Probe: frequency, the contents of message, medium (e.g., Face-to-face conversation, phone, text, etc.), length of conversation) *
12. How would you describe some advantages about receiving childcare help from the care-providing grandmother? *
13. How would you describe some disadvantages about receiving childcare help from the care-providing grandmother? *
14. In case you disagree with how the care providing grandmother cares for your children, how do you address the issues? (Probe: for example, if you do not like the kinds of food the grandmother cooks for the children, how she dresses the children, how she lets your children play too much game, etc.)

15. Do you provide any compensation to the care-providing grandmother? (Probe: Not necessarily money, but in terms of buying food, emotional labor, kind words, expectation to care for them when they age in the future, etc.) *

C. Work and Family

16. Part of this project is about how people negotiate work and family life. To better understand what that looks like for you, could you walk me through a normal day starting in the morning when you get up? In other words, what does your normal weekday look like? (Probe: from waking up to going to bed)
17. What does your normal weekend look like? (Probe: from waking up to going to bed)
18. What are your career goals?
19. What is your biggest concern about your career?
20. What is your biggest concern about managing family tasks? (Probe: relationship with spouse or children)
21. How does the current childcare option alleviate your career related concerns? (Probe: increase working hours and commitment to work, etc.) *
22. How does the current childcare option aggravate your career related concerns? (Probe: decreased working hours and commitment to work, etc.) *
23. How does the current childcare option alleviate your family related concerns? (Probe: relationship with your spouse, with in-laws etc.) *
24. How does the current childcare option aggravate your family related concerns? (Probe: relationship with your spouse, with in-laws etc.) *
25. Are you planning on having another child, and how did you make that decision? (Probe: the influence of spouse, time/health commitment, etc.)

D. Policies on Childcare

26. Is there any childcare-related policy that you have benefited from? If so, how? (Probe: If not mentioned already, I asked whether both participant and her husband have used the leave policy or not. If so, how long. If not, why not.)
27. Is there any childcare-related policy that needs to be improved? If so, how?
28. Is there any childcare-related policy that you would like to see in the future?

G. Concluding Questions

29. Is there anything else you would like to add?
30. If not mentioned already, collect information on education and age.

*Skip this question for stay-at-home mothers

Thank you for your participation in the study. We are grateful for your time and willingness to share your views.

APPENDIX B. WAVE 2 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (2020)

A. General Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Could you tell me about your family? (Probe: Are you still married? How many children do you have now? How old are they? How many children would you like to have in total? Why is that? Ask about the sex of the child as well)
3. How would you describe your relationship with your children?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your spouse?
5. Do you still work?
 - If yes, is it the same job as last year? If not, why did you change?
 - If work for part-time, what type of work do you do, and did you ever work full-time?
 - What made you transition into part-time career?
 - If not, did you work before? If worked before, what made you stop?
6. (If the respondent has a spouse) Between you and your spouse, how do you divide the care work and other domestic work, in terms of time and the types of work? (Probe: hours spent on cleaning, who does the laundry, who cooks, who takes the children to daycare/school, etc.) Are you satisfied with the way your husband is contributing to the care and other domestic work? Why or why not? How do you communicate your needs in case you want your spouse to be more involved?
 - a. When the care facility or any care provider needs to reach out, do they usually reach out to you or your husband? How often do you communicate with the childcare provider?
 - b. Have you asked your husband to help contacting the care facility or the care provider instead? Why and why not? How would your husband react if you asked him to be in charge of childcare arrangement?

B. Individual Questions (if applicable)

See below for more information.

C. Care Providing Arrangement

7. Who is the primary care provider for your child? Who is the second and tertiary? Why do you think that they (or you) are the primary, second and tertiary care provider? (Probe: Is it because of the most-time spent with the child? Is it because the primary care provider makes the most important decisions regarding the child?)
8. Who provides the most childcare work while you are at work? While you are not at work? Is it the same provider from last year?
 - For stay-at-home mothers: Are you the main childcare provider? If not, who provides the most childcare work?

- If the participant employs the same childcare arrangement, why did you decide to continue using such care arrangement?
 - If there were any changes in care arrangement, how did you make that decision? What were your other options? How much was your husband involved in making that decision?
9. Could you describe your relationship with the care-providing grandmother? * (Probe: is the child's sex any deciding factor for the care-providing grandmother to decide whether she wants to help with childcare or not?)
 10. In case you disagree with how the care providing grandmother cares for your children, how do you address the issues? * (Probe: for example, if you do not like the kinds of food the grandmother cooks for the children, how she dresses the children, how she lets your children play too much game, etc.) Does your husband help mediate the relationship between you and the care providing grandmother in the case of any conflict?
 11. Do you provide any compensation to the care-providing grandmother? (Probe: compare with the last year's interview data) *
 - For example, if the participant said that she and the care providing grandmother did not talk about expectations for caring the grandmother when she ages in return for the help of childcare, ask whether they had a conversation about it within the past year.
 - For another example, if the participant provided the monetary compensation last year, ask about whether the amount changed. If so, why it was changed.
 12. How would you describe any advantages about current care arrangement?
 13. How would you describe any disadvantages about current care arrangement?

D. Identity & Balancing Work and Family

14. Part of this project is about how people negotiate work and family life. To better understand what that looks like for you, what are your career aspirations?
15. How would you describe your primary identity among a worker, mother, wife, woman, etc.? (Or how do you define yourself, as a worker, mother, wife, woman, etc.?) Why is that? What does it mean for you to be a good *primary identity*? Do you think you are easily able to fulfil these meanings? Why or why not?
16. Is your primary identity (identity in reality) same as your ideal identity (identity you desire the most)? Do you think your other family members (spouse, mother, mother-in-law, etc.) and coworkers think you are a good *primary identity*? Why or why not? If not, how does this make you feel? How do you compromise any gap between two identities?
 - a. For those not employed: Do you think your spouse, mother, mother-in-law would support you if you decided to work outside the home? Why or why not? How does this make you feel? How do you deal with these feelings?
17. Do you feel that you receive enough support to continue your career (or to stay at home) from your colleagues, husbands, parents, and parents-in-law? If so, what kind of support are they? If not, what are the reasons for discouragement?
18. What is your biggest concern about your career? How does that make you feel? How do you try to resolve your concern?
19. What is your biggest concern about managing family tasks? (Probe: relationship with spouse or children) How does that make you feel? How do you try to resolve your concern?

20. Is there any aspect of work that interferes with your duties at home? Or is there any part about work that you cannot perform well because of your responsibilities as a mother or a wife
21. How does the current childcare option alleviate or aggravate your career related concerns? (Probe: increase working hours and commitment to work, etc.)
For stay-at-home mothers who intend to join labor force: ask how the current childcare option has helped or aggravated their efforts to get a job.
22. How does the current childcare option alleviate or aggravate your family related concerns? (Probe: relationship with your spouse, with in-laws etc.) *

E. Impact of COVID-19

23. If working or worked in the past year, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your work? (Probes: Were you able to work from home or have reduced working schedule during the COVID-19 crisis? If so, what was the adjustment? How long was it?)
24. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your family?
25. Were your child(ren) able to attend the private/public childcare facilities such as daycare or kindergarten?
 - If they were closed, for how long?
 - When they were closed, who was taking care of the child?
26. If child's grandparent was caring for the child last year, was she able to continue providing the care during the COVID-19 crisis?
 - If so, how long was she caring for the child? If not, why did she stop providing the care?
27. Did you employ a new childcare arrangement during the COVID-19? If so, what were they? Why did you decide to employ a new care arrangement?
28. Given that the pandemic situation is still ongoing, what are your plans for work in the future?
29. Similarly, what are your plans for childcare arrangement until the pandemic situation ends?

F. Policies on Childcare

30. Other than the policies you mentioned already today, is there any childcare-related policy that you have benefited from within the past year? If so, how?
31. Are you aware of any new child-care related policy which has been implemented in the past year? If so, how did you hear about it? Were you able to use it? If so, how was your experience? If not, why did you not use it?
32. Is there any childcare-related policy that you would like to see in the future?

G. Concluding Questions

33. What is your ideal family size? Do you think you have reached your ideal family size? If not, what has stopped you? Are you planning on having another child, and how did you make that decision? (Probe: the influence of spouse, time/health commitment, Is there anything such as better policies or financial situation that could potentially change your fertility intention? etc.)

34. Is there anything else you would like to add?
35. If not mentioned already, collect information on education, age and occupation for both the participant and her spouse.

*Skip this question if not applicable.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I am grateful for your time and willingness to share your views.

Individual Questions

These questions should be asked right after “A. General Questions.”

For those who delivered a child within the past year

- Who was taking care of the first child while you were in labor? How did you make that decision?
- When did you tell your boss about your pregnancy? What was her/his reaction?²³
- Did you and your husband use the maternity/parental leave policy? If so, how long? If not, why not?
- Did you use the public post-partum assistance service**? If so, how long? How was your experience with using the service? If not, why not?
- Did you use the private/public post-partum nursery service?

**The post-partum assistance service subsidizes \$1,500 out of \$2,300 for the four-week service of a private helper. Usually, the helper visits the house to help with childcare, care for the post-delivery recovery of the mother and general domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry etc. There are also facilities where the new-born child and mother can get extensive care for the two to four weeks period after the labor. The amount of assistance for using these facilities vary per local government.

For those who were at the maternal/parental leave at the time of the interview last year

- How long have you been back at work?
- How was the transition like, from the leave to returning back to work? Did you have enough support from your family and colleagues? Any challenges? If so, what were they? How did you manage them?
- In case she did not use the maximum amount of leave: Why did you not take a longer leave? Are you planning on using another parental leave? Why or why not?

For those who quit the job within the past year

- Why did you decide to quit the job? (Probe: how long were you considering quitting?)
- How has your childcare arrangement changed after you quit your job?
- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) particularly supportive of such decision? If so, why?

²³ I referred to Collins (2019) for this question.

- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) particularly against such decision? If so, why?
- Are you satisfied with your decision? Why? If not, why not?

For those who got a job within the past year

- Why did you decide to get a job? (Probe: how long were you planning to get a job?)
- How has your childcare arrangement changed after you got a job?
- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) supportive of such decision? If so, why?
- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) against such decision? If so, why?
- Are you satisfied with your decision? Why? If not, why not?

APPENDIX C. WAVE 3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (2021)

A. General Questions

1. We have not met in a year. How have you been? Can you tell me about what has changed for you in the past year? Probe: ask about work, childcare, family etc.
2. Has there been any change in your family formation? (Probe: Are you still married? How many children do you have now? How old are they? What are their genders?)
3. How are things with your husband? Probe: You said you have a good/bad/etc. relationship with your husband last year. What about now? If there's any change, why is that?
4. Do you still work? *
 - If yes, is it the same job as last year? If not, why did you change?
5. Between you and your spouse, how do you divide the care work and other domestic work, in terms of time and the types of work? (Probe: hours spent on cleaning, who does the laundry, who cooks, who takes the children to daycare/school, etc.) Was there any change in the division of domestic work in the past year? If so, why, why not? Are you satisfied with the way your husband is contributing to the care and other domestic work? Why or why not? How do you communicate your needs in case you want your spouse to be more involved?

B. Individual Questions (if applicable)

See below for more information.

C. Care Arrangement

6. Last year, your childcare arrangement was X. How are things now? If there was any change, why did it change?
7. What is an "ideal childcare" for you? How does that look like? What do you consider as a "quality" care? Why do you think that's ideal?
 - a. Did your sense of ideal childcare change over time? If so, how?
8. In your opinion, what do most people think good childcare is? Do you think your vision of ideal childcare is similar to those around you? Probe for their husband, your mothers and mothers-in-law, colleagues, your friends, etc.
9. Is your current childcare arrangement same as your "ideal childcare?" If different, how are they different? What makes it difficult to meet your ideal standard of childcare? How do you feel about that? For example, is it stressful for you that your current arrangement does not meet up with your standard of quality care? Some people find this stressful, while other people do not think about it as much. Or is it something that you do not necessarily think about?
10. How has the pandemic affected your ability to provide your child with "ideal childcare"?
11. Could you describe your relationship with the care-providing grandmother?
12. How do you think your relationship with the care-providing grandmother has changed/not changed in the past two years?

13. Do you provide any compensation to the care-providing grandmother? (Probe: compare with the last year's interview data)*
 - For example, if the participant said that she and the care providing grandmother did not talk about expectations for caring the grandmother when she ages in return for the help of childcare, ask whether they had a conversation about it within the past year.
 - For another example, if the participant provided the monetary compensation last year, ask about whether the amount changed. If so, why it was changed.
14. How would you describe any advantages about current care arrangement? Compare with the previous years' data.
15. How would you describe any disadvantages about current care arrangement? Compare with the previous years' data.
16. How long do you plan on continuing to receive care help from grandmothers? If so, why?

D. Balancing Work and Childcare

17. Part of this project is about how people negotiate work and family life. To better understand what that looks like for you, what are your career aspirations? (Probe: If it has changed from previous years' data, ask what factors have influenced such change.)
18. What is your most salient identity? (Probe: If it has changed from previous years' data, ask what factors have influenced such change.)
19. Do you feel that you receive enough support to pursue your career aspirations (or to stay at home) from your colleagues, husbands, parents and parents-in-law? If so, what kind of support are they? If not, what are the reasons for discouragement?
20. Do you feel that you receive enough support to pursue your most salient identity from your colleagues, husbands, parents and parents-in-law? If so, what kind of support are they? If not, what are the reasons for discouragement?
21. What is your biggest concern about your career? How does that make you feel? How do you try to resolve your concern?
22. Do you feel like your workplace makes it possible for you to provide "ideal childcare?" If so, how? If not, why not?
 - a. If not, how could your workplace, boss or colleagues change so that you feel comfortable providing "quality care" for your child? *

E. Impact of COVID-19

23. How do you think COVID-19 pandemic has affected your career aspirations in any way?
24. If working or worked in the past year, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your work? (Probes: Were you able to work from home or have reduced working schedule during the COVID-19 crisis? If so, what was the adjustment? How long was it?)
25. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your family?
26. Do you think the pandemic affected the way you think about "ideal childcare"? If so, how?
27. How has the pandemic affected your ability to provide your child with "ideal childcare"?
28. What are your plans for childcare arrangement until the pandemic situation ends? (Probe: How did you come to decide on these plans?)

29. Were your child(ren) able to attend the private/public childcare facilities such as daycare or kindergarten? If different from 2020, probe why.
 - If they were closed, for how long?
 - When they were closed, who was taking care of the child?
30. If child's grandparent was caring for the child last year, was she able to continue providing the care during the COVID-19 crisis? If different from 2020, probe why.
 - If so, how long was she caring for the child? If not, why did she stop providing the care?
31. Did you employ a new childcare arrangement during the COVID-19? If so, what were they? Why did you decide to employ a new care arrangement? (Probe: Compare with the data from 2020. Have you been satisfied with the new arrangement? If so, what do you like about it? If not, what do you not like about it?)
32. Given that the pandemic situation is still ongoing, what are your plans for work in the future?

F. Childcare Policies

33. Other than the policies you have already mentioned today, is there any other childcare-related policy that you have benefited from within the past year? If so, how?
 34. Are you aware of any new child-care related policy which has been implemented in the past year? If so, how did you hear about it? Were you able to use it? If so, how was your experience? If not, why did you not use it?
 35. Is there any childcare-related policy that you would like to see in the future?
- Fertility Intentions

36. Before you started having kids, how many kids did you wish to have? Why did you want that many kids?
37. In an ideal world, how many kids would you have? What factors have influenced you not to have that number of kids (if it's different)? (Probe: compare with the data form 2020.)
38. Did your childbearing play out the way you had hoped? Did your births come at the time you had hoped/planned? If not, why do you think there was a discrepancy in your plans vs. what actually happened?
39. Has the pandemic changed your ideal family size in any way? If so, how?
40. Are you planning on having another child, and how did you make that decision? (Probe: Is there anything that could potentially make you want to have another child in the future? The examples include, but not limited to, better policies, financial situation, or career change for you or your husband.)

G. Concluding Questions

41. Overall, how have things changed over the course of study (in the past three years)? Have things gone the way you thought you would? Why/why not? What do you wish would have happened instead?
42. How things have been different if covid was not a factor?

43. Is there anything else you would like to add?
44. If not mentioned already, collect information on education, age and occupation for both the participant and her spouse.

*Skip this question if not applicable.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I am grateful for your time and willingness to share your views.

Individual Questions

These questions should be asked right after “A. General Questions.”

For those who delivered a child within the past year

- Who was taking care of the first child while you were in labor? How did you make that decision? (If she discussed her plan for the potential care provider after her childbirth last year, compare her response.)
- When did you tell your boss about your pregnancy? What was her/his reaction?
- Did you and your husband use the maternity/parental leave policy? If so, how long? If not, why not? (If different from her proposed plan from last year, ask why.)
- Did you use the public post-partum assistance service**? If so, how long? How was your experience with using the service? If not, why not?
- Did you use the private/public post-partum nursery service?

**In South Korea, the post-partum assistance service subsidizes \$1,500 out of \$2,300 for the four-week service of a private helper. Usually, the helper visits the house to help with childcare, care for the post-delivery recovery of the mother and general domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry etc. There are also facilities where the new-born child and mother can get extensive care for the two to four weeks period after the labor. The amount of assistance for using these facilities vary per local government.

For those who were at the maternal/parental leave at the time of the interview last year

- How long have you been back at work? (If different from her proposed plan from last year, ask why.)
- How was the transition like, from the leave to returning back to work? Did you have enough support from your family and colleagues? Any challenges? If so, what were they? How did you manage them?
- In case she did not use the maximum amount of leave: Why did you not take a longer leave? Are you planning on using another parental leave? Why or why not?
-

For those who quit the job within the past year

- Why did you decide to quit the job? (Probe: how long were you considering quitting?)
- How has your childcare arrangement changed after you quit your job?
- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) particularly supportive of such decision? If so, why?

- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) particularly against such decision? If so, why?
- Are you satisfied with your decision? Why? If not, why not?

For those who got a job within the past year

- Why did you decide to get a job? (Probe: how long were you planning to get a job?)
- How has your childcare arrangement changed after you got a job?
- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) supportive of such decision? If so, why?
- Was any of your family member (such as husband, childcare providing grandmother, etc.) against such decision? If so, why?
- Are you satisfied with your decision? Why? If not, why not?

APPENDIX D. RECRUITMENT FLYER IN ENGLISH

Subject: Looking for Research Participants (Working/stay-at-home moms receiving childcare help from grandmother)

Content:

This is a sociological research conducted by Youngeun Nam and Dr. Christie Sennott from Purdue University in the United States. This research explores working mother's childcare negotiation process with care-providing grandmother(s) in South Korea.

Among mothers with child below the age of seven, you are eligible to participate if you are a:

- full-time working mother receiving care work from the child's grandmother(s),
- part-time working mother receiving care work from the child's grandmother(s),
- non-working mother receiving care work from the child's grandmother(s), OR
- mother who tried to receive care work from the child's grandmother(s), but failed.

The interview will approximately last for an hour to 90 minutes. There would be small monetary compensation for your participation. If you are interested in participating in this research, please comment below or contact us at:

Kakao ID: (Youngeun's messenger ID)

Phone: (Youngeun's Korean phone number)

Email: nam49@purdue.edu



Project title: Working Mother's Child Care Negotiation Process in South Korea

Principal Investigator: Christie Sennott, Ph.D.

Co-Investigator: Youngeun Nam

IRB Protocol #: 1904022011

APPENDIX E. RECRUITMENT FLYER IN KOREAN

제목: 인터뷰 참여자 공고 (외할머니/할머니가 아이를 돌봐주시는 워킹 맘 혹은 전업 주부)

내용:

퍼듀 대학교의 크리스티 세노트 박사, 남영은 연구원이 진행하는 사회학 연구로, 한국의 워킹맘들이 아이를 돌봐주시는 할머니와 돌봄과 관련된 요구들을 어떻게 협의하는지 연구합니다.

만 7 세 미만의 아이가 있는 어머니 중 아래 사항에 하나라도 해당되신다면 본 연구에 참여하실 수 있습니다:

- 외/친 할머니가 아이를 돌봐주시는 풀 타임 워킹맘
- 외/친 할머니가 아이를 돌봐주시는 시간제 (알바) 워킹맘
- 외/친 할머니가 아이를 돌봐주시는 전업주부
- 외/친 할머니의 육아 도움을 고려했지만 결국 도움을 받지 못한 엄마

인터뷰는 약 한 시간에서 90 분 정도 소요될 예정입니다.

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