

Awareness Toward Child Abuse of Parents With the Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the degree of awareness toward child abuse behaviors, causes of child abuse, and the necessity of the parent education for child abuse prevention in the parents of elementary school students. Four hundred fifty parents of elementary school students participated for this study. The results were as follows. First, the parents generally were aware of emotional abuse and physical abuse, but not aware of neglect. In the comparison, according to parental education level and family income, highly educated parents and high-income parents were more aware of both emotional abuse and neglect. Second, most of the parents agreed on the causes of child abuse presented in the survey except the cause of having an unexpected child. Third, most parents agreed on the necessity of parent education programs for child abuse prevention. The discussion for the results and strategies for child abuse prevention was provided.

Key words: Child Abuse, Parents of Elementary School Students, Parents' Awareness Toward Child Abuse

1. INTRODUCTION

The child abuse is a physical, emotional and sexual abuse that can hurt child's health, welfare and normal development. Also, child abuse is a cruel action and neglect done by an adult including guardians, such as parents [1]. The Children's Welfare Law and National Child Protection Agency explain the child abuse in three different categories [19]. First of all, physical abuse is defined as the action that causes physical damage conducted by adults including parents and happens under not accidental circumstances. To be more specific, throwing objects to child, pushing and grabbing, slapping face, beating with tools such as a belt and kicking and punching can be the example of the physical abuse. Second, an emotional abuse includes all of the action that guardians or adults do to children such as verbal violence, cruel action to cause an emotional threat. For instance, emotional abuse includes

swearing and cursing at the child, using resentful, rejecting and insulting language, comparing child with siblings or friends and discriminating him/her, letting child to witness the domestic violence between parents, and having child's head shaved. Third, neglect is the action that intentionally and repeatedly careless child protection and nurturing, and prevents child's normal development. For example, neglect includes physical neglect such as not providing basic necessities of life, and leaving child in dangerous and dirty environment. Also, neglect includes educational neglect that is not sending out child to the school even the child is in the school age and careless the child when he/she doesn't go to school. And another form of neglect is medical neglect that not providing necessary medical treatment or declining medical intervention for the disabled child [2], [3], [19].

The rate of the child abuse in Korea is in very serious level and the numbers of abuse cases continue to increase. According to the research on the actual status of the child abuse based on 4,439 children under age of 18 published by Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (2007), the child abuse incidence rate was 66.7% over one year period time of August 2007. In

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other words, 6.7 children out of 10 had experienced the abuse. Moreover, child abuse experiences upon school age presents that 32.7% of high school students and 49.9% of middle school students experienced children abuse, whereas 89.9% of elementary school students were victimized for children abuse. Thus, children abuse rate of elementary school age was among the highest [3]. The National Child Protection Agency under Ministry of Health and Welfare, which is a professional agency for the child abuse prevention and treatment, publishes the child abuse status report every year. According to this report, there were 2,105 national children abuse cases in 2001 whereas 5,657 cases in 2010, which was increased by 2.7 times. Also, upon categorization of children abuse by ages, 25.6% of preschoolers, 44.7% of elementary school students, and 29.7% of middle and high school students were abused, thus elementary school age children were abused the most [4]. In addition, according to the statistical data on the child abuser and the place that the child abuse has taken place, the parents who are closely related to the child is the highest rank as child abuser and child's home is the highest rank as the place. For example, in accordance with 2010 report of the National Child Protection Agency, the parents among other abuser took a share of 83.2% as the highest and 'at home' ranked the highest of 87.9% that the child abuse took a place. In other words, the family is supposed to protect and take a care of child, but it was the more of threat to the safety of the child [4].

The researches on child abuse point out that parents' awareness on maltreatment action is an important factor to child abuse because an actual abusive action can be affected by parents' awareness and attitude toward abuse. In other words, a lot of parents are ignorant of the child abuse and maltreatment behavior, thus they physically and verbally abuse and neglect the child and do not even recognize it [5], [6]. Also, [7] points out that the child who is raised by the parents that has low level of understanding abusive action and who do not recognize various types of abusive action as an actual abuse is more likely exposed to the risk of abuse and highly likely experience an actual abuse.

In addition, the degree of child abuse and the level of recognition of abuse depend on parents' educational level and an income status. For example, according to [3] research, child's experience rate of the abuse was twice higher when parents' educational level is below high school graduates rather than the university graduates. Moreover, in accordance with [4] research, when parents' education and income level is higher then the more negative attitude towards child abuse were shown. Recently, it is well known that the parents are the main attacker and parents' awareness level of abuse affect the actual child abuse; therefore many researches about the scope of the abuse, such as negligence [9], physical abuse [10], and sexual abuse [11] are found. Also, the researches on parents' awareness level of the abuse upon child's age, such as infants and toddlers [12], [13], or elementary school age [7] are published as well. However, comparing to other ages, elementary school age children experience the abuse among the highest, yet not many researches about parents' recognition and attitude towards this age group are published. Moreover, by researching how parental awareness of abusive behavior differs depending on the abuse categories, it is necessary to examine

how possibilities that children's experiences of the abuse can also differ on each abuse domains.

The purpose of this study is to understand the awareness of parents' child abuse and how parents' educational level and the income can affect the depth of the awareness, to examine the causes of child abuse as well as to understand of prevention of child abuse, and ultimately to suggest ways to remedy the existing condition of the child abuse or its reality.

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants and Research Period

This study was obtained from survey of elementary school students' parents who live in K city populated over 500,000. As of June 2013, there are 36,577 elementary students in K City [23]. Four elementary schools were selected randomly. From the first to the sixth grade in each school, 540 parents of the students were intended for the survey. 465 Surveys were returned out of 540 distributed surveys, and the recovery rate of the survey was 86.1%. Out of 465 returned surveys, 15 surveys that were not completely answered were discarded, thus 450 surveys were analyzed and used in this paper. According to the survey data, 85.6% of respondents were mothers and by the age group 55.1% of the respondents were in their forties. In addition, by the educational standards 54.7% of the respondents were high school graduates and 47.3% of them were above university graduates. By the monthly income 24% of the people who answered earned around 3,000,000 won, 61.8% of the respondents made below 4,000,000 won and 38.2% of them earned above 4,000,000 won [Table 1].

Table 1. General Characteristics of Participants (N=450)

	Classification	Frequency	Rate (%)
Sex	Father	65	14.4
	Mother	385	85.6
Age	20~29	0	0.0
	30~39	186	41.3
	40~49	248	55.1
	Above 50	16	3.6
Education	High School	237	52.7
	University	213	47.3
Parents' Income (10,000 won)	Below 100	18	4.0
	100~199	49	10.9
	200~299	103	22.9
	300~399	108	24.0
	400~499	97	21.6
	Above 500	75	16.7

2.2 Instruments and Methods

The survey for the parents consists of two parts were administered. The first part was related to participants' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. In other words, the first part of the survey includes participants' gender, age group, the educational level and the family monthly income and child's gender and the age.

The second part of the survey was consisted with questionnaires such as abusive action, cause of child abuse, knowledge of reporting system, and the necessity of the education on child abuse prevention. First of all, the questionnaires about abusive action, the researchers reconstructed them based on [14] and child abusive actions that National Child Protection Agency suggests. It is divided into three domains, such as neglect, emotional abuse and the physical abuse and each domain contains 15 questions, total of 45 questions. Generally, sexual abuse is contained as one domain [4], [14], however, this study exclude this domain based on National Child Protection Agency's annual statistics that sexual abuse is only 4.6% [5]. In this section, respondents were asked to answer scaled question 1 to 4, 1 as "Absolutely Not Abuse" and 4 as "Absolutely Abuse".

Secondly, on the domain of the cause of child abuse, 7 sentenced questions were suggested based on what [5] proposes as 'parent factors' of the child abuse. The respondents were asked 1 to 5 scaled questions, 1 as "Strongly Disagree" and 5 as "Strongly Agree". Thirdly, on the domain of knowledge of reporting system, survey presents questions whether the respondents know where to report when they witness the child abuse and how to reach to agency or not. They were asked to choose between 1 as "Yes, I know" and 2 as "No, I do not know" and once they answered "Yes" then they were asked to write down the name and the number of the agency. Lastly, on the domain of necessity of the education on child abuse prevention, 5 educational contents for child abuse prevention that was used in [7] research was suggested and the participants were asked 1 to 5 scaled questions, 1 as "Absolutely Not Necessary" and 5 as "Absolutely Necessary".

The process of making the survey started as the researchers were making survey draft based on previously mentioned researches. Then the researchers asked 2 Paedology experts and 2 elementary school students' parents to review the level of survey. And their expertise and opinions were applied to complete the survey questionnaires.

The credibility of the survey questionnaires were verified by Cronbach Alpha and the credibility coefficient was 0.86. Per domain, neglect, emotional abuse and physical abuse credibility coefficient was 0.81, 0.79, and 0.84 each. Also, credibility coefficient for the cause of abuse was 0.83 and necessity of education for child abuse prevention was 0.85.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Survey distribution and the recollection were preceded on July, 2011 with help of each school teachers. Data process instrument for the result was done by SPSS 18.0 statistics program. First of all, to apprehend parents' demographic and sociological characteristics, frequency and percentage (%) were yield. To understand parents' recognition level of abusive action, per domain each question's average and the standard

deviation were obtained. Moreover, to see the difference of the recognition level per educational and income level, 15 questions in each domain were sum up to calculate domain score. The multivariate analysis of variance was employed to further examine the effect of income and education on the three dimensions of parents' awareness towards child abuse. In addition, to understand recognition degree of cause of abuse, knowledge of reporting system, and the necessity of education for abuse prevention, respondents' frequency and percentage (%) were yield per each question.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Awareness of Child Abuse

In order to understand the level of the awareness regarding parents' child abuse, the average was calculated in the three domains of abusive behavior: neglect, emotional abuse, and physical abuse [Table 2].

Table 2. Average Score of Each Domain (N=450)

Domain	Score
Neglect	2.81±0.45
Emotional Abuse	3.14±0.51
Physical Abuse	3.24±0.43
Sum	3.10±0.42

3.2 Comparison of Awareness on Each Variable

3.2.1 Awareness on Parents' Educational Level

The multivariate analysis of variance showed that there was no difference between parents with university degree and parents with high school degree in the realm of physical abuse. However, there was a significant difference between parents who are university graduated and those who are high school graduates in the domain of neglect ($p<0.01$) and emotional abuse ($p<0.05$). To be more specific, parents whose degrees are higher than university graduate have higher awareness level on neglect and emotional abuse [Table 3].

Table 3. Awareness on Parents' Educational Level (N=450)

Education	Awareness About		
	Neglect	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse
High School	42.42±7.81	46.12±7.97	48.19±6.71
University	45.12±6.32	48.23±7.00	48.99±6.06
F	10.612**	5.164*	1.037

(** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$)

3.2.2 Awareness on Parents' Income

According to statistics of Ministry of Strategy and Finance, analyzed data of household finance trends of annual and the fourth quarter during 2012 year shows average monthly household income was 4,077,000 won [24]. In this study, to classify the low income and the high income, average monthly income of 4,000,000 won was used as standard. It was noted

that there was no difference in parents with monthly income of less than 4,000,000 won and parents with their monthly income of more than 4,000,000 won in regards to the domain of physical abuse. However, there was a difference in the domain of neglect ($p<0.05$) or emotional abuse ($p<0.05$). That is to say, parents whose income is higher than national average have a higher level of awareness on the neglect or mental abuse than those who earn lesser than national average monthly income [Table 4].

Table 4. Awareness on Parents' Income (N=450)

Income	Awareness About		
	Neglect	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse
Low	43.02±7.42	46.24±7.58	48.19±6.61
High	44.81±6.88	48.54±7.42	49.18±6.06
F	4.049*	4.422*	1.802

(* $p<0.05$)

3.2.3 Awareness of Cause of Child Abuse

78.0% of the participants agreed on the fact that the reason for child abuse was parents' immaturity, 73.1% agreed that unstable personality of the parents cause the abuse, 72.9% agreed that emotional dissatisfaction of the parents cause the abuse 67.4% agreed on lack of skill on raising children, 64.2% agreed on excessive anticipation on their children, 49.1% agreed that they experienced child abuse during their own childhood, and 20.0% of parents pointed out that cause of the child abuse that they did not want the child [Table 5].

Table 5. Awareness of Cause of Child Abuse (N=450)

Rank	Cause of Child Abuse	Rate (%)
1	Parents' immaturity	78.0
2	Unstable personality of the parents	73.1
3	Emotional dissatisfaction	72.9
4	Lack of skill on raising children	67.4
5	Excessive anticipation on their children	64.2
6	Experienced child abuse during their own childhood	49.1
7	Unwished child	20.0

3.2.4 Awareness of Necessity of Education on Preventing Child Abuse

93.5% of the parents agreed that counseling and management of abused children is necessary to prevent child abuse. 92.3% agreed on counseling and educating the abusive parents, 91.4% agreed on the education about reporting child abuse, and 84.0% agreed on the education of detecting children who are abused. Also, 82.5% of the parents agreed on the education of the concept and contents of child abuse. In every question, most of the parents feel that it is necessary to educate about the child abuse, regarding on education of the concept and contents of the child abuse as the lowest percentage (82.5%) and counseling and management of the child among the highest percentage (93.5%) [Table 6].

Table 6. Awareness of Necessity of Education on Child Abuse Prevention (N=450)

Rank	Cause of Child Abuse	Rate (%)
1	Counseling and management of the child	93.5
2	Counseling and educating the parents	92.3
3	Education about reporting child abuse	91.4
4	Education about detecting child abuse	84.0
5	Concept and contents of the child abuse	82.5

4. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was also to investigate the cause and prevention of the child abuse and to suggest ways to remedy the reality or current status of the child abuse. First of all, among the three types of the child abuse, the parents considered emotional abuse and physical abuse as an 'abusive behavior' although they had a low awareness level for the neglect. This indicates that the parents who participated in the study do not recognize neglect as an abuse, thus their children can experience neglect more than they experience emotional or physical abuse. The neglect was the most prevalent type of the child abuse from 2001 to 2008 and the rate is increasing annually and this study supports the findings of the study [14]. To improve this matter, it is important to facilitate parents to recognize that neglect can impede well-being or normal development of their children and neglect has to be legislatively and substantively included in the abuse behavior. Besides the result of this study suggests a need of further research on the prevention of the neglect and it would contribute to change parents' understanding of the aspect of the prevention [15].

Second, this study indicates that parents demonstrated a different level of the understanding of the child abuse depending on their educational level and the income. Parents with university degrees have a higher perception and the awareness of neglect or emotional abuse than those who have a high school diploma or below than high school level. As far as the income level, parents with higher than the national average monthly income have a better perception of neglect or emotional abuse than those who have below than the national average monthly income. The research findings coincide with the research findings of [3] and [8]. Also, the result suggests that the issue of the child abuse is at the structural problem of the society such as an economic problem rather than the child or the abuser himself or herself. Recently, number of problems started to arise in our society such as a financial burden, unemployment, and the collapse of the family. Therefore, persons who are involved with the policy-making of the child abuse or child battering need to be aware that these factors can cause the child abuse and reflect them on the legislature on the systemic improvement.

Third, except for the reason of having to raise an unwished child (20%), the percentage of the parents' agreement to the rest of the causes of the child abuse was quite high. 64% to 78% of the parents agreed that the child abuse is caused by parents' immaturity, unstable personality, emotional dissatisfaction,

lack of parenting skills, and the excessive anticipation toward their children and almost half of the parents indicates that they have experienced the child abuse in their early childhood. According to another statistics which has investigated into the child abuse, half of the child abuse cases are caused by lack of parenting skills [16]. In the case of the child abuse with the handicapped [17], 90% of the cases showed lack of parenting skills or discipline method was the reason of the abuse rather than parents' willful intention to hurt their children. This result was supported by the parents who participated in this study because 67.4% of the parents agreed on 'lack of parenting skills' was one of the causes of the abuse. What need to be improved in our society are the cultural characteristics which strict disciplines or physical punishment turn into a method of parenting. Particularly physical punishment or spanking leads to physical child abuse, parents tend to use child abuse as a way of parenting in our society [15]. Thus, it is an essential to enlighten parents not to justify punishment as a mean of parenting or teaching at home. As regards to the causes of the child abuse, it is noted that the child abuse can be passed down from the generation to generation. To be more specific, when children who had experienced the child abuse when they were toddlers tend to become juvenile delinquents and when they grow and become parents, they are more likely to maltreat their own children [18]. This finding suggests that it is necessary to also educate prospective parents regarding prevention of the child abuse not only the parents who are raising younger children [7].

Fourth, most of the parents who participated in this study, which was 80% of the parents, feel the necessity of the education and enlightenment about preventing the child abuse. It correlates the fact that more than 80% of the parents did not know the reporting institution or their phone numbers when they notice the child abuse. If the society and the community look at the methods to meet the necessity of educating how to prevent the child abuse, the Child Welfare Institutions or the Ministry of Health and Welfare will need to create resources such as instructions or manuals regarding preventing the child abuse, how to report the child abuse, and then distribute the resources to the local schools [20]. In addition, more educational sessions should be provided at schools to counsel and teach parents regarding parenting styles and skills, characteristics of the child development, and the proper communication skills with children, which in turn can be more effective in prevention and management of the child abuse.

Summarizing our study, we found differences according to education and income in terms of awareness about neglect and emotional abuse. The fact that there is the gap on degree of awareness of neglect and emotional abuse upon educational level means that it is necessary to have educational program using mass media so that people with various educational levels can easily access to information [25]. Moreover, it implies that it is necessary to strengthen the educational program through the public institution on the congested area with low income family [26].

This study has some limitations. The participants were limited to K city, so it could be hard to generalize the result of it as a representative result. Thus, the supplementary studies should survey the parents from various regions. Additionally,

we tried to understand the possibilities of maltreatment from parents through comprehending parents' awareness level of the child abuse. However, further studies need to research parents' actual abuse experience to see if the degree of awareness and the actual experience matches. Finally, the sexual abuse was not included because the reporting rate was too low. However, considering the increasing rate of sexual abuse of the children [11], [22], the additional studies need to include the sexual abuse of children.

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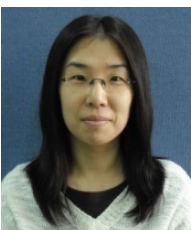
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