

ATTITUDES TOWARD SAFETY OF DAY CARE STUDENTS

Attitudes Toward Safety of Day-Care Students: The Case of Save the Children Korea

by

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Abstract

This study focuses on the safety of day care children from families of low socioeconomic status (SES) because because their financial instability and lack of parental support are more likely to expose these students danger than other students. For this, the study considers the nursery schools managed by Save the Children in Korea because all these schools have children from low-SES families. According to the results, parents were generally satisfied with their children's safety. As expected, there was some gender difference in parents' perception of the safety of their children, but the difference was only slight and nonsignificant. More specifically, parents were slightly more likely to be concerned about the safety of their female children than their male children. Teachers also perceived the safety of their students, and children generally had favorable attitudes toward their own safety (based on their discussions with their teachers). There was a slight difference between teachers and students in terms of their safety perceptions, and it was nonsignificant. These results have important practical implications, and some limitations as well as interesting avenues for future research are discussed.

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I. Introduction

Technological advances have simplified people's lives and provided a wide range of information through the Internet, and people can now communicate with others across the world. A vast range of entertainment options are available for all to enjoy, and the world has become much more convenient and comfortable. However, safety issues concerning young children have risen as one of the most important concerns for parents. Children are more likely to face danger. The amount of time children spend outside their home has increased sharply in recent years, which has increased their potential exposure to danger. When outside their homes, children can be exposed to criminal elements and other dangers. For example, there were 19,373 road accidents involving children under 16 in the U.K. as of 2011 (CAPT May 2013). This shows not only the danger surrounding children but also its ubiquitous nature. That is, any child can be a potential victim. Many children are exposed to violence in their daily lives. More than 60% of all children are exposed to some form of violence over the course of the year. (Finkelhor et al. October 2009) Children may not be safe even in their nursery school because of some teachers' mental and physical abuse (NSPCC May 2012). In addition, almost 40% of all primary and secondary school children have parents who are concerned about their children being attacked or kidnapped on the way to school (De Vaus et al. 1996). The situation in Korea is less serious than that generally observed worldwide. The Korean government tracks sex offenders around the clock. Although this policy is in place in Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Japan, Kenya, Korea, and the U.K. (Naebklang February 2013), only Korea has made use of it. This implies that Korea is well prepared for protecting children from various dangers, few studies have verified this. In addition, the danger still exists, as illustrated by the continued reporting of missing children. Further, recent news still suggests a plenty of room for improvement in policies on child safety. For example, the Korean government announced the so-called "Code Adam system." This system is implemented if a child is reported missing in a multipurpose facility. If there is such a report, all entrances and exits are immediately closed for 10 minutes as employees search for the missing child. The need for this system for child safety implies a need for such systems in other locations and facilities (Lee 2012). Among such locations and facilities, the present study examines those associated with the safety of day care students by

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focusing on the most serious environmental factors associated with their school and commute. The study focuses on day care children from families of low socioeconomic status (SES) because because their financial instability and lack of parental support are more likely to expose these students danger than other students. For this, the study considers the nursery schools managed by Save the Children in Korea because all these schools have children from low-SES families. The results of this study are expected to have important implications for child safety.

II. Theoretical Framework

Some studies have observed a correlation between poverty and crime and have demonstrated a positive correlation between unemployment and crime. It is widely known that crime is more likely during an economic downturn. This implies that the weaker the economic environment, the more likely the crime is. In this regard, there is a need for a better understanding of the specific areas of crime that low-SES parents should be aware of. In addition, it has been shown that "Unemployment does cause crime among ex-offenders. Unemployment also has stronger effects at the neighborhood" (Padhy 2006). This further demonstrates the extent of danger reflected by the general economical status of a town to residents and suggests an urgent need for strengthening the safety of weaker members of society, namely young children.

Previous studies have found an increase in income inequality in recent decades. According to a report on low-income households ("U.S. Low-Income Working Families Increasing" 2013), the number of such households rose from 10.2 million in 2010 to 10.4 million in 2011 in the U.S., representing nearly a third of all working families in the country. Such an increase was particularly brutal in Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, and South Carolina, where the proportion of low-income households increased by 5 percentage points or more between 2007 and 2011. This suggests the increasingly serious problem of poverty at the global level, particularly since the start of a global economic recession in 2009. Given how low-income households tend to turn toward dual-income opportunities for more income, low-SES parents are likely to use day care centers. In this regard, this study considers a sample of low-SES parents using

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day care services. In addition, the study considers day care centers operated by Save the Children in Korea because these centers focus on providing low-SES households with quality services at low prices. In particular, the study examines how such parents perceive the current safety environment of day care centers and what their desired environments are. It is crucial for parents to perceive day care centers to be trustworthy and feasible because, without this perception, they cannot freely pursue outside income opportunities.

RQ1. How do low-SES parents perceive the safety of their day care children?

Previous studies have tested whether parents' behavior toward their child is influenced by his or her gender and found that a strong relationship (Leaper et al. October 29, 1996). In fact, the gender of the child as well as that of the parent has been found to be a strong determinant of this behavior and attitudes toward the child. This raises the question of whether the gender of the child also influences his or her parents' safety perception. For example, do parents think it is more dangerous for their daughter than for their son to travel alone? However, it should be noted that clear evidence is unlikely. That is, results are likely to vary according to various factors. Despite this limitations, however, the study addresses this issue because it would be important to evaluate parents' perceptions for the later analysis of data. In this regard, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2. How does the gender of the child influence low-SES parents' safety perception?

Teachers provide students with initial guidelines. That is, teachers play a crucial role in the development of students and their actions. Researchers have found that teachers have considerable influence on their students based on their teaching quality and in-service education. It has been shown that the instructional quality of teachers is the third most influential factor in student performance (Petty 1999). In addition, teachers influence students' affective attributes. This shows that teachers' performance and existence are crucial for student development, and this may also be applicable to the case of children in day care centers. Children's behavior and attitudes may depend on how teachers do things, and therefore teachers should influence students' actions to enhance their safety. This study analyzes teachers' attitudes toward the safety of their students to find

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appropriate solutions for parents as well as for teachers. The results are expected to provide a certain pattern of responses from teachers, which can be employed to determine the most important factors influencing the safety of children. In this regard, the following research question is proposed:

RQ3. How do teachers perceive the safety of day care children from low-SES families?

The teacher-student relationship is the key to any teaching and learning. According to one research, if teachers make substantial efforts to bond with students, the students are likely to be motivated to form a strong bond with the teachers (Bruney April 2012). In addition, connecting with students allow teachers to know how and when to address their students' specific needs. Given the professional nature of Save the Children, its teachers are expected to have close relationships with their day care students, and in this regard, this study obtains these students' perspectives indirectly through their teachers as well as those of teachers directly. In addition, having these teachers' perspectives can validate the results from parents, whose views are evaluated because their children are too young as direct respondents. In this regard, the following research question is proposed:

RQ4. Are there any differences in safety perceptions between teachers and their students (based on teacher-student discussions)?

III.Method

Participants

There were three groups of respondents: nursery school teachers, students, and parents. Because some parents were not-Korean residents and could read only simple Korean, the questionnaire was written as simply as possible. Two day care centers were targeted: Mindeullae Nursery School in Su-Seo and Eun-hwa Nursery School in Hongeundong. Both these schools were in Seoul, Korea.

Procedure

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Two versions of the questionnaire were prepared: one for parents and one for teachers. They were first prepared in English (see the Appendix) and then translated into Korean. The questionnaire was delivered to the two day care centers, and the teachers there were asked to distribute and collect all responses. For the parent survey, only one parent was asked to complete the questionnaire. As a result, 11 teachers and 33 parents responded. In addition, each teacher was asked to discuss various safety-related issues with their students and provide results of their discussions on the sheet provided to gain a general understanding of how the students perceived their own safety.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire for the parents included one item for demographic information (gender). The other four items addressed their safety perceptions and were measured based on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The internal consistency and reliability of these four items were determined based on Cronbach’s α (.725), which indicated sufficient internal consistency and reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Table 1 shows these four items. In addition, the questionnaire for teachers’ safety perceptions included a total of four items (two items for perceptions based on discussions with students and two for those based on their own views). These items were also measured based on a five-point Likert-type scale. Table 2 shows these items.

Table 1 Questionnaire items for parents’ safety perceptions

My child is safe while in the classroom.

My child is safe during his or her commute to the school.

The school provides my child with a safe classroom environment.

My neighborhood provides my child with a safe environment for his or her commute to the school.

Table 2. Questionnaire items for teachers’ safety perceptions

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Responses based on discussions with students

My students generally feel safe while in the classroom.

My students generally feel safe during their commute to the school.

Responses based on the teacher's personal views

My students are safe while in the classroom.

My students are safe during their commute to the school.

Analysis

For RQ1 and RQ2, the means and standard deviations for the four items for parents' safety perceptions were analyzed, and the difference between the groups (parents with female vs. male children) was examined. Here statistical significance was assessed by the independent-samples t-test. For RQ3 and RQ4, the means and standard deviations for the four items for teachers' safety perceptions were analyzed, and the difference between the two categories (perceptions based on discussions with students and those based on their personal views) was examined. Here statistical significance was assessed by the independent-samples t-test.

IV. Results

RQ1

Parents generally had favorable safety perceptions. The results indicate that the mean for their attitudes was 4.27 (SD=0.58). The mean for parents with a male child was 4.39 (SD=0.51), whereas that for a female child was 4.20 (SD=0.61). Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for parents safety perceptions by gender.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations

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	n	M (SD)
Male	21	4.39 (SD=0.51)
Female	34	4.20 (SD=0.61)
Overall	55	4.27 (SD=0.57)

Note. The higher the mean, the more favorable the safety perception.

RQ2

The mean was higher for parents with a male child (4.39 (SD=0.51)) than those with a female child (4.20 (SD=0.61)). As shown in Table 4, the results of the independent-samples t-test indicate no significant gender difference ($t(53) = 1.213, p = .231$).

Table 4. The independent-samples t-test

		Levene's test of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variance assumed	.125	.725	1.213	53	.231	.19433	.16025	-	.51575

RQ3

Teachers generally had favorable safety perceptions. The results indicate that the mean for their attitudes was 4.14 (SD=0.55). The mean for safety perceptions based on discussions with students was 4.11 (SD=0.49), whereas that for safety perceptions based on own views was 4.18 (SD=0.60). Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for teachers' safety perceptions for the two categories.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations

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	n	M (SD)
Discussion	22	4.11 (SD=0.49)
Own	22	4.18 (SD=0.60)
Overall	44	4.14 (SD=0.55)

Note. The higher the mean, the more favorable the safety perception.

RQ4

The mean was higher for safety perceptions based on personal views (4.18 (SD=0.60)) than those based on discussions with students (4.11 (SD=0.49)). As shown in Table 6, the results of the independent-samples t-test indicate no significant difference ($t(42) = -.411$, $p = .683$).

Table 4. The independent-samples t-test

		Levene's test of variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variance assumed	1.385	.246	-.411	42	.683	-.06818	.16605	-.40329	.26692

V. Discussion

This study focuses on the safety of day care children from families of low socioeconomic status (SES) because because their financial instability and lack of parental support are more likely to expose these students danger than other students. For this, the study considers the nursery schools managed by Save the Children in Korea because all these schools have children from low-SES families.

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Parents generally perceived the safety of their children (4.27). This implies that they were generally satisfied with their children's safety. As expected, the results show some gender difference in parents' perception of the safety of their children, but the difference was only slight and nonsignificant (0.19). More specifically, parents were slightly more likely to be concerned about the safety of their female children than their male children. In general, teachers also perceived the safety of their students (4.14), and children's perceptions (4.11) based on discussions with their teachers were also generally favorable. There was a slight difference between teachers and students in terms of their safety perceptions, and it was nonsignificant. These results imply that all stakeholders in school safety were generally satisfied with the safety of their environments.

These results have important practical implications. Although previous studies have highlighted increasing dangers surrounding children, all parties considered in this study (parents, teachers, and children) reported being relatively safe. On the positive side, this may reflect the reality, but on the other, it may lead to complacency. Regardless of the reason behind these results, school administrators should regularly remind parents and teachers of dangers facing children and offer various programs that enhance their safety preparation. In addition, schools should offer parents and students various ways to maintain their safety.

This study has some limitations. First, children's safety perceptions were not measured directly but indirectly through discussions between teachers and students because the children were too young to provide reliable responses. However, the teachers carefully recorded the children's views, and therefore the results are considered to accurately reflect the view of the children. In this regard, future research should consider a more direct way to assess children's responses, such as focus group interviews. Second, sample size was relatively limited, particularly for teachers and children (22). In this regard, future research should consider a larger sample by considering more teachers, students, and schools.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PARENT

We invite you to participate in this short survey to help us better understand various safety issues surrounding your child's classroom and transit environments.

Your participation is voluntary and confidential, and your responses will be used only for the purpose of academic research.

1) What is the gender of your child? Male/Female

2) Perception of classroom/transit safety

a) My child is safe while in the classroom.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

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b) My child is safe during his or her commute to the school.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

c) The school provides my child with a safe classroom environment.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

d) My neighborhood provides my child with a safe environment for his or her commute to the school.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

Thank you!

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE TEACHER

ATTITUDES TOWARD SAFETY OF DAY CARE STUDENTS

We invite you to participate in this short survey to help us better understand various safety issues surrounding your students' classroom and transit environments.

Your participation is voluntary and confidential, and your responses will be used only for the purpose of academic research.

Part I: Responses based on discussions with students

1) My students generally feel safe while in the classroom.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

2) My students generally feel safe during their commute to the school.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

Part II: Responses based on the teacher's personal perception

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1) My students are safe while in the classroom.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

2) My students are safe during their commute to the school.

___ Strongly disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neither disagree nor agree

___ Agree

___ Strongly agree

Thank you!

KOREAN QUESTIONNAIRES

학부모 설문지

귀하의 자녀 교실 및 통학환경 관련 안전 사안들에 대해 더욱
세심한 주의를 기울이는데 도움이 될 수 있도록 본 간략한 설문지를
작성해 주시기 바랍니다 .

귀하의 참여는 자발적이며 비밀이 보장되며 답변은 학술적

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연구의 목적으로만 활용될 것입니다 .

3) 자녀의 성별: 남성 / 여성

4) 교실 / 통학 상 안전에 대한 인식

e) 나의 자녀는 수업을 받는 동안 교실에서 안전하다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

___ 절대 동의합니다.

f) 나의 자녀는 학교에 통학하는 동안 안전하다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

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___ 절대 동의합니다.

g) 학교에서 나의 자녀에 안전한 수업 환경을 제공해 준다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

___ 절대 동의합니다.

h) 나의 자녀의 인근 주변 환경은 통학을 하는데 있어서 안전하다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

___ 절대 동의합니다.

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교사 설문지

귀하의 학생 교실 및 통학환경 관련 안전 사안들에 대해 더욱 세심한 주의를 기울이는데 도움이 될 수 있도록 본 간략한 설문지를 작성해 주시기 바랍니다 .

귀하의 참여는 자발적이며 비밀이 보장되오며 답변은 학술적 연구의 목적으로만 활용될 것입니다 .

I부: 아래답변은 학생들과의 토의사항에 기초합니다 .

1) 나의 학생들은 수업을 받는 동안 일반적으로 안전하다 느낀다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

___ 절대 동의합니다.

2) 나의 학생들은 통학을 하는 동안 일반적으로 안전하다 느낀다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

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___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

___ 절대 동의합니다.

II부: 아래답변은 교사의 개인적 인식에 기초합니다 .

1) 나의 학생들은 수업을 받는 동안 일반적으로 안전하다 느낀다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 중립

___ 동의합니다.

___ 절대 동의합니다.

2) 나의 학생들은 통학을 하는 동안 일반적으로 안전하다 느낀다 .

___ 절대 동의하지 않습니다.

___ 동의하지 않습니다.

ATTITUDES TOWARD SAFETY OF DAY CARE STUDENTS

___중립

___동의합니다.

___절대 동의합니다.