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Atypical Development of Children from Multicultural Families in Korean Rural Areas

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore overall developmental status of young children from multicultural families. 290 kindergarten children were involved (147 from multicultural families and 143 from typical Korean families). The result indicated significantly lower levels of performance on overall development of children from multicultural families than children from typical Korean families. It also suggested that delayed language development of children from multicultural families negatively affected their cognitive development, which then influenced higher aggression indirectly through their low self-respect and low self-control. These findings indicated latent atypical development of children from multicultural families.

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1. Introduction

During the last decades, Korea has become a multicultural and multi-ethnic society (Hwang, Kim, Lee, Choi, & Lee, 2007; Koo, Park, & Choi, 2009). This can be observed in both urban and rural areas. However, there is a big difference between the two regions: In urban areas, usually a majority of immigrant men have come to find job opportunities, whereas in rural areas, many women have immigrated to marry Korean men (Lee, 2005; Oh, 2007; Yoon, 2005). Moreover, although the absolute number of multicultural families in cities is larger than in rural areas, the social, economic, and psychological influence of multicultural families is greater in rural areas because they form a higher percentage of the population (Koo, 2007). In terms of immigrant women's influx, in 1995, the number of immigrant women was 619 and most were Korean-Chinese (Korean National Statistics Office, 2005). However, according to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea, by 2011 this had increased to 189,900 from various countries in South East Asia, South America, and the former Soviet Union. This dramatic increase was also reflected in the marriage ratios, that is, 33.9% of all marriage cases in rural areas were interracial marriages in 2010 (Korean National Statistics Office, 2011).

Despite the high ratio of international marriage in rural areas, many young males in those areas appear not yet prepared to adjust to this change. Several studies on this issue have demonstrated that rather than understanding and accepting multicultural families, numerous young males in rural areas just tolerate them as an unavoidable given fact and display depressive emotions on intermarriage (Chu, 2006; Eom, 2008). Additionally, they report their feelings of insecurity about the increasing new cultures and colored races in their environment (Yang & Chung, 2006).

In accordance with this perspective on intermarriage, a considerable number of immigrant women may be at risk. Regarding this, Lee (2005) and Yoon (2003) reported serious problems with intermarriage in rural areas. First, there is a big age gap, averaging between 15 and 17 years in married couples. In some cases, the gap is more than 20 years. Second, without knowing the groom, the women move to Korea and get married through private agencies. More seriously, in this case, most immigrant women do not have enough linguistic ability to communicate with their husbands in Korean. Third, a high prevalence of economic deprivation has occurred in rural areas and the disadvantaged environment from poverty has negatively affected these women's marriages.

The foremost problem for multicultural families in rural areas in South Korea, however, is related to their children. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2008), 1 in 10 children from multicultural families in rural areas leaves primary school. Up to 87% of adolescents give up attending secondary school. Even children in primary schools show a very low level of academic achievement. Moreover, 37% of children from multicultural families have been bullied due to their maladjusted behavior. Related to their social maladjustment, there is other evidence that children in multicultural families easily get involved with school violence and delinquency (Ahn, 2007; Lee, 2007; Oh, 2007). Koo (2009) and Chung and Chung (2010) also showed that the aggressive behavior of children from multicultural families is often reported not only by school teachers but also by kindergarten teachers. Teachers explain that the aggressive behavior is different from that of children from typical Korean families.

To alleviate various problems in multicultural families, the Korean government has implemented several policies and supporting programs. For immigrant mothers, Korean language learning and culture classes were established (Chung, 2008). In addition, for children, after-school programs for coping with schoolwork were provided and mentoring services by school counsellors were established (Hwang, 2008; Jun, Pae, & Kwak, 2008). Nevertheless, there were no significant and positive outcomes (Koo, 2009). For instance, North Jeolla Province, which has the highest number of immigrant women and their children as a percentage of the population, reported that the problems were becoming even worse (Jeonbuk Development Institutes, 2010). These results demonstrate that more effective intervention systems are required based on in-depth understanding of the latent problems.

Therefore, there is a need to figure out the reasons for the non-remarkable results of governmental projects, and to analyze the requirement of immigrant women and their children, as well as to explore when children's problems started and why.

2. Method

To discover fundamental reasons for the maladjustment of young children from multicultural families, a quantitative study was conducted.

2.1. Participants

Initially, 350 kindergarten children were selected in North Jeolla province, South Korea. However, 43 parents did not give permission for this study and 17 children could not be involved in all the tests. The final number of participants was 290: 147 children from multicultural families (75 boys and 72 girls) and 143 children (73 boys and 70 girls) from typical Korean families.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Language development test

For measuring language development for children from multicultural families, Joo's (1982) revised version of Peabody Language Development Kits (Blank, Rose, & Berlin, 1978; Dunn, Horton, & Smith, 1981) was used. Joo's (1982) original kits consisted of 80 items in four sub-factors (perceptive, analytic, synthetic, and reasoning skills). Through a pilot study with children from multicultural families, 48 of 80 items were selected across four sub-factors. Cronbach's alphas ranged from .96 to .97.

2.2.2. Cognitive development test

To examine early cognitive development, an intelligence test, Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC) was used. The test was standardized in 1997 by Moon and Byon in Korea. K-ABC differs from most traditional intelligence tests because it has reduced emphasis on verbal abilities and has a significant advance toward non-discriminatory assessment of minority children from multicultural backgrounds (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1983). The test is divided into two domains called mental processing scales and achievement scales. More specifically, mental processing scales contain simultaneous processing, which is related to congenital cognitive development, and sequential processing, which is more involved in acquired cognitive development. However, for mental processing, the two sub-tests are considered as inborn mental abilities. In contrast, achievement scales are strongly related to acquired learning of children.

2.2.3. Social and emotional development test

To investigate the social-emotional development of the children, test scales on self-respect, self-control, and aggressive behavior were used. The self-respect test was the Pictorial Scale Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance (Harter & Pike, 1984). Based on a pilot study, 17 of 24 original items were included and Cronbach's alphas ranged from .84 to .96. Next, the self-control test was a revised version of Eisenberg et al.'s (1996) Self-Control Ability Test by Ahn (1998) in Korea. After a pilot study, it contained eight items with pictures and reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .81 to .98. Third,

aggressive behavior was measured using the developed test (Koo, 2007) based on the Behavior Check List (Achenback & Edelbrock, 1983), the Korean version of Child Behavior Checklist (Moon, Oh, Ha, & Park, 1999), and the Toddler Behavior Checklist (Lazelere, Ambersun, & Martin, 1989). Based on a pilot study, 14 items were used and Cronbach's alphas ranged from .93 to .95.

2.3. Data analysis

For data analysis, first an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare total and subscale scores of language and social-emotional development between children from multicultural families and those from typical Korean families. To explore cognitive development of children from multicultural families, their distributions of intelligence test scores were analyzed against those of children from typical Korean families. Furthermore, to understand cognitive characteristics of children from multicultural families, sub-factors of the intelligence test were compared separately. Finally, to investigate potential causal relationships among developmental domains, structural equation modeling analysis was conducted.

3. Results

3.1. Understanding in language development for children from multicultural families

Regarding language development, the results showed that children from multicultural families had significantly lower levels of language development over the sub-factors (see Table 1): perceptive ($t=-4.65$, $p<.001$; $M=2.11$, $SD=.75 < M=2.45$, $SD=.47$); analytic ($t=-2.30$, $p<.05$; $M=2.16$, $SD=.64 < M=2.31$, $SD=.40$); synthetic ($t=-9.27$, $p<.001$; $M=1.64$, $SD=.73 < M=2.29$, $SD=.43$); and reasoning skills ($t=-8.15$, $p<.001$; $M=1.69$, $SD=.74 < M=2.28$, $SD=.44$) when compared with those in typical Korean families. The delay in language development during early childhood is considered an independent impediment. Moreover, it also can be identified as a continuing negative factor over a person's lifetime on cognition and social-emotional development. This demonstrates that language development is a crucial part of general developmental process.

Table 1. Comparison of language and social-emotional development between the two groups

	Children from multicultural families ($n=147$)	Children from typical Korean families ($n=143$)	<i>t</i>
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Language			
Perceptive skills	2.11(.75)	2.45(.47)	-4.65***
Analytic skills	2.16(.64)	2.31(.40)	-2.30*
Synthetic skills	1.64(.73)	2.29(.43)	-9.27***
Reasoning skills	1.69(.74)	2.28(.44)	-8.15***
Social-emotional			
Self-respect	3.02(.53)	3.27(.48)	-4.08***
Self-control	2.61(.57)	2.89(.64)	-3.89***
Aggressive behavior	2.70(.54)	1.82(.69)	11.99***

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

3.2. Understanding in social and emotional development for children from multicultural families

To understand social-emotional development in children from multicultural families, the levels of self-respect, self-control, and aggressive behavior were measured, compared with those of children from typical Korean families. As can be shown in Table 1, children from multicultural families showed lower levels of self-respect ($t=-4.08, p<.001; M=3.02, SD=.53 < M=3.27, SD=.48$) and self-control ($t=-3.89, p<.001; M=2.61, SD=.57 < M=2.89, SD=.64$), whereas their aggressive behavior ($t=11.99, p<.001; M=2.70, SD=.54 > M=1.82, SD=.69$) was much higher than that of children from typical Korean families.

3.3. Understanding in cognitive development for children from multicultural families

To analyze cognitive development of children from multicultural families, the distributions of their K-ABC intelligence test scores were compared with those of children from typical Korean families. As can be seen from Fig. 1(a), the overall distribution of children from multicultural families in mental processing scales was similar to the normal distribution of the comparative group. However, in a more detailed analysis, there were differences in some specific intervals.

As the line chart of Fig. 1(a) shows, the percentage of children from multicultural families in the mean interval ranging from 90 to 109 was much lower than that of the children from typical Korean families. Moreover, in the borderline interval ranging from 80 to 89, which indicates cognitive developmental delay, the result showed a significant percentage difference between the two groups. Only 15.9% of children from typical Korean families were distributed in this borderline interval, whereas 25.2% of children of multicultural families appeared in the same interval. Although there were more children from multicultural families in the borderline interval on mental processing scales, the line chart indicated a normal distribution.

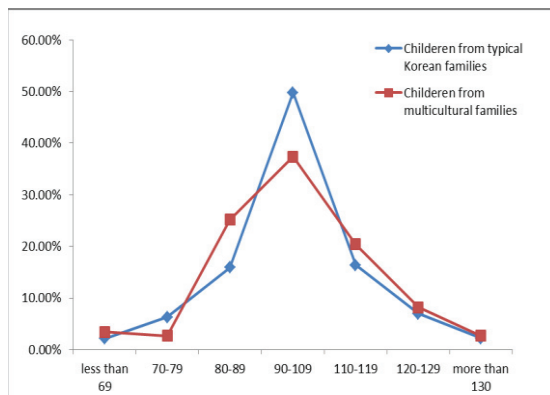


Fig. 1. (a) Comparison of mental processing scales

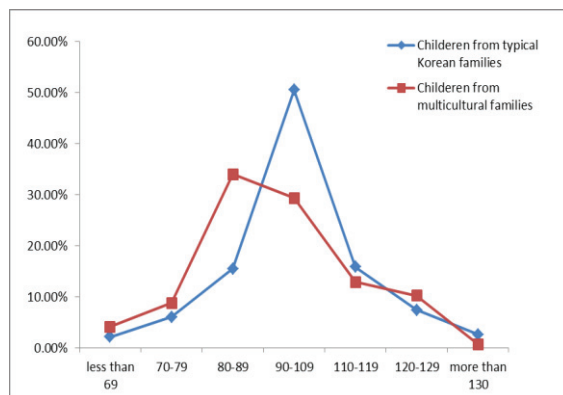


Fig. 1. (b) Comparison of achievement scales

However, a significant difference appeared on the achievement scales in the overall distribution as well as in specific intervals presented in the line chart in Fig. 1(b). The highest number of children from multicultural families in the achievement scales appeared in the borderline interval ranging from 80 to 89, which indicates cognitive developmental delay, with a positively skewed curve. In contrast, the largest number of children from typical Korean families appeared in the interval ranging from 90 to 109 with a normal distribution.

To reveal a clear view on cognitive development of children from multicultural families, the obtained

scores of mental processing scales were separately compared because the sub-factors emphasize different aspects of cognition, such as congenital and acquired function. Thus, the result of simultaneous processing was compared to that of sequential processing. Each obtained score of simultaneous and sequential processing was also compared to that of achievement scales. In addition, the total score of mental processing scales (simultaneous and sequential processing) was compared to that of achievement scales.

As can be seen in Table 2, children from multicultural families achieved significantly lower scores in sequential processing ($t=-5.14$, $p<.001$; $M=96.43$, $SD=17.89$ < $M=104.21$, $SD=15.93$) as well as in achievement scales ($t=6.19$, $p<.001$; $M=95.53$, $SD=15.81$ < $M=104.21$, $SD=15.93$) when compared to simultaneous processing. They also achieved a significantly lower mark in the degree of achievement ($t=4.10$, $p<.001$; $M=95.53$, $SD=15.81$ < $M=100.78$, $SD=16.30$) compared to the total score of mental processing scales.

Table 2. Comparison between cognitive sub-factors for children from multicultural families

Cognitive (comparison between sub-factors)	Children from multicultural families ($n=147$)		t
	$M(SD)$	$M(SD)$	
Sequential vs. Simultaneous	96.43(17.89)	104.21(15.93)	-5.14***
Sequential vs. Achievement	96.43(17.89)	95.53(15.81)	.69
Simultaneous vs. Achievement	104.21(15.93)	95.53(15.81)	6.19***
Mental processing vs. Achievement	100.78(16.30)	95.53(15.81)	4.10***

*** $p < .001$

According to the results, it can be assumed that fluid intelligence, which is strongly related to biological factors, does not explain children's cognitive developmental delay. However, achievement, which is more involved in crystallized intelligence, naturally receiving input from the surrounding environment, could be the reason for the delay in cognitive development.

3.4. Structural equation modeling for developmental pathways of children from multicultural families

To understand potential developmental pathways of children from multicultural families, structural equation modeling was analyzed with model fitness indexes. Model fit indicators were RMSEA=0.07, TLI =.91, and CFI= .93, which could imply goodness-of-fit indexes.

Moreover, in the structural equation modeling, standardized β coefficients were tested in the relationship of causal effect between independent and dependent variables for children from multicultural families. As shown in Table 3, language development affected cognitive development ($\beta=8.76$, $t=5.08$, $p<.001$) and also impacted self-respect ($\beta=0.17$, $t=3.02$, $p<.01$). Moreover, cognitive development had an effect on self-control ($\beta=0.03$, $t=5.23$, $p<.001$). Through these connected relationships among developmental domains, finally, the extent of self-control ($\beta=-0.51$ $t=-3.77$, $p<.001$) and self-respect ($\beta=-0.50$, $t=-2.77$, $p<.01$) influenced aggressive behavior.

The results of indirect and direct causal effects among developmental domains showed that the developmental delays of children from multicultural families in Korean rural areas were articulated with each other (see Fig. 2). The problems usually start with language developmental delay, and this affects the children's cognitive development as well as their self-respect. Cognitive developmental delay also affects the children's self-control. Eventually, failure in self-control and self-respect brings on aggressive behavior. Therefore, any kind of developmental delay may negatively affect other developmental aspects.

Table 3. Hypothesis test with structural equation modeling for children from multicultural families

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized β	t
Cognitive	Self-control	0.03	5.23***
Language	Cognitive	8.76	5.08***
Language	Self-respect	0.17	3.02**
Self-control	Aggressive behaviour	-0.51	-3.77***
Self-respect	Aggressive behaviour	-0.50	-2.77**

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

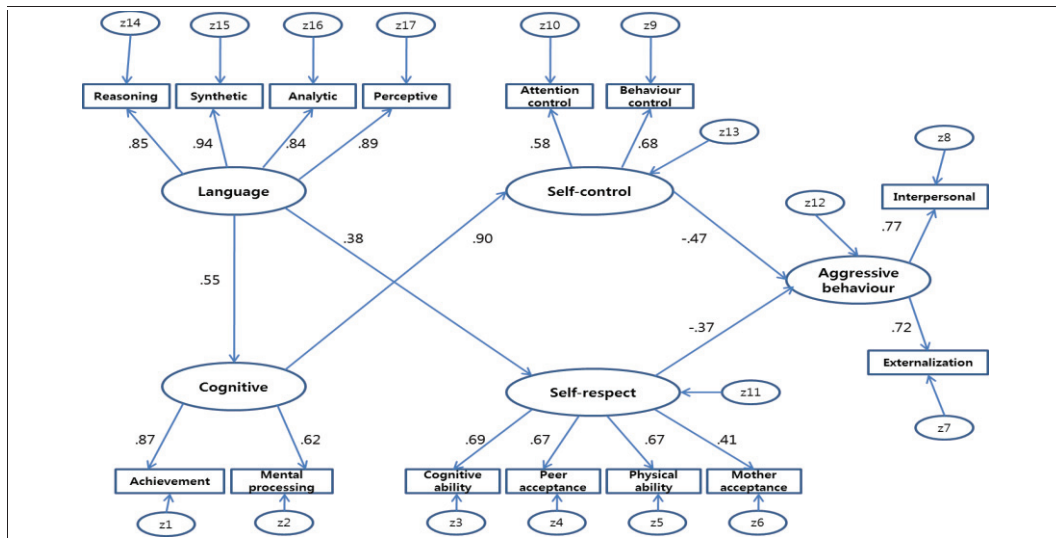


Fig. 2. Structural equation modeling for developmental pathways of children with multicultural families in rural areas

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has provided an account of and the reasons for the developmental delay and its potential pathways in children from multicultural families. It is a broadly recognized fact that the early days of life are easily and directly influenced by factors like social, cultural, and family environment, the relationship between parents, parents' social and financial circumstances, and caring attitude of parents (Chung, 2003; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Koo, 2007; McLoyd, 1998). Hence, any problems caused by those factors will seriously affect normal development of young children. More specifically, the problematic behavior of young children from multicultural families found in this study may start from deprivation in their home environment. The negative influential factors from their home environment affect these children's early language, cognition, and social-emotional development. Accordingly, an infant who experiences a negative environment is highly prone to show either atypical development or developmental delay, which also has a negative impact on future growth processes (Koo, 2009; Koreman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995). Thus, it can be concluded that the problematic behavior of adolescents from multicultural families is not a temporary issue.

Considering this critical impact of environment on early childhood development, the mother has an important and large role in stimulating her child in the early days (Cho, 2011; Haden, Reese, & Fivush, 1996; Raikes et al., 2006). For the same reason, the conflicts of interracial couples may negatively affect their children's development. Relevant previous research has also emphasized that a lack of caring and stimuli at the beginning of children's lives has a negative effect on their development over the lifetime (Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, & Liaw, 1995). Furthermore, in most cases, interracial couples are afraid of their future and become more stressed from the fear that conflicts will remain unresolved. These conflicts, however, are not unique to multicultural families in Korea. Instead, they represent a global social problem that is inevitable between interracial husband and wife (McFadden, 2001).

With his longitudinal study, McFadden suggested progressive stages for accepting each other in interracial couples. He indicated that the first stage of acceptance starts with rejection; the next stage is resistance. Through those conflict stages, the husband and wife identify themselves in the family. After that, they can accept and will have respect for each other. Based on this respect, their two different cultures will be transmitted to each other. Finally, the racial difference will be minimized, signalling the universality stage. McFadden also explained that it usually takes 10 years to overcome the rejection and resistance stages. From this point of view, most multicultural families in Korean rural areas could be considered in these stages, which means their conflicts are natural and their chances of surviving the struggle will increase. Therefore, there must be education on the acceptance stages, and the social caring system must focus on interracial couples married for less than 10 years.

In addition, the evidence of this study suggested that children from multicultural families should be systematically observed through screening tests. With respect to this, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) explained that environmental risks in disadvantaged families and vicious cycles of potential problems can be prevented when the community builds up the social safety net for young children. They also emphasized that the fundamental solution is to identify accurately these children's developmental status. Similarly, Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, and Mann (2001) suggested that screening tests and early intervention can reduce the atypical development of children at environmental risk.

Taken together, the findings of this study imply that children from multicultural families should be involved in early childhood special education. Regarding this, Tjossem (1976) divided children who need special education and are at risk of atypical development into three groups. These are children at biological risk, established risk, and environmental risk. From this perspective, the children from multicultural families could be considered to be at environmental risk in that they have greater possibility of atypical development. The first five years of human life include critical periods that can optimize human development but also negatively affect the entire life. Therefore, for children from multicultural families, implementing immediate interventions through early childhood special education after identifying developmental delay can be the most effective way to prevent further social problems.

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