



Perceptual difference of child neglect among Korean parents and children: Implications for child welfare policy[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptual differences in child neglect among Korean parents and children. The data were collected from a convenient sampling of 321 Korean parents and 294 children using the case statements developed by Giovannoni and Becerra (1979). The statements consisted of examples of child neglect in the following seven domains: (1) emotional neglect; (2) lack of supervision; (3) medical neglect; (4) educational neglect; (5) neglect of personal hygiene; (6) nutritional neglect; and, (7) drug/alcohol use. Findings showed that both Korean parents and children consider child neglect moderately serious while Korean children consider child neglect situations significantly more serious. Korean parents perceive emotional neglect as the most serious child neglect domain whereas Korean children perceive drug/alcohol use as the most serious domain of child neglect. Gender variation among Korean children indicates that girls are more likely to perceive the emotional neglect and lack of supervision domains more seriously than boys. The implications of the study offer valuable insights into policy development and program planning efforts in reducing the child neglect among Korean parents and children. Additionally, the findings of the study will likely contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the area of child neglect among Korean children and parents.

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1. Introduction

Child abuse in Korea has been viewed as a private matter for decades. Since the 1990s, there has been a marked shift in child welfare policies and programs aimed at protecting children from abuse, neglect and abandonment. Child rights advocates, human service organizations and child welfare professionals have been at the forefront of elevating the child abuse issues to the mainstay. These efforts have increased public awareness and resulted in substantial change in the way child abuse and neglect is perceived by the public. As a result, Korean society currently views child abuse as a major social problem, and there are many professional disciplines that have shown an interest in addressing these issues (Chun, 1989; Park, 1998). For example, in 1996, women's organizations proposed the enactment of legislation to establish a "Law for Preventing Domestic Violence," which included a provision for dealing with violence against children (Doe, 2000). Subsequently, the Korean government revised the existing "Child Welfare Law" in 2000, by adding punitive provisions for perpetrators and establishing professional protective services for abused and neglected children. According to Article 2 of the Child Welfare Law revised in 2000, child

maltreatment is defined as "physical, mental and sexual violence and severe behaviors by adults including care-givers". It includes "abandonment and neglect by care-givers, which impair the child's health and welfare, impeding the child's normal development" (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2013).

Although South Korean government has taken necessary steps to protect the children from all forms of maltreatment, reported cases of child maltreatment has increased from 4133 in 2001 to 10,943 in 2012 marking an increase of 62.2%. Among the reported cases child neglect was the single largest category of child maltreatment, representing 42.6% of the 10,943 reports of child maltreatment, which was followed by emotional abuse 28.6%, physical abuse 17.2%, and sexual abuse 11.6%. Since 2000, the Ministry of Health and Welfare has been collecting data on child maltreatment from the Central Child Protection Agency. According to the data, there were 7329 reported cases in 2006, of which 2842 cases (38.8%) were child neglect. Child neglect cases have continued to increase in 2007 and 2008. The data show that 39.8% of the total cases (97,794) were child neglect cases in 2008 and 42.6% of the total cases (10,943) in 2012 were also child neglect cases (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2013). Clearly, there has been an upward trend in the reported incidents of child neglect between 2006 and 2012. Although child neglect constitutes a substantial segment of child maltreatment cases, it has not received as much attention as physical abuse or sexual abuse due to the public perception that child neglect may not have as much detrimental effects on children as child sexual abuse.

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It is important to have an understanding of various child rearing styles in the cultural context in order to develop appropriate laws and policies to protect children and to preserve social integration of culturally diverse groups. Conceptions of treating and disciplining children are fundamentally dependent on the sociocultural fabric of the society as well as on the unique values, attitudes and perceptions of individuals and families. To a great extent, this explains the cultural variations in terms of disciplining and punishing children as well as parenting and educating children in various cultures. For example, the Mexican law supports the right of parents to discipline their children. According to Lau, Liu, Cheung, Yu, and Wong (1999), in the Korean culture, it is thought that child abuse, discipline norms, etc., are identified as a family matter, which means that child abuse and discipline norms are not subject to be discussed outside of the nuclear family. There are also marked individual variations towards physical abuse and forms of discipline. Studies have found that individuals that have supportive views about physical abuse as a form of discipline are more likely to abuse their own children than those who have negative views about physical abuse (Jackson et al., 1999; Qasem, Mustafa, Kazem, & Shah, 1998; Vargas et al., 1995). Clearly parents' perceptions and attitudes towards child abuse seem to influence, correlate and even predict the nature and extent of child neglect and abuse.

Given the nature and extent of child abuse and neglect, there is clearly a need to explore how Korean society perceives child neglect. Motivated by these considerations, this study examines how seriously Korean parents and children perceive situations of child neglect and identifies perceptual difference between Korean parents and children. Additionally, the study explores how demographic variables influence the perception of child neglect among Korean parents and children. This study further identifies predictive factors of the perception of child neglect among these groups.

2. Literature review

In the literature, child abuse and neglect are often intertwined and used interchangeably. The literature on the perceptions of child abuse and neglect concludes that there is no universal standard definition for child rearing or for child abuse and neglect. There are several studies that examined the role of culture on the perceptions of child abuse and neglect (Chao, 1994; Hong & Hong, 1991; Ju & Lee, 2010; Lau et al., 1999; Lee & Kim, 2011 & Muller, Hunter, & Stollak, 1995). For example, research has found that Chinese parents did not accept physical maltreatment of their children as "abuse" or "maltreatment" (Chang, Rhee, & Weaver, 2006). Similarly, Korean parents did not consider physical abuse/corporal punishment as an abusive behavior due to their definition of physical maltreatment and abuse (Park, 2001). Additionally, studies show that child physical maltreatment behaviors by parents are significantly associated with their definition of child physical maltreatment (Gong, 1985; Korbin, 1981; Ma, Chen, Xiao, Wang, & Zhang, 2011).

Literature indicates that sociocultural factors also influence and shape parenting beliefs. For example, Hong and Hong (1991) and Lee and Kim (2011) have found that culture plays an important factor in the perceptions and attitudes regarding child abuse and neglect. In their study, Hong and Hong (1991) found that Chinese participants judged the child abuse case vignettes to be less severe than did Hispanics and Whites. In a similar vein, Gong (1985) found that Asians rated the presented vignettes significantly less severe than their counterparts because the described behaviors in the vignettes were acceptable to their cultural norms. In other words, participants perceived the abuse justifiable because they might have experienced a higher severity of discipline, and this was acceptable to them. These findings indicate that there is a significant interaction between ethnicity and culture as predictors of ratings of the vignettes in regards to physical abuse and neglect.

Cultural values or preferences seem to be related to the perceptions of child abuse and neglect. For example, researchers found that Chinese culture has the belief that children are to make personal sacrifices for their parents. Also, children are expected to be obedient and to respect their elders (Hong & Hong, 1991; Pelczarski & Kemp, 2006). Such family values endure in the culture. In this regard, Lau et al. (1999) found that participants who believed that child abuse is an internal family matter which should not be subject to outsiders' interference were less likely to report a case to Child Protective Services. Cultural values, norms, and beliefs play an important role in the perceptions of discipline. Kim and Hong (2007) in their study found that Korean-American parents' perceptions of discipline were shaped by living in two cultures: Korean culture and American culture. In other words, Korean parents were more likely to raise their children based on how their parents raised them and disciplined them. Kim and Rohner (2002) empirical study concluded that authoritarian parenting tends to be more prevalent among Asian Americans than European Americans. Furthermore, another important factor to take into account would be that if the abusive act happened outside the hierarchical context, the participants might perceive the discipline and abuse non-justifiable. Most children that have been maltreated or neglected believe that the abuse occurred due to their own faults; they thought of themselves as being badchildren because they believed it was not possible for parents to do something bad (Ju & Lee, 2010, p. 26). The foregoing review shows that perceptions of child abuse and neglect differ from culture to culture.

Focusing on the demographic variables, a number of studies reported that socio-demographics played a crucial role in the perceptions of parents and children in regards to neglect (Gong, 1985; Kasim, Shafie, & Cheah, 1994; Tang, 2006; Wissow, 2001). For example, educational level and involvement in the children's education were correlated with the perceptions of child abuse and neglect. More educated people are likely to perceive child abuse and neglect more seriously. Qasem et al. (1998) found 42% of the illiterate parents strongly agreed with severe physical beating compared with only 15% of those with an education up to high school or more. It is evident that education seems to have an impact on the perceptions of child abuse and neglect, and studies have shown that Asians' level of education correlates with the identification of different types of abuse. For example, Lau et al. (1999) found that participants who were better educated were more able to name different types of abuse without prompting. From a similar perspective, Park (2001) reported mothers who spend more time with their children have a high educational level and are familiar with Child Protective Services. Consequently, they are more likely to have negative attitudes about abusive behaviors toward children. Consistent with previous findings, Maker, Priti, and Agha (2005) found that South Asian and Middle Eastern fathers' education levels were correlated with physical abuse. The data revealed the higher the education level of the father, the less physical abuse the child experienced.

Studies have also shown that age along with other demographic factors affects the perceptions of child abuse and neglect (Lau et al., 1999; Segal & Iwai, 2004; Tang, 2006). Lau et al. (1999) revealed that older respondents were less likely to think that child neglect and physical abuse are common. In a more recent study, Tang (2006) showed that younger participants were more likely to identify corporal punishment than older participants. Findings also show significant gender variations: mothers were more likely to use corporal punishment than fathers (Tang, 2006). Research also established that fathers are more likely to perceive particular behaviors towards children as being abusive than mothers (Segal & Iwai, 2004; Tang, 2006). These researchers also report that age and gender affect perceptions of child abuse and neglect among Asians.

Although various aspects of child abuse and neglect have been studied, the perceptions of Korean parents and children as it relates to the relationship between several demographic variables have not been adequately explored. Furthermore, the lack of culture-specific

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