

Perceptions of Child Abuse among the Undergraduate Students in Korea

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to analyze the level of perceptions of child by college students. The data was collected from 200 undergraduate students in B universities located in Chungnam by structural questionnaire from May to June, 2017. Parent-Child Conflictive Tactics Scales (CTSPC) developed by Straus was used to understand the perception of child abuse by college students. Data were analyzed using SPSS 18.0. The results show that the average score for child abuse among undergraduate students were 0.81 of 1, respectively. Among the sub-domains of child abuse, physical abuse was 0.89, violent discipline was 0.78, neglect was 0.63, and emotional abuse was 0.44 of 1. And there was significant differences in the perceptions of child abuse among the department ($F=7.009$, $p<.001$) and the grade ($F=5.676$, $p=.001$). There was significant differences in the perceptions of child abuse among the willingness to report child abuse ($t=2.102$, $p=.037$). Therefore, It is necessary to develop education programs to prevent of child abuse and respect for human beings.

Keywords: *Perception, Child abuse, Violent discipline, Emotional abuse, Physical abuse, Neglect*

Introduction

An international study conducted by the World Health Organization in September 2016 revealed that a quarter of adults around the world (one in five women and one in thirteen men) reported having experienced physical abuse during childhood. In addition, approximately 41,000 abused children under 15 years old die every year. Furthermore, a countless number of children experience emotional abuse and neglect ¹.

Statistical data on child abuse in Korea shows that the incidence of child abuse continues to increase every year in accordance with the type of abuse. In particular, reported cases of emotional abuse have soared from fewer than 4,000 in 2013 to 7,197 in 2015, while physical abuse cases have more than doubled, from fewer than 3,000 in 2013 to 6,661 in 2015. Among these,

the abuser has been found to be the father in 5,368 cases, and the mother in 3,456 cases. Thus, there is a much higher number of incidents in which the abusers are the parents than other people, such as institution staff (427 cases). The ages of the victims are distributed as follows: 14.4% 4-6 year-olds, 18.1% 7-9 year-olds, 19.5% 10-12 year-olds, and 22.2% 13-15 year-olds. Thus, the risk of child abuse is relatively higher among 13- to 15-year-olds than in other age groups ².

Child abuse poses behavioral, physical, and emotional hazards as children enter adulthood. Victims may subsequently become assault perpetrators or victims, and they may struggle with depression, smoking, obesity, high-risk sexual behavior, unintended pregnancy, drug abuse, suicide, and even various physical illnesses ³.

Therefore, child abuse is a serious social problem, and the definition and scope of the phenomenon must be precisely grasped to prevent it. It is necessary to examine how child abuse is socially perceived and publicized ⁴. From this perspective, it must be analyzed on socio-cultural, family, and personal levels.

As child abuse has been surfacing as a social issue, national accountability has also come to be emphasized⁵.

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Various media outlets have increasingly been covering child abuse, as these problems have become more than simple domestic affairs. In child abuse cases, the identity of the victim as a child causes many complications. Considering the rising number of child abuse cases, there is a serious lack of awareness of this type of abuse.

While the debate on whether an action qualifies as discipline or abuse goes on, many child victims continue to suffer. The lack of awareness does not only surround child abuse, but also reporting procedures. To prevent cases of child abuse and to help foster a healthier society, national and local governments should make the prevention, discovery, and treatment of child abuse a priority task ⁶.

Various previous studies on child abuse awareness have covered research on mandated reporters^{7,8}. However, there has been insufficient research on university students' perceptions of the phenomenon. To better prevent child abuse, it is necessary to educate and publicize not only mandated reporters, but also university students, who are receiving education on human life ⁵.

The main factor that affects child abuse awareness and reporting is the experience of child abuse prevention education. Child abuse prevention education involves the provision of information on ways to prevent child abuse and to minimize or end the problems caused by child abuse⁹. In a previous study, child abuse prevention education was found to have significant effects on the reporting intentions¹⁰. Furthermore, the child abuse awareness and reporting knowledge levels were higher in those who had received child abuse prevention education than in those who had not¹¹. Moreover, while it is suggested that child abuse prevention education must be provided to university students as well as to mandated reporters¹², statistical research on the status quo of preventive education for university students has been lacking.

It can be inferred that child abuse prevention education not only affects the child abuse reporting intent, but also the recognition of child abuse and the knowledge of reporting procedures, which ultimately contribute to the prevention of child abuse. The present study therefore attempted to collect the data needed to develop a child abuse prevention educational program to improve child abuse awareness and reporting knowledge by understanding college students' degree of awareness of child abuse.

Method

Sample and Data Collection: The data was collected from 200 students in B universities located in Chungnam by structural questionnaire from May to June, 2017.

Instruments: Parent-Child Conflictive Tactics Scales (CTSPC) developed by Straus¹³ was used to understand the perception of child abuse by college students. The scale consists of 27 items. Each sub-domain is violent discipline, emotional abuse, physical abuse, neglect. The Cronbach's α was 0.826.

Data Analysis: The collected data were analyzed with the SPSS 18.0 software program. The general characteristics of the subjects were analyzed by frequency and percentage, and the degree of child abuse was analyzed by mean and standard deviation. T-test and ANOVA were conducted to analyze the differences in child abuse according to the general characteristics of the subjects and the characteristics of child abuse. A scheffe test was done as a post hoc test.

Results

General Characteristics: Table 1 presents the subjects' general characteristics. The percentage of male college students was 32.5%, and that of female college students was 67.5%. Nursing, social welfare, music, and law were 25.0%, respectively 47.0 in the third grade, and 51.0% in the Christian religion.

Table 1: General characteristics

n = 200

Characteristics	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	65	32.5
	Female	135	67.5
Major	Nursing	50	25.0
	Social welfare	50	25.0
	Music	50	25.0
	Law	50	25.0
Grade	Freshman	38	19.0
	Sophomore	49	24.5
	Junior	94	47.0
	Senior	19	9.5
Religion	Protestant Christians	102	51.0
	Catholics	12	6.0
	Buddhists	1	0.5
	No religion	85	42.5

Characteristic of Child Abuse: Table 2 shows the results of analyzing the characteristics related to child abuse. The severity of child abuse was found to be severe 91.5%, and 81.5% said they did not know the phone number. 48.0% of them knew that child abuse was a crime, 52% did not know it, and 44.5% of them had experience in child abuse education. When they found child abuse, 98.5% of the respondents were willing to report it.

Table 2: Characteristic of child abuse

n = 200

Characteristic of child abuse		n	%
Severity of child abuse	Severe	183	91.5
	usually	14	7.0
	Not bad	3	1.5
Know the child abuse report phone number	Yes	37	18.5
	No	163	81.5
Perceived criminal behavior for child abuse	Yes	96	48.0
	No	104	52.0
Educational experience in child abuse	Yes	89	44.5
	No	111	55.5
Willingness to report child abuse	Yes	197	98.5
	No	3	1.5

The Level of the perceptions of child abuse: The level of perceptions of child abuse among undergraduate students was analyzed in Table 3. The results show that the average score for child abuse among undergraduate students were 0.81 of 1, respectively. Among the sub-domains of child abuse, physical abuse was 0.89, violent discipline was 0.78, neglect was 0.63, and emotional abuse was 0.44 of 1.

Table 3: Level of the perceptions of child abuse

Variable	Min	Max	M.	SD
Child abuse	.04	1.00	.81	.16
violent discipline	.00	1.00	.78	.31
emotional abuse	.00	.56	.44	.15
physical abuse	.00	1.00	.89	.18
neglect	.00	1.00	.63	.32

Differences in the perceptions of child abuse according to the general characteristics: Table 4 shows the analyzed difference in the perceptions of child abuse according to the general characteristics of the subjects.

There was significant differences in the perceptions of child abuse among the department (F=7.009, p<.001) and the grade (F=5.676, p=.001). With regard to the department, nursing showed a higher the perceptions of child abuse than music and law, and social welfare than law. In relation to grade, junior and senior showed a higher the perceptions of child abuse than sophomore.

Table 4: Differences in the perceptions of child abuse according to the general characteristics

Categories		Perceptions of child abuse	
		M ± SD	t or F(p)
Gender	Male	.78 ± .18	-1.850 (.066)
	Female	.82 ± .14	
Major	Nursing(a)	.86 ± .11	7.009 (.000)*** a, b > c, d
	Social welfare(b)	.85 ± .11	
	Music(c)	.77 ± .17	
	Law(d)	.75 ± .20	
Grade	Freshman(a)	.81 ± .11	5.676 (.001) B < c, d
	Sophomore(b)	.74 ± .23	
	Junior(c)	.82 ± .13	
	Senior(d)	.89 ± .07	
Religion	Christians	.83 ± .16	1.209 (.308)
	Catholics	.77 ± .24	
	Buddhists	.89 ± .00	
	No religion	.78 ± .14	

*** p<0.01

Differences in the perceptions of child abuse according to the characteristic of child abuse: Table 5 shows the analyzed difference in the perceptions of child abuse according to the characteristic of child abuse.

There was significant differences in the perceptions of child abuse among the willingness to report child abuse (t=2.102, p=.037). When they found child abuse, they reported it higher than not reporting it.

Table 5: Differences in the perceptions of child abuse according to the characteristic of child abuse

Characteristic of child abuse		Perceptions of child abuse	
		M ± SD	t or F(p)
Serious perception of child abuse	Severe	.15 ± .01	1.804 (.167)
	usually	.22 ± .06	
	Not bad	.17 ± .10	

Conted...

Know the child abuse report phone number	Yes	.84 ± .15	1.259 (.209)
	No	.80 ± .16	
Perceived criminal behavior for child abuse	Yes	.82 ± .16	.830 (.408)
	No	.80 ± .16	
Educational experience in child abuse	Yes	.82 ± .14	1.148 (.252)
	No	.79 ± .17	
Willingness to report child abuse	Yes	.81 ± .17	2.102 (.037)*
	No	.62 ± .27	

* p<0.5

Discussion

This study set out to provide the data needed to develop a child abuse prevention educational program to improve child abuse awareness and reporting knowledge by understanding college students' child abuse awareness levels.

The perception of child abuse was high, at 0.81; among the different types, the awareness of physical abuse was the highest (0.89), followed by the awareness of violent discipline (0.88). These results were consistent with those Park's study⁵ on college students' perceptions of child abuse, suggesting that there had been no significant change in the perception of child abuse in 14 years.

When analyzing the difference in child abuse awareness by general characteristics, statistically significant differences were found according to the students' department and grade. Nursing and social welfare students were more aware of child abuse than music and law students. Moreover, junior and senior students showed higher perceptions of child abuse than sophomore students. These results were consistent with the findings of Park⁵, but differed from those of Cho and Chung¹⁴, who had found no differences in the perceptions of child abuse according to the grade or gender. The results of the present study were as follows. It can be inferred that the use of different subjects was accountable for the different results.

When analyzing the perception levels of child abuse according to the characteristics of child abuse, there was a statistically significant difference according to the presence of a reporting intent ($t=2.102, p=.037$). These results were

similar to those of a study by Cho and Chung¹⁴, which had shown no statistically significant difference from factors such as prior study or reporting experience.

A study by Kim¹⁵ showed that the amount of child abuse preventive education had a statistically significant effect on the child abuse awareness and reporting intention. In other words, college students' attendance of more child abuse prevention educational programs suggested a stronger reporting intent. These results reflected a study by Kim¹⁰ that had reported that child abuse prevention education affected the child abuse reporting intention, as well as a study by Eichelberger¹⁶ that had shown that child abuse education positively influenced the confidence and reporting intention. Based on the significant differences in intention to report, the results of this study showed that it is necessary to strengthen child abuse prevention education.

Conclusion

The more frequently a subject receives child abuse preventive education, the more sensitive they are to the recognition of child abuse, and this in turn affects their formation of a reporting intent. To promote the active reporting of suspected cases of child abuse, it is therefore necessary to offer continuous child abuse prevention education to university students, and to seek practical measures and policies to improve the awareness of child abuse.

Ethical Clearance: Not required

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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