

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES AND COUNSELING PRINCIPLES APPLICABLE TO MISSIONARY KIDS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to review the psychological difficulties of missionary kids (also known as “MKs”) and to draw out counseling principles applicable to them. Overall, MKs are people who could experience the special gift and grace from God in various ways, but at the same time, they are people who could experience some special agonies and sufferings caused by their life condition. The writer reviewed related books and articles about mission principles and strategies and analyzed the MKs’ predictable psychological difficulties from the counseling viewpoint. In the latter section of this article tentative counseling guidelines for MKs as well as for mission school teachers were suggested.

Korea is the second largest mission country in the world(Kim, 2003). According to the statistics of KWMA (Korea World Mission Association), the total number of Korean missionaries abroad is approximately 6,578 and the number of MKs is about 11,187. That association estimates the number of MKs as 11,614 in the case that they included the omitted number of MKs. Since the year 2000, the increasing number of MKs reached approximately 60 percent. Moreover, it is a known fact that one of the common reasons for the dropping rate of missionaries from the mission field is the rearing and education issues for their children (Lane, Denis,1993; Kane, Herbert, 1980; Hesselgrave, David J., 1988). Park (1996) indicated that Johnson Cedric B. and David R. Penner pointed out that the most common requested workshop topic by missionaries as the topics of workshop was family life represented in ‘an abundant marital life’ or ‘mission and family’. So it is crucial for mission-related workers to know the MK’ possible problems and prepare appropriate educational and counseling strategies for them.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES OF MISSIONARY KIDS

Third Culture Child

Useem defined the third culture as an interstitial culture, which is shared and formed by immigrants of their own community. He studied the life and culture of immigrants and named their home culture as 'The First Culture' and the host culture which is the culture of their families as 'The Second Culture' (Pollock, David and Ruth E. Van Reken; 1999). Pollock and Ruth describes the 'Third Culture Child' as a child who has grown up in a different culture from parents' culture so he or she has a relation with his or her host culture and the current culture but he or she does not have enough sense of belongingness.

Most MKs can be called "third Culture Children" because of the nature of mission that they have to be raised in various cultures. This could either be beneficial or detrimental to MKs. MKs may have some advantages from it as in the following (Kim, 2003): They can have a chance to build up enough flexibility and skill to adjust. They can develop an open and broader worldview and value systems. Moreover, they could be more objective rather than subjective in their life's circumstances. However, at the same time, the nature of 'The Third Culture Child' has various disadvantages as follows: They are not familiar with the behavior pattern and thought pattern as well as values of the culture they originally belonged to even though they have similar same appearances with the natives. They also behave differently from the natives because they have no ideas about the history, social norms and rule and value systems.

There are some important counseling issues in these advantages and disadvantages. The writer considered these topics in terms of psychological difficulties and counseling guidelines below. In addition, the author figured out the problems of MKs as caused by their unique family dynamics and family situation as belonging to missionary families.

Identity Problems Caused by Constant Mobility

Erik Erikson pointed out that the essential crisis of adolescence is discovering one's true identity and in order to resolve this identity crisis, people should develop a sense of a coherent self (Zimbardo, Weber, Johnson; 2000). There are various factors that affect the process of developing a sense of a coherent self; parenting, peer relationship, occupational choices, values and so on. For MKs, much of their life condition is just handed over to them as a MKs. They did not have any choice about having parents who are deeply devoted to God. They did not have choice about where to live. They had no choice about whom they belong to. They had limited choices about their value

systems. Especially, in terms of social affect, there are crucial questions to building identity during the adolescent period to MKs as follows (Taylor, 1997): “To which country can I adjust? To which culture do I really want to adjust? How can I please my missionary parents keeping my own identity? Where am I from? Is that possible for me to have a feeling of belongingness to at least one place?” Taylor (1997) showed four basic dimensions of cultural adjustment which are a mirror, a hidden immigrant, an adjustor, and a foreigner. This dimension is formed based on those two axes: appearance and thinking style of the immigrants. The mirror type immigrants appear same as the natives and try to have the same thinking style with the natives. But usually they do not want to leave the culture they have already adjusted. The hidden immigrants appear same with the natives but have different thinking style. So, they are forced to behave and think in the same way as the natives but they can not do exactly what the natives do even though they look similar. The adjustors look differently but think in similar ways with the natives. The MKs who are adjustors face a difficulty when they come back to their mother or home country. Even if they look the same as the other people in their country of origin they have already become. Foreigners look and think differently. They may have their strong identity as people of their home country but still they experience difficulties as foreigners.

Constant mobility of missionary families could cause trouble to MKs when they are developing their identities during their adolescent period. They have to adjust to a different group of peers in different cultures. It is not easy for them to develop coherent self-identity regardless of their environmental and cultural changes.

Interpersonal Problems Caused by Repeated Separation

Repeated move and “repeated separation” can cause difficulty to MKs. According to Brehm (1985), when social scientists considered the development of relationship, they have taken the ‘Stage Theory’ to explain that all relationships have to go through a specified set of stages in a certain order. Two major stage theories in the development of relationship are the “wheel theory” and “filter theory”. Reiss, Kerckhoff and Davis studied how an intimate relationship can be developed between couples and they discovered good rapport, mutual self-revelation, mutual dependency, personality need fulfillment, similarity in values and need complementarity as important variables when couples develop their relationship.

Looking back to the foundation of stage theory in relationship development, they all share the assumption that completion of one stage is necessary for progress to the next. In other words, it takes time to move to another stage when people try to develop their relationships. Most of the MKs who move frequently from one place to another, have they limited time to

build up an intimate relationship with their parents. Especially MKs in their adolescent period, struggle greatly about repeated separation experiences in their life. With fear that they might move to another place, they even do not disclose themselves to friends whom they feel close to. They hardly develop proper interpersonal skills because they have not enough experience to share and communicate. They may, struggle from feeling of lack of belongingness because they might not have a good rapport with their friends. They might feel severe loneliness because they hardly have a deep relationship with their friends. Those disadvantages in relationship building pose a malicious cycle that works continuously in the MKs' life. Once they experience the difficulties in interpersonal relationship, their relationship with others can be shallow and superficial so they feel lonely again.

Adjustment Problems Caused by Rapid Life Changes

Missionary life can be characterized as a life of change. MKs often need to adjust themselves to continuously changing circumstances. Change causes stress. Psychologically, stress is defined as a physical and mental response to a challenging or threatening situation. Stress comes when people feel the lack of ability to overcome the change. In order to reduce stress, people can utilize two different methods. One is to increase their ability to adjust and the other is to decrease the degree of their desire to adjust. For example, when one takes an exam, he/she can either increase his/her ability (studying hard) or decrease his/her desire (giving up a good grade) to lesson the stress level. MKs often are confronted with life changes and it is burdensome for them to overcome those changing situations regardless of the frequency and degree of changes.

Holmes and Rahe developed the social readjustment rating scale in 1967 (Zimbardo, Webert, Johnson; 2000). The scale is designed for a respondent to check each of his/her life event during the past year and the authors assigned the life-change units according to the severity of that event. The highest unit of the scale is death of spouse and the unit is one hundred and the lowest unit is minor violations of the law which is eleven. In this readjustment rating scale, the author can find out many life events which may occur to a MK's life; business readjustment, change in financial state, change to a different line or work, change in responsibilities at work, family member leaving home, beginning or ending school, change in living conditions, revision of personal habits, change in work hours or condition, change in residence, change in schools, change in recreation, change in church activities, change in social activities, change in sleeping habits, change in number of family get-togethers, change in eating habits and so on. The total life-change units of these items is around 450 and this is three times of a 50-50 chance of problems; half the people they found in this range developed a significant physical or mental disorder in the next few months. For the inevitable rapid life changes MKs are

exposed to danger that might cause them to develop severe physical or mental problems.

Feelings of Abandonment Caused by Separated Life from Parents

Mahler's separation/individuation theory emphasizes the important role of stable parenting for children (Crain, 2000). According to her developmental theory, an infant who experiences enough practice and experience of being embraced and being separated without severe fear can produce an emotional object constancy. A child with this constancy feeling may think, "I know my mommy is not always good and ready for me, but still I can live in this world as myself".

MKs usually experience separation from their parents when they start to have education. It is known that there are several options open to parents for educating their children (Kane, 1980); teaching at home, sending them to their own countries, sending them to a mission school, sending them to a National school overseas and sending them to local schools with the nationals. Except the first and last options, it is inevitable for MKs to leave their parents and live alone. MKs who go through separation/individuation stage successfully and succeed in developing a coherent real self would not have severe problems even though the separation experience itself can be quite painful. However, MKs who fail to develop the real self and rather develop a fear of separation or loss might have severe emotional and psychological problems when they separate from their parents. Moreover, according to Erikson, developing autonomy, initiative and industry in their childhood is very necessary for a child in order to form a healthy identity. However without parental supervision, it is not easy for a child to accomplish those developmental tasks.

Children who have no conviction that their parents really love them hardly feel safe and comfortable when they face separation. They might develop a feeling of abandonment or a feeling of loss because they may not have experienced acceptance from people. This feeling of abandonment also prevents MKs to go through the next stages of development.

In summary, most difficulties of MKs come from their unique identity as third-culture kids. In this sense, they may have identity problems, interpersonal problems, adjustment problems and emotional problems.

COUNSELING PRINCIPLES FOR MKS

Parent Education: Screening Issues for Missionary Applicants

Previous descriptions about MKs' psychological difficulties tell the possibility of severe problems in MKs. Therefore, it is crucially important to

screen missionary applicants according to the apparent and proper criterion. The criterion should include several categories like spiritual maturity, mental stability, intelligence and language ability, capability of cultural adjustment and physical health. However, it will be described in terms of mental stability only as a criterion of screening missionary applicants because the writer's main interest is to draw out counseling principles from understanding MKs' psychological difficulties that are applicable to them.

Usually, good parenting can come out of good parents who experienced proper care and upbringing. So, it is helpful to review their family backgrounds and developmental histories. If the motivation of being a missionary seems to be an escape trial from their family situation, a serious concern should be given to this applicant. It is not desirable for a missionary to use the chance to go to a mission field as an escape from their life's distress. Furthermore, this sort of motivation in parents may cause more serious problems in their children. Parents who have not experienced warm and stable care seldom take care of their own children well, and the result is that their children may have more possibility to suffer from added environmental change in a mission field.

There are some ways of screening the missionary applicants outlined as follows: Firstly, evaluators can use some standardization tests like MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) or SCL (Symptom Check List)-90. The writer suggests that the test results should be delivered to the applicant and the test takers may have enough time to reflect about themselves and to have an insight about themselves based on the test results. A second possible way of screening is to apply projective tests. A drawing test like HTP (House-Tree-Person) indicates people's social and family interaction, ego-strength and self-perception. A missionary applicant who has a negative self-image hardly bears fruit in a mission field because of his/her wrong projection and rationalization defense mechanisms. They even may not even raise their kids healthily. The most traditional projective test for screening is TAT (Thematic Apperception Test). Through the description of thirty one pictures of TAT, an assessor can tell the unconscious desire and hidden motivation of a person. The Rorschach Test is also useful when the test-giver would doubt that the applicant has a severe mental disease like schizophrenia or severe depression.

Counseling Guidelines for MKs

Making a Permissive and Free Counseling Atmosphere

MKs are extremely sensitive to others' response and evaluation, including that of a counselor. Therefore, a counselor should make a special effort to have

a warm and permissive relationship with MK clients. Their life experiences of being exemplary kids in the mission field sometimes affect them so that so they try to fake being good in front of a counselor. In this case, counselors should pay much attention to establishing a free and comfortable relationship with them in order to break down their strong defense.

Evaluating Parent-Child Relationship Thoroughly

MKs' psychological problems are affected by their relationship with their parents. The most common unhealthy relationship with their parents can be pseudo-mutuality. This is defined as a homeostasis-seeking relationship between and among family members that give the surface appearance of being open, mutually understanding, and satisfying when in fact it is not. The religious atmosphere around them causes them to pretend that they are satisfied with the relationship with their parents and look nice in terms of relationship. But in fact, there is a possibility that there is always tension, conflict and distance between their parents and them. The second possible pathological relationship is distant relationship. Missionary parents are always busy doing their mission work in the mission field. Sometimes parents move far away from their children. Sometimes children move far away from their parents to get better education. This life condition would form a distant relationship in a missionary family. The last possible pathological relationship is a fused relationship. The children of missionaries just introject parents' value and belief system and they give up to form their own identities. MKs would suffer from fear and anxiety that they may go beyond the borderline of their parents.

Giving Compliments for MKs' Adjustments and Helping MKs Accept Their Difficulties

As the writer mentioned earlier, MKs often encounter rapid changes in life that bring about burdensome feelings and identity crisis to a third culture kid. It is not easy even for a mature adult to go through what MKs go through. So, there is a chance that counselors can have MK clients with very severe mental problems such as schizophrenia or autism. One important counseling tip for MKs' counselors is to consider their tough life histories and give them enough and dramatic compliments. In a solution-focused therapy, In Soo Kim suggests some good examples of compliment. She emphasized the effect of compliments when a counselor compares the degree of their improvement in a difficult circumstance. She suggested that counselors also can empower clients with scaling questions, miracle questions or exceptional questions. The main idea of this approach is that it is important for counselors of MKs to acknowledge the difficulties of their clients and give them a chance to think

about their good accomplishments and strong points in order to set a safe counseling environment and provide them energy and power to do their counseling sessions with a very positive expectation. The other approach of giving compliment can be a person-centered therapy. Even though the writer does not fully agree either with the philosophy or counseling goal of that approach, acceptance and empathetic understanding of MK clients should be very effective to MK counselors. Sometimes, some missionary parents may feel that it is a stigma that they bring their child to a counselor and so do the MKs who come to a counseling room with their parents. Counselors should fully accept their agonies and uneasy feelings and give them an exact empathetic understanding in order to break down their defenses and resistances. It is a good way to begin the counseling session with a full explanation about common difficulties in MKs caused by identity problems, interpersonal problems, adjustment problems and emotional problems in general. When the missionary parents and children listen to those objectives and clear psychological difficulties of MKs, they can easily open their minds and look into their problems objectively with a motivation to grow and change.

Encouraging Their Positive Aspects as MKs

Many authors pointed out many positive aspects about 'living as a MK' in a good number of books (Lane, 1993; Kane, 1980; Taylor, 1997; Park, 1996; Kim, 2003; Pollock, David, Ruth, 1999). First of all, variety of experiences in this international society can be considered as the best benefit for MKs. They can speak several languages. They can understand cultural differences. They can adjust themselves to a different culture. They can see the diversity of different life conditions. They can understand the minorities in any kind of society. Secondly, MKs can have a great opportunity to see and learn how God's Kingdom can be developed when they are grown up. The writer thinks that this is much more beneficial than anything else. They can see how sincerely and diligently their parents work for His Kingdom. They can see how much sacrifice should be given for building His Kingdom. They can directly see how an unbelieving native become a believing Christian. They can clearly see how the first believer's faith can grow by the Holy Spirit. They just learn through their own body and sense and this learning experience goes through their skin and more deeply down to their bone marrow.

One of the recent trends in counseling can be characterized as "resource-oriented counseling." Counselors and researchers have had a serious concern about "problem-oriented counseling." Both in the past and the present they emphasize the important role of clients' strong points and resources rather than their weak points and difficulties. Of course, the basic philosophy of this trend is based upon post modernism of the twenty-first century such as subjective interpretation and relativism. As a Christian scholar, the writer does not agree

with this philosophy at all. The basic tenet of Christianity starts when we accept our limitation as sinners. However, it is also true that when we realize our power in Jesus who gives us strength, we can do anything. MKs surely have much potential to be mentally ill and this is the reason why MK clients are sitting down before the counselors. But also they have uncountable blessings and strong points as MKs. MK counselors should have multi-focused viewpoints when they meet MK clients. They should look at MKs' vast resources rather than their problems and encourage MKs to utilize those assets in order to overcome their difficulties.

Helping Them Form the Most Important Identity as "God's Kid"

MKs can cope with their serious difficulties only when they form their true identity as God's Kids. In other words, only when MKs can reinterpret their earlier life difficulties and resources as God's Kids, can they finally integrate their experiences as God's provision and blessing. Unfortunately, some missionary parents are too busy doing mission to evangelize their own children, so their children can not help getting through their life agonies without any meaningful understanding of the "whys" in life. Nevertheless the most important mission of Christian parents is to introduce Jesus to their children as their personal Savior. Sometimes parents presume that their children are already sincere believers even though they have not evangelized them yet.

Counselors should first check if their MK clients have already accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior or not. If not, counselors should deliberately set the counseling goal to lead them to accept Jesus. But this does not mean that counselors have to focus on MKs' "born again experience" from the beginning of the sessions. Counselors include this spiritual goal in total counseling sessions and whenever they have a chance to confront MKs about it; that is when they do it. This can be done from the beginning to the end of the counseling process. The time to encourage the MKs to think about their spiritual status can be different according to the content and/or severity of their problems and current situation. However, counselors should open their eyes and focus on this subject through the sessions and never forget to check the spiritual maturity of MKs and utilize their own spiritual power to change them.

Recommended Counseling Programs for Mission School Teachers or Counselors

In previous sections, the writer reviewed the difficulties of MKs and some counseling guidelines. Several counseling programs can be recommended to MK counselors and mission school teachers from the review.

Self-Esteem Program

As the writer mentioned earlier, it is possible that MKs could not develop a high self-esteem due to their life condition. So, counselors and teachers should have interest in self-esteem programs for youth to assist MKs. Self-esteem can be defined as a positive self-concept and self-evaluation. This can affect everyday life including one's perception of other persons, and thinking and behavior patterns. The higher self-esteem people have, the better they function. Generally, the factors that affect self-esteem are known as peoples' physical condition, parenting style and evaluation, relationship with peers, achievement in academic work and so on. This program includes the definition of self-esteem, the factors affecting self-esteem, the evaluation of self-esteem of participants and the methods for increase of self-esteem. Counselors and teachers can refer to these self-esteem programs when it is necessary. And they also add some important elements such as strength as MKs and unlimited power as GKs (God's Kids).

Communication Skill Program

The repeated and rapid move from place to place of MK families may cause some communication skill deficit for missionary children. Many kinds of counseling programs have been developed which are helpful for increasing peoples' communication skills. These programs include the characteristics of desirable human relationship, some principles of human behaviors, several communication skills such as acceptance, empathetic understanding, clarifying, confronting, self-disclosure and so on.

Career Counseling Program

One of the most difficult problems of MKs is career decision-making. Because they have moved even from one country to another, they may have more opportunities than other students. But at the same time, this mobility can bring more disadvantages to MK students than benefits.

For MKs, it is very beneficial to think about their career early from childhood, to think about their advantages and disadvantages from the point of career decision-making and to plan their career far ahead. There are quality career counseling programs available. It is helpful to adapt these career programs in counseling sessions and educational setting for MKs. Through this program, counselors and teachers can evaluate MKs' career maturity, their decision-making skills, aptitudes, interests, career values, personalities, physical conditions and abilities. They also introduce variety of occupations that are available to MKs to help them make a final decision and plan their career in a

realistic and reasonable way.

Re-Adjustment Program

As this society is globalized, a series of cultural readjustment program have been developed in the counseling field. Korean Youth Counseling Institute (KYCI) already developed the cultural integrative adjustment program for reentry adolescent in 1995 (Park, 1995). This program starts with the evaluation of life satisfaction and it provides guidelines on how foreigners can adapt to a different culture. The adjustment period can be divided as observation period, confused period, and adjustment period. Generally, counseling can offer also guidelines for difficult life. This kind of information about adjustment period can also provide a wonderful compass for MKs life adventures. This program introduces four kinds of different adjustment styles such as separation, marginalization, assimilation and integration. Surely, the integration style of adjustment is best recommended for re-entry students; that means the individual not only retains the original cultural identity but also joins the majority group of people.

Living the Christian life includes a series of adjustments itself. We live in this world with a totally different set of values and viewpoint in life. In this sense, living as MKs has many benefits because they already learned how to adjust in different societies and cultures. At the same time, counselors and teachers can also educate MKs how to live with proper priority of Christian value systems and how not to be threatened by secular values.

Family Counseling Program

The final counseling program that the writer can recommend for MK counselors and teachers is the family counseling program. As MKs, they may have experienced several separations from their own families and have no clear boundary with other family members including parents. A number of well-structured family counseling programs have already been developed by Kim (1997) and Kim (1998). Such family counseling programs consisted several sub- educational programs: genogram, family development cycle, family structure, family function, family rule and so on. Clear understanding of MKs' families can release life's agony and burden and give MK clients a desirable direction they should move into.

CONCLUSION

This article focused only on the general review of MKs' difficulties and counseling principles and guidelines. The problems of MKs stem from their unique identity, the third culture kids. This situation produced a variety of

identity, communication, interpersonal, adjustment, family problems in MKs. In this regard, counselors should recognize the problems as well as the strengths of MKs provide good counseling sessions and programs for them, as the writer mentioned earlier. This article is just an introduction to MK counseling and further studies in this area are recommended. Researchers can conduct a survey in order to evaluate the problems and strengths of MKs. Counselors can keep records of their counseling experiences with MKs and do a qualitative study on it. Program developers can formulate good counseling programs that would consider the unique life conditions of MKs. It is the writers' desire that some of the counseling guidelines and programs introduced in this article could be helpful for counselors and teachers with mission interest and concentrate their efforts in those who are serving God, our King.

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