



Behavioral and musical characteristics of the children who are exposed to child maltreatment and poverty in South Korea: A survey[☆]



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ABSTRACT

A preliminary survey was conducted on primary school aged children ($N=302$) between seven to twelve years of age, who attend the local Community Child Centers (CCC) in the economically deprived areas of Jeollabukdo in South Korea for the purpose of identifying the children who have been exposed to on-going child maltreatment and poverty, and their needs. Both standardized and non-standardized self-report types of surveys were carried out and completed by both the children and the teachers of the CCC. As would be expected, emotional and behavioral problems are more pronounced by the children who are exposed to child maltreatment and poverty compared to the children who were not exposed to these adversities, or who were not poor. The more severely abused children in terms of frequency and co-occurrence of different abuses appear to display more behavioral problems than less severely abused children. Teachers reported that the children who were able to play a musical instrument and had arts therapy experiences appear to have less behavioral problems, particularly delinquent and aggressive behavior in comparison to the children who did not have such ability and experiences. Through the survey, it was possible to identify the children in need of therapeutic intervention and discover clinically relevant information. Clinical implications will be discussed further.

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Introduction

South Korea has gained a reputation for rapid economic development as one of the fastest growing developed countries. However, there have been long standing issues of underprivileged and vulnerable sections in the society who have been left behind from these economic developments (H. Kim, 2010; Kim, 2013; Lee, Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2009; Korean Ministry of Health & Welfare, 2010).

“Gongbubang (study room)” started as one of social movements in the mid-1980s for children from working poor families in city slums in South Korea. Gongbubang was a voluntary organization with the strong belief that education is a key factor for upward mobility to escape the poverty (Kim, 2013; H. Kim, 2010; Lee, Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2009). Therefore, the

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initial priority of Gongbubang was to assist children with their school work for better grades, and to prepare them for post-secondary education, which will ensure job and economic security. Volunteers of Gongbubang discovered that many of these children were exposed to on-going child maltreatment, domestic violence and alcoholism. Therefore the priority shifted from assisting children with school work to child protection and basic care (H. Kim, 2010; Kim, 2013; K. Kim, 2010; Lee et al., 2009). The Korean government gradually began to recognize the need for child protection and care in the economically deprived neighborhoods. In 2004, the government made amendments in child welfare policies and the child welfare law, and subsequently legalized Gongbubang as Community Child Centers (CCCs), providing social and financial support. CCCs have now extended child welfare services (i.e., day and night care after school, providing free meals and child protection) to children under single-parent and grand-parents' care, and children with both parents working (H. Kim, 2010; Kim, 2013; Lee et al., 2009). The majority of children who attend the local CCCs are from low-income, working families below middle class. All participating children in this study have attended local CCCs after school in Jeollabukdo. Due to strong Confucian values of education, it is common for Korean children to attend extra-curricular activities after school that local CCCs tend to provide. (i.e., English, math, arts, etc.), and help children with their homework.

Under the influence of Confucianism, Korean culture has a steady hierarchical order in the family and places high value on family fealty (Chang, Rhee, & Weaver, 2006; Lee & Kim, 2007, 2009; Park, 2001). Although parental dedication to one's children is a common feature in child rearing, corporal punishment is viewed as a necessary way to educate children by some parents. In some cases, this provides the rationalization of physical abuse (Ju & Lee, 2010; Kim, 2013; Lee & S. Kim, 2005; Lee & K. Kim, 2007; Park, 2001). Within that culture, child abuse that occurs within the home environment has been difficult to recognize, or intervene (Ju & Lee, 2010; Kim, 2009; H. Kim, 2010; Kim, 2013; K. Kim, 2010; Park, 2001). Social recognition and help for the abused children tend to readily focus on severe types of child maltreatment such as sexual and severe physical abuse that needs immediate medical attention. Incidents of other types of child maltreatment such as relatively less severe types of maltreatment – neglect, emotional and physical abuse within the home environment are easily regarded as a private family matter, leaving the children without support, or appropriate intervention (Ju & Lee, 2010; Kim, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2007). Therefore, the study primarily deals with three types of child maltreatment (physical, emotional abuse and neglect) that happen within some families in Jeollabukdo, Korea.

A substantial body of studies have indicated a strong association of poverty with child maltreatment (Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1999; Drake & Pandey, 1996; Gelles, 1992; Gillham et al., 1998; Ju & Lee, 2010; Lee and Kim, 2007, 2009). Kim and Ko (1990) reported higher incidents of severe physical abuse in the students from the impoverished areas than the students from affluent areas. Kim (1995) determined that the mother's employment in low income families often led to child neglect since child caring has generally been regarded as the mother's responsibility in Korea. Lee and Kim (2005) investigated the role of neighborhood poverty on child maltreatment. They found poorer neighborhoods with higher rates of government income support had higher divorce rates and higher substantiated child maltreatment rates than neighborhoods without such conditions. Previous studies conducted in the last two decades attributed the significant risk factors for child maltreatment to the social-economic aspects such as persisting economic hardship affecting the level of family poverty (the increasing number of people below the poverty line) and family life (the rising divorce rate, single-parenthood, family violence and family dissolution) (Ju & Lee, 2010; D. Kim, 1995; K. Kim, 2009, 2010; Lee & S. Kim, 2005; Lee & K. Kim, 2007, 2009; Lee et al., 2009). Several authors of these studies explained the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment based on two major theories. According to human capital theory, impoverished parents do not have enough resources for appropriate child care and protection, leaving their children at higher risk of child maltreatment than the children who are not poor. Moreover, economic stress in family life often leads the family to be in discord among their members and distressed parents are more likely to employ stricter or harsher measures in child rearing, which may develop into child maltreatment (family process model).

There have been accumulating studies investigating the effects of child maltreatment, especially by state run studies (Korean Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2000; Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2000, 2010). These studies have confirmed that developmentally adverse effects of poverty and child abuse on children tend to increase according to the severity, length of exposure, and the age of the child: abused children tend to display internalized (depressive, anxious, withdrawn behaviors) and externalized behavioral problems (aggressive and delinquent behaviors). Kim (2009) investigated effects of different types of child abuse on children that the co-occurrence of emotional abuse with other types of abuses was found to be most damaging to the children while effects of physical abuse alone was relatively less damaging. Ju and Lee (2010) also found numerous cases of co-occurrences in physical and emotional abuse with severe neglect among 357 severely abused children placed in child protective care. Many of these children were from low income working families. Previous research has pointed out the strong correlation between adverse childhood experiences to later adult mental health problems. (Afifi, Brownridge, Cox, & Sareen, 2006; Kim, 2009; Korean Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2000; Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2000, 2010; Lee & Kim, 2011; Van der Kolk, 2005).

As mentioned before, many parents in South Korea routinely send their children to extra-curricular classes after school despite the heavy financial burden. Piano lesson is one of the most popular extra-curricular activities in South Korea. There have been many studies indicating active involvement with music, such as how piano lessons in childhood have long-lasting positive effects for the developing mind and brain of the individuals throughout their life-time (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Hallam, 2010; Hogan & Huesman, 2008; Schellenberg, 2006; Wetter, Koerner, & Schwaninger, 2009). Dunbar, Kaskatis, MacDonald, and Barra (2012) discovered active involvement with the music-making process such as drumming, singing, and dancing to music, which trigger an endorphin release resulting in elevated positive affects where mere music listening

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