

## PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS AND RESOURCES OF KOREAN CHILDREN IN CHRISTIAN HOMES

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Decreased birthrate of 1.16 child per woman during their lifetime gained great amount of attention and responses from national level in Korea (KNSO, 2004). However, the efforts to understand children in Korea do not appear to be receiving much attention. As an effort to increase our understanding of Korean children, this study focuses on the psychosocial needs and resources of children in Korean Christian homes. Korea has experienced many struggles in its development as a nation over the past century. Political and economical developments, war, tension between North and South Korea, and conflict between the encroaching Western culture and traditional values, all create a social climate that has a direct influence on the psychosocial well-being of Korean children.

This study aims to examine the psychosocial well-being of Korean children and explore the role that helping professionals can play in meeting the needs of Korean children. In addition, this study hopes to engage in meaningful dialogue with Korean Christian church in order to help Korean children. The Korean Christian church appears to be a useful vehicle for addressing the needs of children as one of the institutions in Korea. In the past, Korean Christians have played an important role in shaping Korean history and society (Min, 1998). The Korean church continues to have great capacity for playing an important role among Korean people, including children.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

While the benefits of needs assessment are numerous, Korean children have not received attention from the perspectives of their needs and resources. There is very little in the literature that helps us understand the resources or the emerging needs of Korean children. However, we may infer from available studies by researchers and professionals that there are concerns about child maltreatment and high levels of stress, especially related to the areas of school and family

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(Hamn & Guterman, 2001; Doe, 2000; Lee, J. Y., 2000; Park, 2000; Lee, 1999; Kwon, 1998; Lee, Han & Park, 1998; Chee, Yee, Park & Han, 1997; Lim, 1997; Ahn & Lee, 1996; Kim 1998; Lee, Yoon, Lee, Kim, Suh, Kim & Shin, 1997; Ahn, Park & Lee, 1998; Park, 1996).

### Child Maltreatment Concerns

Individual rights regarding protection against violence, even within the cultural emphasis on family, have been acknowledged within the current legal standards. Researchers, clinicians, graduate students in helping professions, have all started to examine the problem of child maltreatment in Korea. Earlier research has focused on understanding the concept of child maltreatment and measuring the prevalence of it in Korea (Kim & Ko, 1990; Yoon, 1997; Park, 2000; Chae, 1994; Lee, 1999; Lee, 2000; Huh, 1993). Despite the fact that different researchers used different measurements to assess the level of child maltreatment, the general consensus is that there is a relatively high prevalence rate of child maltreatment in Korea (Hahm & Guterman, 2001). Inadequate after-school care, especially for low income families, has also received some attention (Kim & Lee, 2000; Lee & Yang, 1999; Jung & Choi, 1996; Kim, 1996). However, it appears that intervention and prevention for child maltreatment has received less attention in the literature. This suggests that there is still a need to further develop culturally sensitive intervention and prevention programs (Kong, 2000). Child maltreatment is an area that seems to have gained some recognition as a “problem” in Korea. However, the benefits of this recognition appear to be limited at this time. It will require continuing efforts in order to bring lasting impact in the level of protection affording Korean children.

### Mental Health Concerns

Another area of concern for Korean children is their mental health. Korean children are reported to experience greater levels of stress than children in the United States (Lee, Han & Park, 1998; Chee, Yee, Park & Han, 1997). They worry frequently about school, health, and friends. One out of five children in one study reported worrying about their parent’s unemployment or parental conflict such as divorce, separation, and discord (Lim, 1997). Negative events that take place in the family, such as divorce, parental discord, illness or death in the family, are perceived as the number one stressor for children. Other stressors are reported to be school examinations, sibling and peer relationships, and

being home alone (Shin & Kim, 1996). With non-traditional, single-parent families increasing, a greater number of children may be concerned about family matters to the extent that they need outside help to transition through the difficult challenges that they face. However, efforts to increase resiliency in children or to promote appropriate adaptation to difficult circumstances appear to be minimal or non-existent.

### Educational Stress

Education is another area of concern for Korean children. Most school-age children are engaged in extra-curricular activities after school, such as tutoring, academic learning centers, or music or physical training centers. Coupled with parents' general dissatisfaction with the current educational system and the general perception that higher education attainment is extremely important and competitive, parents are willing to pay for the additional cost to provide extra opportunities for their children. Parents, regardless of their socioeconomic status, view such opportunities as necessary, and they are willing to sacrifice financially. Emphasis on extra-curricular activities results in children spending more time on studying after school and less time in unstructured play. For example, 45.6% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade children reported that they study three to four hours after school and 9.6% reported that they study five or more hours. Also, a majority of 6<sup>th</sup> grade children reported to be engaged in more than two extra-curricular activities focusing on supplemental education (Ahn, Lee & Song, 1997; Choi, 1998). As children report higher degree of anxiety related to school, educational stress is an area that requires consideration.

Examining the problems of children in Korean Christian homes as a sub-group of Korean families would provide a stepping stone for future research regarding the needs, necessary treatment, and available resources for Korean children. As indicated earlier, Korean Christians make up a significant portion of Korean population. Historically, the Korean church has played an important role in shaping Korean society. This researcher believes that the Korean church's capacity to contribute to Korean society and to the well-being of Korean children is still great.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This study attempted to answer the following research questions. What did participants perceive as challenges or problems for Korean

children in Christian homes? To what extent were these identified challenges or problems supported by the current literature? What did participants perceive as strengths and resources for Korean children in Christian homes to combat the challenges associated with parental divorce and family disruptions, the “home-alone” syndrome and parental neglect, high parental expectations and performance pressures, and abuse in the family environment?

## METHOD

This study includes qualitative data collected through surveys and interviews in 1999 and 2003 respectively.

### First Round-Survey Study Participants

A total of 44 people participated in this study. Eight people were from the First Annual Meeting of the Korean Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy Association (KCCPA), and five were pastors attending a training workshop at the Clinical Pastoral Education Graduate School of Korea (KCPE). The remaining 31 participants were graduate students enrolled in an introductory Christian education course at a small Christian theological seminary located near Seoul.

### Instruments

The survey instrument was designed by this researcher. The survey has three sections. The first section asks an open-ended question to identify the needs and challenges of Korean children between the ages of 5 and 12 in Christian homes. The second section asks respondents to identify strengths and resources available to address a list of problems, including family disruption, child neglect, high parental expectations and academic pressure, and child abuse. These four areas of problems were drawn from the available literature. The third section asks for demographic information of respondents, including age, gender, population they work with, work setting, the number of years working, and income level.

### Procedures

This research was part of a project that investigated the needs and resources of Korean Christian communities. This project was led by Dr. McMinn at Wheaton College and approved by the Human Research Review Committee. Following one of the research formats used in the

project, the survey for this study was developed in English and translated into Korean by this researcher and a doctoral student in clinical psychology whose first language is Korean. The student also provided feedback on the survey instrument for its clarity, content, and cultural relevance. Informed consent was requested with the survey. The collected surveys were coded in the NUD\*IST program according to the themes. Two other persons were trained and they coded the surveys as a reliability check.

### **Second Round-Interview Study Participants**

The second part of this study utilized in-depth interviews of selected professionals from various backgrounds who work closely with children or who understand children's issues in Christian homes. Fifteen professionals from various backgrounds were contacted for the interviews, including clergy, educators, counselors, and parents. Eleven individuals participated in the interviews, and hence were included in this study. They were professors, pastoral staff members, lay leaders, Christian elementary school staff, counselors, graduate students, and parents. Many were serving more than one role.

### **Instruments**

This researcher designed interview questions in the Korean language. The interview questions were reviewed by two masters' level staff members at a Christian counseling center to evaluate the clarity, content, and cultural relevance of the questions. The study was explained to interviewees and they were asked to fill out a demographic information to indicate their age, gender, population they work with, work setting, number of years working, and income level of population they work with. Participants were asked to identify current challenges or problems Korean children face, to express their views about the causes of such problems, to identify the most serious problem, and to identify the problems' relationship with age group, socioeconomic status, and being in Christian homes. In addition, participants were asked to identify resources and strengths to meet the identified challenges both in general and in Christian homes, and if not previously identified, specific circumstances such as high parental expectations and academic pressure, child neglect, family disruption, and child abuse. These circumstances were the same circumstances that were used in the survey study based on the available literature. Finally,

participants were asked to identify ways to further develop strengths and resources.

### Procedures

Interviewees were identified by initial contact with various Christian communities and personal resources. Initial contact with the prospective interviewees was conducted in Korean by this writer, as were all the interviews. On the day of the interview, the purpose of the project and how the information would be used were explained in person, and the interviewees' informed consent was sought verbally. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. The qualitative data analysis software program, NUD\*IST, was used for data analysis. The text of each transcript was coded in NUD\*IST according to the themes that emerged from the participants' interviews. Two other people were trained and they coded independently for verification purposes.

## RESULTS

### Survey Study

#### Participant Characteristics/Demographics

Forty-four individuals participated in the survey study. However, only 17 of these individuals provided all of the requested demographic information. Twenty-two other individuals provided some of the demographic information, including age, gender, population they work with, work setting, and level of income. For any given demographic variable, the number of individuals who provided information ranged from 24 to 38. Of those who provided demographic information, seventy-six percent (N=28) of the participants were females, and they ranged in age from 22 to 59 years (mean = 39.2 years, median = 40 years) and in clinical work experience from 1 to 30 years (mean = 9.9 years, median = 8 years). Sixty-three percent (N=20) of the participants were currently working with children and/or families. Others (N=12) indicated that they work with individuals, group, and/or youths. Eighty-one percent (N=26) reported church as their work setting and 13% (N=4) school. Other work settings included counseling center (3%, N = 1), and family (3%, N = 1). Fifty-two percent (N=23) of the participants reported the average income for their clients. Of those reported, 57% (N=13) reported that the average income for their clients was under 1,500,000 won (low-low middle class), 17% (N=4) reported

that it was between 1,500,000 and 3,000,000 won (middle class), and 13% (N=3) reported that it was over 3,000,000 won (upper-middle class). Thirteen percent (N=3) reported that their clients had multiple income levels, or an exact amount.

### Challenges or Problems

Results of the survey suggest that participants perceive that Korean children in Christian homes are experiencing difficulties in many areas. Participants' perception regarding the most frequently encountered challenge among Korean children in Christian homes relates to family environment. Seventy-three percent of the participants perceived that family-related issues such as parenting, family disruption, family discord, and economic difficulties are being experienced by these children. The majority of those who expressed concerns about the family environment perceived that the challenges involved parents. General parenting, specific concerns about parents' educational approach (both general and Christian), and the parents' inconsistencies in their daily lives were identified as problems.

In addition, 48% of the participants perceived that Korean children experience challenges associated with education and academic concerns. These concerns included inadequate educational methods and materials, high amounts of stress and pressure, being involved with too many learning activities, and having a competitive performance focus. The reported emotional difficulties were all related to high academic pressures and parental expectations, with the exception of one participant who identified loneliness due to a minimal number of siblings.

Thirty-six percent of the participants perceived that the social environment was another area of challenge for Korean children. To be specific, lack of opportunities for play, lack of Christian culture, lack of protective law, and negative cultural influences on children were perceived to be challenges. Moreover, 34% of the participants perceived matters related to spirituality and Christian practice presented challenges, such as not attending church and having no appropriate Christian role models.

For 27% of the participants, differences in values, such as differences between the old and new generations and between Christianity and society, were considered as challenges. The differing values appear to create confusion and conflicts. Other perceived

challenges included difficulties associated with building character, developing adaptive personality, forming peer relationships, understanding sexuality, fulfilling overall needs, and developing career interests.

### Strengths and Resources

For those challenges associated with parental divorce and family disruption, 43% of the participants perceived help and the availability of extended families as a resource. The second most frequently identified strength or resource was services or help available through church (27%), followed by social service agencies or social response like donations for the needy (20%). Other resources perceived by the participants were *jung* which describes emotional bond and care for others (7%), neighbors (5%), and reliance on the self or personal resource (2%).

Sixty-four percent (64%) of the participants identified some type of strength or resource (N = 28) for the challenges associated with the “home-alone” syndrome and parental neglect. To be specific, church (25%) and social service agencies (25%) were the two most frequently identified strengths or resources. Programs for children, both private and public, are perceived as a resource as well (14%). To a lesser extent, neighbors, extended families, and *jung* are perceived as resources.

Furthermore, about half of the participants provided some type of strength or resource for the challenges associated with high parental expectations and academic performance pressures (N = 21). Fourteen percent of the participants perceived available support from the church and peer group as a resource. Another 14% identified that there have been positive changes in parents due to higher education and parenting training/counseling. Other resources perceived by the participants included church, counseling services, educational reform, and available role models. Seven percent identified children’s character (obedience and/or submitting) as a resource.

In addition, 39% (N=17) of the participants identified some type of strength or resource for the challenges associated with abuse in the family environment. There were fewer participants who provided strengths or resources than previous challenges, and there were more participants who perceived having no strength or resource for this type of challenge. Of those who suggested strengths or resources, the participants identified protective agencies or protective services most



often, followed by training or counseling for parents. Other resources identified were church, child training/counseling, relatives-neighbors, and children's character.

### Interview Study

#### Participant Characteristics/Demographics

This study included those 11 individuals who were able to participate, from three geographical locations: four participants from the capital city, four from a mid-sized city near the capital, and three from another mid-sized city in a southern province. Through in-depth interviews, participants were invited to talk about a number of concerns related to this study in a one-on-one setting. Of the 11 individuals who participated in this study, 73% of the participants were female (N = 8), and they ranged in age from 31 to 53 years (mean = 39.4 years, median = 39 years) and in clinical experience from 5 to 15 years (mean = 9.5 years, median = 9 years). Sixty-four percent (N=7) of the participants were currently working with children and/or families. Others indicated that they work with individuals, groups, and/or youth (N = 4). The majority of the participants were parents themselves (N = 10), and two individuals were currently enrolled in graduate study programs in counseling related fields. Also, 64% (N=7) of the participants worked in more than one setting, often in combination with church and school (N = 6), or with church and counseling center (N = 1). Eighteen percent of the participants reported to work only at church (N = 2) or at school (N = 2). Eighty-two percent (N=9) of the participants work in a church setting, either as paid staff or non-paid lay workers, and 73% (N=8) work in an elementary or post-secondary school setting. Regarding the average income of their clients, 64% (N=7) reported that it ranged between 1,500,000 and 3,000,000 won (middle class), 18% (N=2) reported that it was over 3,000,000 won (above upper-middle class), and 9% (N=1) reported that it was under 1,500,000 (low to low-middle class). One participant reported two groups of clients, one with an average income of under 1,500,000 won and the other over 3,000,000 won.

Overall, participants in the interview study appeared to have similar gender, age, and experience range characteristics as the participants of the survey study. The proportions of participants who work in church and with children and/or families also appeared to be similar. However, interview study participants have a higher rate of participants who work

in the school setting. This means that the interview study participants had direct contact with children in the school setting, or had obtained a higher level of education and were holding a teaching position in the college setting.

### Challenges or Problems

There were three areas of challenges that the majority of the participants identified. Ten participants expressed challenges associated with education and academic concerns, family environment, and emotional difficulties. One of the concerns expressed related to education-academic is that the children are engaged in too many extra-curricular and learning activities after school. Consequently, children may lack unstructured play or free time. In general, the participants appear to be concerned with the number of learning activities in which children currently participate, as well as those scheduled activities being pressured or forced onto them by parents.

Many of the emotional difficulties Korean children which participants reported concerned with the academic performance pressure and high parental expectations. The majority of the participants perceived that there are feelings of pressure and stress related to academic performance and learning activities after school. In addition, many of the participants perceived that children experience emotional difficulties in the context of the family. Some described children having emotional instability and stress due to having both parents work outside the home. Others described emotionally withdrawn and self-blaming children in single-parent homes or disrupted homes where children feel they caused the family breakup. Overall, the unavailability of parents due to children's busy schedules, especially the absence of mothers who traditionally served as the main caretaker of children, are associated with children's feelings of loneliness and having to seek other sources, such as friends, to fulfill their emotional needs.

As children are reported to experience emotional difficulties in the family context, it appeared that there is a connection between the challenges Korean children face and the family environment. The majority of the participants perceived that the relationship between Korean parents and children is far from being strong. Many pointed to problematic communication patterns focused on academic related issues. Communication difficulties appear to be fostered or maintained

by a lack of family time as a result of children's busy learning schedules and parents' busy work or other engagement schedules. Parents are perceived to pressure their children to excel and attend a number of learning activities.

Another area of challenge for Korean children described by participants relates to peer relationships. This included a wide range of concerns such as competitiveness and comparing with others, a lack of group opportunities, inappropriate social interactions, and group bullying or victimizing a child in a group. Overall consensus was that peers play a very important role in the lives of children, more so with upper-level elementary school-aged children.

Participants also perceived numerous other developmental issues such as physical, spiritual, and character development and social environment as challenges for Korean children. Thirty-six percent of the participants perceived the development of a healthy self-concept as a challenge because of the focus on academic performance. Children's ability to perform academically was considered to determine how good they are as persons. Some participants also identified challenges associated with developing social skills and coping skills.

## Participants' View about Identified Challenges

### Parental Divorce and Family Disruption

Eighteen percent of the participants had mentioned challenges related to parental divorce or family disruption without this researcher's prompting. When this researcher asked participants to consider the issues of parental divorce and family disruption, 55% of the participants agreed that it is a challenge faced by Korean children, and they often supplied examples of what they had observed. Eighteen percent of the participants acknowledged that there may be problems related to the issue, but did not appear to consider it as a major concern. Nine percent denied the issue as a problem in their work settings.

### "Home-Along" Syndrome and Parental Neglect

When asked directly, eighty-two percent of the participants considered the "home-alone" syndrome and parental neglect as a challenge for Korean children. However, the definition of neglect appeared to vary among the participants. Some participants appeared to consider parents' inability to spend time with their children as neglect. One participant stated that both parents working outside the home in

order to provide learning opportunities for their children while children are cared for by relatives or day care centers qualifies as neglect. Similarly, another participant talked about “wrapped” neglect. That is, parents are making arrangements, such as overseas learning opportunities, for their children so that they could be free from caring for their children. Without prompting, eighteen percent of the participants believed that there may be problems related to neglect in some cases, but not in general.

### High Parental Expectations and Performance Pressures

Ninety-one percent of the participants identified challenges associated with academic performance pressure and high parental expectation. One participant, who had only talked about the importance of academic performance in building self-concept also acknowledged high parental pressure when asked directly. None of the participants questioned academic performance pressure or high parental expectation as a challenge faced by Korean children.

**Abuse in the Family Environment:** The majority of participants acknowledged that abuse in the family environment is a challenge for Korean children. Many of the participants talked about verbal abuse being readily observable. One participant perceived that there may be one child in a classroom of forty who might be abused. Another participant thought parents may become “abusive” without realizing it when they are too focused on children [and their performance].

### Strengths and Resources

Again, in the interview study, participants were asked to identify what they would consider as strengths or resources to combat identified challenges or difficulties in relation to two main categories: being Korean and being Christian. Overall, there were more strengths or resources identified in the category of church or Christianity than in the category of Korea or Korean society.

### Korea/Korean Society

Forty-five percent of the participants considered family as a Korean resource. Availability and support of grandparents, parents’ willingness to sacrifice for their children and their education, their own educational background, and overall importance of family in Korea are considered as strengths and resources. Another forty-five percent of the

participants pointed to the national or societal characteristics of Korea as a strength. They perceived that Koreans tend to have a strong focus on the family and are community-oriented rather than individualistic. Related to community orientation is the concept of “*jung*,” which denotes care and response to others because of an emotional connection. The participants perceived that Koreans tend to use “*jung*” as a resource. Another 36% of the participants identified education as a strength and resource. It was noted that there have been positive changes in the educational system. Furthermore, 27% of the participants also perceived that there are organized programs, such as parent training and support groups, as resources for the faced challenges.

### Church/Christianity

Seventy-three percent of the participants perceived participation and availability of church and church programs as strengths or resources in overcoming the challenges. The majority of participants perceived that the church is concerned with family and parenting issues, and offers Bible studies, small groups, and/or parent training opportunities in addition to other services such as Sunday school, counseling, after-school programs and mercy ministries. Another important resource of the church was the opportunity to learn and experience in the form of community. In addition to having church or church programs as a resource, 36% of the participants perceived that there were spiritual resources such as faith, the Bible, and prayer. One participant specifically saw the value in establishing a positive self-concept and receiving support from having faith in God. Another 36% of the participants perceived that there are Christian organizations in addition to local churches that offer resources for children. Other strengths or resources found in church or Christian homes, endorsed by fewer than 30% of participants, were the Christian family, relationships with Sunday school teachers and peers, availability of personnel resources in the church, and monetary support from the church to the needy.

### Future Change Direction

Related to the challenges or problems Korean children face, participants were invited to discuss what changes they would like to see in the future. Eighty-two percent of the participants identified some

changes they would like to see in the church. The majority of participants would like to see more church programs offering practical help and strongly supporting families, such as parenting and marriage programs and/or small group opportunities. Some of the participants also discussed how the church should be better organized and actively involved in the society through their work with underserved populations and social welfare in general. Fifty-five percent of participants identified society and culture as a future area for change, including having a better organizational structure and increased utilization of local social welfare agencies, attending to socially disadvantaged groups of people, and utilizing the strength of strong family ties and community focus. One participant also wished that communication skills would be taught and utilized by the general population. Forty-five percent of the participants wished for changes in parenting or family environments through parent education or having family time together to deepen family relationships. Thirty-six percent of the participants discussed changes in the educational environment: having reality-based career education, involving parents in implementing educational policies, having counselors in school, and having more educational options such as home-schools or alternative schools. Eighteen percent of the participants believed children could benefit from having a counseling service available to them.

## DISCUSSION

### Psychosocial Needs and Challenges

The findings from these two studies suggest that Korean children's needs and challenges can be categorized into two broad areas: those related to the educational and academic environment, and those related to family environment. Moreover, the stress on children to perform academically seems to be compounded by a family environment where parents are less available to meet the emotional needs of their children. While there is minimal literature available related to Korean children's emotional difficulty, the few stress-related studies available confirm relatively high levels of emotional stress experienced by Korean children (Lee, Han & Park, 1998).

The participants of the survey study identified the family environment, educational and academic environment, social environment, and spirituality and religious practice as the most frequently faced challenges by Korean children in Christian homes. For

the interview participants, family environment, educational and academic environment, and emotional difficulties were the most frequently identified challenges for Korean children. They perceived that Korean children in Christian homes faced the same challenges as other Korean children. Based on these identified challenges from the survey and interview studies, the psychosocial needs and challenges of Korean children in Christian homes seem to be most apparent in the areas of family environment and education/academic environment. Korean families have evolved and changed over time, and they continue to experience changes today. Perhaps in an attempt to adapt to the changing context, parents have placed additional stress on their children. Many of the participants from both the survey and interview studies described parents as “overemphasizing” academic performance and exerting great amounts of pressure on children. Some of the participants from both studies also pointed out that parents tend to work outside of the home and are not available to their children. In addition, the family environment was described by some survey participants as having a lack of harmony or warmth, and an increase in parental conflict. Lack of communication and weakened relationship between parents and children were also noted by interview participants.

Furthermore, survey study participants expressed concern that the current family environment in Korea did not support the children’s spiritual development. Parents’ lack of consistency regarding faith and the pressure on spiritual practice were frequently identified as challenges. This was also a concern expressed by the interview participants. Although they were not clear about the extent of the problem, some of the interview participants acknowledged that Korean children in Christian homes experience added difficulty stemming from the pressure to adhere to Christian religious practice. Overall, it is possible that Korean Christian children experience a significant amount of stress in the family environment. This is supported by one study that identified negative events in the family as the primary stressor for Korean children (Shin & Kim, 1996). However, there is inadequate attention given to this issue in the literature.

Another area of difficulty for Korean children relates to the educational and academic environment, as participants of both studies described. Interview study participants strongly identified this area of challenge and described Korean children as being involved with too many extra-curricular learning activities, having very limited

unstructured time, being highly competitive, and feeling pressure and stress related to academic performance and parental expectations. Many of the participants of the interview study indicated that challenges associated with the educational and academic environment seemed to increase as children grew older. Two participants of the interview study specifically mentioned how academic performance was often equated with who the child was as a person. In spite of these difficulties, there is limited literature available addressing the issue. However, the available literature does agree with our findings that Korean children are engaged in many extra-curricular learning activities and feel stressed from the performance focus (Ahn, Lee & Song, 1997; Choi, 1998).

There is a possibility that a tradition of strong family ties in Korean culture may have influenced Korean parents to become very concerned about their children's academic performance. Korean parents may view their children's academic success as a reflection of their own success as parents. Combined challenges related to the family and educational/academic environments inevitably yield emotional difficulties for Korean children. This is especially clear in the interview study where participants described the challenges Korean children face in more detail. Consequently, emotional aspects surfaced more prominently than in the survey study. Korean children were described as "pressured," "burdened," "stressed," "unstable," "unfulfilled," and "insecure."

In the survey study, a number of challenges associated with child maltreatment was identified by the participants. Given opportunities to respond to identified challenges, the interview participants, in general, considered child maltreatment as a challenge for Korean children. However, further description revealed that the participants often used their own definitions of child maltreatment, so it remains unclear as to the severity and prevalence of the problem. For example, one participant stated that children may be neglected by parents who make learning arrangements for their children in order to be freed from childcare responsibilities. Several participants noted that children from families of low socioeconomic status are at greater risk of maltreatment. Overall, however, the extent to which interview participants considered child maltreatment as a challenge for Korean children seemed to be less than the weight they placed on challenges related to the family and educational environments.



A significant amount of the available literature confirmed the presence of child maltreatment. However, many of the researchers used different standards in measuring child maltreatment. There appears to be a lack of consensus in defining child maltreatment, especially concerning the use of corporal punishment. Although participants of this study did not specifically address the issues of corporal punishment or define child maltreatment, their responses seemed to reflect a diverse understanding of these issues.

A number of other challenges identified by the participants of this study has little or no support in the literature. For example, challenges associated with the social environment, differing values, and the development of character do not appear to have received much attention in the literature. Overall, the literature is limited in number and topic, and does not adequately address the needs and challenges of Korean children or Korean Christian children as identified in this study.

### Resources and Strengths

Although family environment is one of the areas of challenge for Korean children, there continues to be a belief that Korean families, including extended families, are a great resource when faced with problems. The strong emphasis on family ties in Confucianism may have been reshaped or weakened over the years, but it has not completely disappeared in Korean culture. In both studies, participants noted that grandparents and close relatives served as a safety net for children who become identified as “in need.” Help and support available through the extended family, as well as parental commitment to children, were considered strengths of Korean families. Many of the interview participants perceived that family can be strengthened when parents participate in parent training programs. In addition, the interview study participants identified certain Korean national characteristics as strengths. They described Koreans as community-oriented people, responding well to the needs of neighbors, and as having the capacity to accept changes.

Survey study participants did not list church consistently as a resource for the specific challenges identified. On the other hand, 73% of those interviewed considered church, or what church offers, as a resource that can be used to help Korean children with challenges. Church provides many opportunities for parents to learn about family issues from a Christian perspective. These opportunities include, but

are not limited to, pre-marital programs, marital programs, parent training programs, and programs for fathers and/or mothers. Another resource provided by the church was the opportunity to experience small group communities. Whether they offer programs such as after-school programs in low-income neighborhoods or social service programs, people from local areas were thought to benefit from the services.

The services that the church currently offered were considered important resources, but the interviewed participants expressed their wish for the church to become more effective. They desired that the church would offer help in a more practical manner, including parenting and family-related issues. They also wished the church would offer more resources directly to children. Church, in general, offered many resources to Christian families, but there appears to be room for further development. This may explain why a relatively small number of survey participants listed the church as a resource. In more specific challenging situations, the availability of the church as a resource may be limited. This is an area that should receive further study.

In general, the participants of the survey study more often identified government agencies or government funded social service centers as a resource than participants of the interview study. Although small in number, some of the participants of the survey study listed legal protection available for children as a resource for Korean children when faced with abuse in the family environment. However, many participants also responded that there are no resources available for such a challenge. None of the interview participants identified legal protection as a resource for children. It is not clear whether the participants were aware of the legal protection available or whether they perceived such protection as unhelpful. However, what is clear is that the available resources as described in this section appear to be insufficient to meet the overall challenges and difficulties faced by Korean children.

### LIMITATIONS

Because this research was designed for qualitative study, the results do not provide information about the prevalence or severity of the findings. In addition, the participants of this study were associated with Christian organizations. The interview study participants were selected from a convenient sample of pastoral staff, lay leaders, educators,

and/or concerned parents of Christian background. The participants' understanding of Korean children in general may be influenced by their Christian backgrounds. Furthermore, the number of participants was relatively small (44 for the survey study and 11 for the interview study), therefore the representative nature of the sample should be considered carefully, and the findings should not be generalized to the wider Korean population.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made for future research. First, as the family and educational environments are considered areas of challenge for Korean children, it would be helpful to examine ways to strengthen the family and educational environments. This could include an investigation of effective ways to deal with the identified challenges, including consideration of how other nations have done so. Evaluation of parents' current educational and parenting choices, and ways to empower parents to exercise their parental rights effectively, should be considered. Also, further research related to strengthening the identified resources and increasing utilization of these available strengths and resources should be considered as well. Specifically, a more detailed look at church as a resource would be helpful. Most critically, ways to provide help with identified needs and challenges, taking available strengths and resources into consideration, need to be developed and implemented to offer treatment options for children and families to combat the difficulties they experience. Currently offered services need to be examined for their effectiveness, because treatment and preventive programs, and the implementation of such programs, are desperately needed.

In addition, further research should focus on the emotional functioning of Korean children and effective ways to promote emotional and psychological health in their context. Research that closely examines Korean children in a more specific context would be helpful as well. For example, assessing the needs of Korean children with behavioral and/or emotional problems, of children living in rural areas, or of children in impoverished areas, would each provide meaningful information about their needs and challenges in more specific context. In addition, comparing Korean children in families with varying religious practices would be helpful in understanding the

relationship between children's needs and challenges related to family religion.

### CONCLUSION

This study explored the psychosocial needs and resources of Korean children in Christian homes. Korean children face many psychosocial needs and challenges, and they have limited strengths and resources to effectively deal with these challenges. Some needs and challenges are associated with the family and educational environments, as well as numerous emotional difficulties experienced by Korean children. There are some resources and strengths for meeting the challenges, which are available in family, national characteristics, and church. However, the current resources and strengths appear to be insufficient to adequately address all the psychosocial needs and challenges Korean children face. Further prevention and intervention is needed to address the needs and challenges of Korean children effectively. This process will require continual communication and joint efforts among all involved individuals.

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