



Anger factors impacting on life satisfaction of mothers with young children in Korea: Does mother's age matter?

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between adult anger and parent anger factors and maternal life satisfaction of mothers with young children and the moderation effect of maternal age on the relationship were examined. The participants were 325 mothers of young children and aged from 25 to 47 residing in metropolitan areas of Korea. Likert questionnaires requiring self-reporting by mothers, were used to examine mothers' experience of adult anger and parent anger as well as life satisfaction. The results of the study were as follows. First, both adult anger and parent anger predicted 10% of the variability of maternal life satisfaction and parent anger in the association with age improved the predictability to 22%. Second, adult anger management was positively associated with maternal life satisfaction while adult anger suppression was negatively associated with maternal life satisfaction. Third, the higher parent situational anger the mothers experienced, the lower life satisfaction they had and that was significant for young mothers only. The higher parent anger management difficulty mothers had, the lower life satisfaction they had and that was true for both young and old mothers.

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1. Introduction

Recently, a term 'anger management disorder' frequently appears in the media. Through several social incidents relevant serious aggressive behavior aiming person and/or objective generated in a variety of situations, anger management difficulty seems to be recognized as a cause associated with the antisocial events. Anger expression and suppression are classified as a dysfunctional while anger management with awareness of the anger state and various tactics to regulate the anger are classified as a functional anger factor (Spielberger, Krasner, & Solomon, 1988). Anger expression or suppression seems to be the central figure of undermining not only a particular individual but also social community. In the same vein, management of anger by parents might be a key factor in forming a healthy home environment as well as parents' wellbeing (see Hong & Giannakopoulos, 1994). Anger seems to be produced if there is discrepancy between desire state and actual state in an individual and the individual has different acceptable range or standard for each of circumstances or objects (see Chon, 1996; Higgins, 1987). Thus, a mother has two different ranges of acceptance toward others as an adult and as a parent and if there is a discrepancy between adult standard and parent standard regarding acceptance toward others, she may experience anger.

Mothers are assumed to experience different types and amount of anger in coping with stressful life events including childrearing and anger experience of mothers should be viewed differently from those of adults. Anger relevant experience in a limited context of parenting courses is distinct from anger experienced and expressed by an adult in many aspects of one's life. A mother in early motherhood is in the process of establishment of her own identity and raising the parenting value so that she experiences a lot of confusion and anger from the mix of tasks in personal development as an adult and in developmental process as a mother (Demick, 2012; Leon, 2008). Especially, mothers with young children experience relatively high parenting adaptation stress due to the developmental characteristics of children and the most dependency for care (Bardnard & Solchany, 2012). Parenting stress in the mother of an infant is associated with state anger and anger expression of the mother (Lam, 1999) and the mother appeals the difficulties of self-control and emotion regulation in the process of childrearing (Chung & Kim, 2014). Parental anger was found to be related to more negative accounts of the child as well as the parent (Parfitt & Ayers, 2012). Mothers are currently facing with various difficulties relevant parenting including financial burden, deprivation of liberty for childrearing, discipline problems, and rapidly changing social values. This pressure increases more difficulties for the mothers as parents in general (Hamner & Turner, 2001) and it might hinder for individuals to pursue subjective happiness of their lives.

Despite the distinct characteristics of parent anger, studies in anger among mothers with young children have not distinguished parent anger from adult anger. Moreover, since these studies have mostly

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used the scale of adult anger to measure anger experience and expression of the mother (e.g., [Spielberger et al., 1988](#)), it has seldom properly measured the anger appearing in special situations which adults were caregivers. Although practitioners and researchers recognize the roles of adult anger and parent anger in various daily situations for mothers, a simultaneous assessment of parent anger and adult anger has been notably lacking in the field.

The effects of maternal age on individual and family outcomes are of increasing interest because of the demographic shifts toward older maternal age at first birth. The trend to delay motherhood to the age of 30 and beyond is common in most advanced countries but relatively little is known about potential effects of maternal age on maternal well-being. Some studies looking for explanations or underlying reasons for the relationship between age and life satisfaction suggest that life circumstances are changing to be less demanding thus less stressful as well as spirituality is increasing in association with age ([Kongarchapatara, Moschis, & Ong, 2014](#)). Older mothers (i.e., women who had first child at an advanced age) are more satisfied with life than their counterparts since childbirth is a well-planned life event considering career, financial condition, and parenthood when women are mature ([Aasheim, Waldenstrom, Rasmussen, Espehaug, & Schytt, 2014](#)). Others, however, ascertained that life satisfaction among older mothers is lower than younger mother due to the difficulties relevant to pregnancy and childbirth risk factors (e.g., artificial conception, surgical delivery, or other health) (see [Campbell et al., 2012](#)). These controversial findings bring up an interesting question that whether a mother having a child at relatively late age would benefit from a more stable life situation as an adult (e.g., less stress from financial hardness, more support from spouse, more stable career) or would make up for the small but increased risk of psychological outcomes as a mother (e.g. anger from parenting) in early motherhood.

In addition, since anger is an affect constructed by society and socialized through cultural paradigms ([Averill, 1982](#)), anger that parents experience might reflect different aspect of anger depending on cultures they belong to. Parents in the Western individualistic culture see the child as an independent individual whereas parents in collectivistic familism culture have been molding a unique relationship between parents and children ([Yaman, Mesman, Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Linting, 2010](#)). Recognizing child-centered familism and value in some cultures, parents might experience anger about children who do not fit in their expectations or needs rather than understand and accept the needs of children. Nevertheless, many existing studies examining anger factors in relationship with life satisfaction have limited the subjects of the studies to Western cultures (see [Bornstein, 2006](#); [Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995](#)). This study, therefore, aimed to investigate if parent anger and adult anger factors impact on satisfaction with life of early motherhood in a sample of Korean mothers and if the relationship between anger factors and maternal life satisfaction differs depending on mother's age. Furthermore, it is explored whether parent anger and adult anger predict maternal life satisfaction uniquely.

2. Methods

2.1. Procedures and participants

Participants were 325 mothers with early childhood children residing in metropolitan areas of Korea. The questionnaires were distributed to two daycare centers and three kindergartens in the areas. The authors provided enough explanations about the purposes and contents of the study and an informed consent was obtained from each participant upon recruitment through teachers. Participants were aged from 25 to 47 years old and 50% of mothers were late 30s, 25% of mothers were early 30s, and 20% of mothers were early 40s, 4% of mothers were late 20s, and 1% of mothers were late 40s. Regarding the number of children, 67% of mothers had two children, 18% had one child, 14% had three

children, and 1% had four children. Maternal age distribution by the number of children was fairly even ranging from 25 to 47 for one-child mothers, 25 to 44 for two-children mothers, 26 to 43 years old for three-children mothers, and 33 to 43 years old for four-children mothers. With respect to mothers' education, 74% of the participants were graduates of universities and above. Furthermore, 49% of mothers had jobs. For monthly family income, 43% of families earned 2–4K USD, 38% of families earned 4–6K USD, 9% of families earned 6–8K USD, 7% of families earned above 8K USD, and 4% of families earned below 2K USD. The participating mothers belong to the middle class in regard to their demographic standings.

2.2. Measurements

2.2.1. Adult anger

Mothers' adult anger was assessed using the Korean adaptation of the Anger Expression Scale (AX-K), which was originally developed by Spielberger (AX, Anger Expression Scale, [Spielberger, 1999](#)) and adapted in Korean culture ([Chon, Kim, & Yi, 2000](#)). The AX-K consists of a total of 24 items that are grouped into three sub-scales: anger suppression (8 items; e.g., “when I am angry with someone, I criticize the person in my head”, anger expression (8 items; e.g., “when I am angry, I argue with people”), and anger management (8 items; e.g., “when I am angry, I can restrain and remain calm). Mothers rated themselves on the four-point Likert scale (1 – never, 2 – a little, 3 – quite a bit, and 4 – very much). Higher score in each sub-scale reflects that a mother suppresses her anger more, a mother has long-lasting feelings of anger inside, and a mother manages anger better. The alphas in original study were 0.75 for anger suppression, 0.74 for anger expression, and 0.88 for anger control ([Chon, 1996](#)) and the alphas in the present study were 0.79, 0.73, and 0.83 for anger suppression, anger expression and anger control, respectively, suggesting fairly good reliability of AX-K in this study.

2.2.2. Parent anger

Mothers' parent anger was assessed using the Korean adaptation of the Parent Anger Scale (PAS-K, [Chung, Son, Ryu, & Cha, 2016](#)), which is redeveloped on the basis of the Parent Anger Scale ([Gavita, David, DiGiuseppe, & DelVecchio, 2011](#); [Notti, 2010](#)). The score of the redeveloped 6-point Likert scale ranges from 30 to 180 points. The total explanatory power of the scale increased after the original frequency item was changed to the same item Likert scale. The PAS-K revised by [Chung et al. \(2016\)](#) has some modifications to the items of PAS with consideration of parenting situations and experiences in Korea for the mothers of early motherhood. In Korean culture, mothers tend to feel burden to respond to some questions since they feel guilt or shame to express anger. In addition, PAS-K has been redeveloped as a possible tool to measure parent anger for parents of early childhood and school-age children, compared to PAS targeting parents of early childhood children through adolescents (see [Gavita et al., 2011](#); [Notti, 2010](#)). The PAS-K consists of a total of 18 items grouped into three areas: situational anger experience (10 items; e.g., “when I get angry with my child, I feel like screaming and yelling at my child”), impulsive behavior (5 items; e.g., “when I am angry with my child, I destroy his/her belongings or throw them away”), and anger management difficulty (3 items; e.g., “when I am angry with my child, I am not able to control myself”). The internal consistency of PAS-K in this study was fairly good having Cronbach's alphas for situational anger experience, impulsive behavior, anger management difficulty, and overall as 0.88, 0.81, 0.75, and 0.91, respectively.

2.2.3. Life satisfaction

Satisfaction with life was measured using the three-item version of life satisfaction, which was developed as subscales of Concise Measure of Subjective Well-Being by [Suh and Koo \(2011\)](#). Satisfaction with life is measured in three separate domains of life – personal, relational,

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