

The Self-concept of Korean- American University Student Victims of Childhood Physical Abuse

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Abstract : This study examined the impact of childhood physical abuse on the self-concept of older adolescents and assessed perceptions of parental relationships as a mediator for consequences of abuse. Sixty-college undergraduates (aged 18-23 yrs.) completed this study. (1) The Self-Description Questionnaires, a multidimensional measure of self-concept, (2) the parent scales of the inventory parent and Peer Attachment, a measure of perceived parental support, and (3) the Assessing Environments, a retrospective report of family environment and parenting practices. Analyses, controlling for SES and education, showed that a history of physical abuse was a strong predictive of adolescence current self-concept. Further analyses would lend support to a mediation model, suggesting that physical abuse had a negative impact on self-concept through its negative effect on parent-child relationships.

Key Words : self-concept, childhood physical abuse, Korean- American

I. Introduction

The maltreatment of children is a long-standing problem. Since ancient times, children have been viewed as property to be sold, bartered, or exploited by adults. Throughout history, children have been overworked, prostituted, and abused. Abuse is defined as maltreatment including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological or emotional abuse (Berns, 1993). Children who are intentionally bruised, wounded, or burned are physically abused. Some physically abused. Some physical abuse takes place under the guise of discipline. The place on children's bodies where they are wounded and the shape of the wound can give clues that indicate abuse rather than accident. While physical beating with a hand or an object such as a belt or hairbrush is the most common

cause of physical abuse, other sources are kicking, shaking, choking, burning with cigarettes, scalding in hot water, freezing, or throwing the child (Garbarino & Ebata, 1983).

Psychological or emotional abuse can occur when parents are inconsistent in their talk, rules or actions, when they have unrealistic expectations of their children, when they belittle and blame their children, when they do not take an interest in any of their activities, or when they never praise them (Kaufman & Cicchetti, 1989). Neglect is defined as maltreatment involving abandonment, lack of supervision, improper feeding, lack of adequate medical or dental care, inappropriate dress, uncleanliness, lack of safety (Kemp & Kemp, 1978). Child maltreatment occurs in all cultures, ethnicities, occupations, and socioeconomic groups. However, child maltreatment has been relatively unexplored within Korean society.

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Few attempts have been made in the Korean social science community to look at child abuse and neglect in a cross-cultural context. Korbin (1981) examined child abuse and neglect in non-western countries. These studies attempted to explore definitions of child abuse and neglect in a cross-cultural context. The studies found that there was no universally accepted standard for optimal child rearing or for abusive and neglectful behavior (Korbin, 1981). Further, Korbin argued that one should look at cultural child rearing practice in the context of each culture. Korbin's cross-cultural guidelines in determining child abuse indicates certain child rearing practices should not be considered child abuse if the child perceives it as appropriate treatment, and if it is considered a necessary practice for one to be a member of the culture in question (Korbin, 1977).

However, issues of defining child abuse and neglect become much more complicated in an immigrant context because various ethnic communities differ in their belief in child rearing practices, including child abuse and neglect from the larger community (Korbin, 1979). For instance, over 50 percent of Asians in the United States are foreign-born, and new ethnic communities have developed where none existed before. Asians must contend with such factors as unemployment, poverty, and marital problems. Asian-born mothers in the United States are faced with a lack of English skills, mobility and social contacts. New immigrant families are experiencing traumatic acculturation processes during their transition periods in the United States (Korbin, 1979). The difficult struggle to procure adequate employment despite language barriers and/or the inability to transfer education and employment skills from their homeland have contributed to creating extremely low self-esteem for those family members (Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002). Additionally, the fear of loss of control over their rapidly Americanized children increasingly threatens the Asian families' social functioning. For some, language limitations as well as a lack of support systems compound their feelings of social and psychological

isolation and homesickness. For those populations at risk, these problems can provoke severe anxiety, depression and conflict which can translate into various forms of child abuse and neglect (Song, 1986).

In addition, Asian parents must raise their children in a bicultural world, often without adequate community and family support. However, Asian parents often get confused in raising children in a bicultural context when, what had been the optimal child rearing practice is not necessarily viewed that way by the host cultures. New Asian immigrants have little options but to raise their children in the way they had been raised. However, since Asian American children assimilate much faster into the mainstream culture than their parents, they may not perceive their parents' child rearing practices, such as demanding absolute obedience and use of physical punishment, as appropriate treatment. Therefore, with the increasing influx of immigrants from Asian countries, it is important to look at child abuse and neglect issues in the bicultural context (Song, 1986).

There are fundamental value differences between the Asian community and the American mainstream; therefore, social expectations of parental functioning are also different. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect definitions of child abuse and neglect to also be different. It is important, however, initially to distinguish between truly harmful child rearing practices, and those, which are merely culturally unique (Song, 1986). For instance, in the Korean culture and other Asian cultures, shaming practices are used to control child behavior based on a high value placed on in-group harmonization and group orientation. In the United States, this cultural practice could be interpreted as emotional abuse. In the Asian community, physical contact such as hugging and embracing is almost nonexistent beyond the children's school years. In the United States, this practice could be interpreted as emotional neglect. In contrast, Asian parents consider some mainstream child rearing practices as neglectful, such as keeping a child in a separate room and only feeding them as scheduled

even if the child requests food. Usually, Asian children are not left alone and are fed on demand (Suh, 1990).

In the Korean culture, parents have absolute authority over their children, and the use of force is considered permissible; the mainstream community, in contrast, has frequently misinterpreted this as abusive. The use of traditional healing practices has also been seen as abusive, such as the Vietnamese “coin-rubbing” practice, which makes bruises on a child’s body with a coin to rid the body of impurities. The Vietnamese firmly believe that the “coin-rubbing” practice works very well in cases of colds. Koreans have valued corporal punishment since ancient times as a method of disciplining children. This value has been so deeply embedded in Korean culture, that Korean society tolerates parental violation of children’s privacy and physical and emotional punishment of children. The traditional Korean culture permits physical punishment of children at home and at school. Sadly, some children think that the physical punishment they receive is a normal part of childhood (Cattanach, 1998). Korean parents actually consider this their right to discipline children for the child’s sake. This cultural aspect has greatly influenced the maltreatment of the Korean child (Suh, 1990).

The Korean children growing up in the United States are refusing to accept such practices. When their parents resort to physical punish, they often challenge their parents, because they are aware such punishment is regarded as abusive in the United States. Many Korean parents become confused and frustrated by such reactions from their children. As parents are already under stress due to difficulties in adjusting to a new social environment, they are easily provoked and lose control, resulting in more severe and harsher physical punishment of their children.

II. Theoretical Background

There have been ongoing arguments on “what causes child abuse and neglect” in the social science

community. The differing views can be broadly divided into three major groups: a psychological frame, a sociological frame, and an environmental frame. The psycho-dynamically-oriented researchers best represent the first view. They see the problem of child abuse and neglect to be caused by the abusive parent’s personality disorder. A survey of those characteristics representing abusive parents were characterized as having unrealistic expectations toward the child, low self-esteem, and parents being easy to provoke are all characteristics contributing to child abuse and neglect (Kemp & Helper, 1972, Kemp & Kempe, 1978). Some of the abusive parents tended to be young, immature and lacking the knowledge and skills of parenting (Kempe & Helper, 1972). They also argued that this personality disorder, in turn, was based on the parent’s own traumatic childhood experience. These studies further suggested that parents who experienced physical punishment in childhood also used physical punishment on their children. The characteristics of children who were abused included premature birth, poor parent-child attachment, and developmental delayed (Vance & Pumariega, 2001).

The second view can be seen as using a sociological frame of reference. These researchers argue that cultural acceptance in using physical force, particularly in child discipline, contributes to child abuse and neglect (Gelles, 1983). The traditional Korean culture accepted physical punishment as a means to assure filial piety (Song, 1981).

The third can be seen as using an environmental frame of reference. The environmental characteristics that apparently contribute to child abuse and neglect are social isolation, inadequate or absence of social networks, and stress resulting from socioeconomic reasons (Gill, 1979, Pelton, 1981).

Social and environmental factors such as parental substance abuse and domestic violence have also been shown to be associated with child abuse and neglect (Lopez & Heffer, 1998).

A number of family characteristics have been reported to be associated with the occurrence of child

abuse and neglect. Physically abused children have frequently reported poor parent-child relationships (Finkelhor *et al.*, 1990). Abusive parents have been reported to use severe physical punishment more frequently, to be more power assertive, and to punish their children more frequently for moral transgressions, conventional social transgressions, and noncompliance (Nobes & Smith, 1986) than non-abusive parents. Research has also indicated that conflict between parents and a lack of social support is associated with a higher risk for child maltreatment (Brown *et al.*, 1998). The families whose children have been abused have a higher level of unemployment, less education after finishing school, and more marital breakdowns (Stern, Lynch, Oates, O'Toole & Cooney, 1995). Neglectful mothers are less likely to have contact with normal models of child rearing and receive less support in their roles as parents (Williamson, Borduin, & Howe, 1991). Also, the physically abusive mothers' poor understanding of child development, in the context of physically abusive behavior by herself or her spouse/ partner, may also help to explain the relatively high rates of context problems (Ney, Fung & Wickett, 1993).

From Child Abuse of Runaway Children (Suh, 1990), 74.9% of runaway children were physically abused, 58.3% of Those physically abused children showed physical wounds, and the primary abuser was the parent (36.9%).

A few researchers have examined the long-term outcomes of child abuse and neglect. Researchers have addressed several important issues surrounding child maltreatment, including the characteristics of abusive parents and the characteristics of the environments in which the children were abused (Kaufman & Cicchetti, 1989). Most of the available research literature on the topic of child abuse and neglect is limited to school age children between the ages of 5 and 15. Physical abuse also has been less thoroughly explored in terms of psychological outcomes, and earlier studies on physical abuse tended to focus on short term behavioral consequences for children and adolescents (Rosen & Martin, 1996). Most of these

studies report significant childhood difficulties, including depression and anxiety (Christopoulos *et al.*, 1987; Hershorn & Rosenbaum, 1985), somatic problems (Hilberman & Munson, 1977), poor school performance and conduct disorders (Carlson, 1984; Hilberman & Munson, 1977), increased aggression (Christopoulos *et al.*, 1987; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak, 1986), lowered self-esteem (Hughes & Barad, 1983), impaired social problem-solving skills (Rosenberg, 1987), and generally high levels of behavioral problems and psychopathology (Fantuzzo *et al.*, 1991; Holden & Ritchie, 1991).

Several studies have demonstrated a link between physical child abuse and subsequent depressive symptoms. Elliott and Briere (1993) found that among professional women, those with physical abuse histories rated themselves as having significantly greater depression than those with no physical abuse history. Runtz (1987), and Briere and Runtz (1988) similarly reported that three samples of university women with histories of physical abuse scored significantly higher levels of depression on the SCL90-R than did women with no such abuse history. Finally, Cole (1989) found that college men and women with histories of childhood physical abuse scored higher on the depressive items of Briere and Runtz's (1988) Trauma Symptom Checklist than did nonabused or physically abused subjects.

Starr, and Keating (1991) reported that a majority of the evidence available concerning the long-term effects of physical abuse comes from studies of clinical samples, such as the ones described above. These samples tend to over-represent the negative consequences that may result from abuse and provide limited epidemiological data. To address this problem, Briere and Runtz (1990) examined college women's retrospective reports of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as they related to Their current psychological adjustment. A strong unique relation between parental psychological abuse and a subject's low self-esteem was found along with smaller unique relations between physical abuse and anger/aggression and between sexual abuse and

dysfunctional sexual behavior. In addition, psychological and physical abuse tended to occur together and resulted in problems in all three areas. These findings provide some support for the theory that a history of childhood abuse is related to negative long-term consequences on self-concept and social competence. However, findings need to be replicated with validated measures, and possible mediation pathways need to be investigated (Lopez & Heffer, 1998).

Research on the psychological adjustment of adolescents and young adults suggests that one possible mediational pathway between childhood physical abuse and poor social functioning and self-concept is the poor quality of intimate relationships, especially with parents. Another argument for the importance of parental attachments for abused children involves the dynamics of abusive families. Many researchers have suggested that physically abusive interactions are only one variable contributing to the negative outcomes of child abuse. Other parental characteristics associated with abusive tendencies, such as low warmth and verbal abuse may play an even more detrimental role in the child's development (Lopez & Heffer, 1998).

One area in which a significant amount of research has demonstrated a negative effect of physical abuse on children is their social functioning and perception of self. Although questions remain, the current literature suggests that physically abused children tend to be more aggressive, less empathic, and respond to peer distress in inappropriate ways and have a greater likelihood of being rejected by peers (Noh, 1994). The causal psychological, sociological, and ecological factors of child abuse and neglect manifest themselves in forms such as stealing, violence, or running away from home, and because these behavior problems are accumulated and repeated continually, they are portrayed outwardly. It is important for research to incorporate these factors into a theoretical model to further our understanding of the ways by which the experience of childhood physical abuse impacts the

development of a healthy self-concept.

Overall, Korean American victims of child abuse and neglect recently are increasing in direct relation to the increase of family violence (Korean Times, 2001). However, there is a lack of extant literature concerning child abuse and neglect in the Korean immigrant context. Also, very few studies have been conducted in the United States among multilingual and the multicultural communities. In the case of the Korean American community, there was one published dissertation. There were no reports of studies on the issue of child abuse with Korean-American adolescents as subjects, and studies on the possible causes and correlates of the problem of child abuse do not exist. In this study, the family backgrounds of Korean-American young adults under abuse and neglect were examined.

A similar model of this study was tested in a recent investigation of parental relationships and abusive experiences. Wind and Silvern (1994) found that physically abused subjects were found to have lower self-concept scores and greater depression. The relation of abuse to low self-esteem and depression was mediated by reports of lack of perceived parental warmth during childhood. These studies suggest that the effects of negative childhood experiences, in particular, physically abusive events, may unfold through parent-child relationships. Therefore, it is worthwhile to conduct this study on Korean-American young adults who are being educated under the American educational system while having Korean cultural backgrounds.

The current study sampled older adolescents to bridge the gap between reports of negative consequences of physical abuse on children and the minimal data on the long-term consequences these experiences have on adults. This study focused on the impact of childhood physical abuse on the current self-concept of Korean-American college students to enhance the inconclusive empirical base of literature. The purpose of this study was to provide a representative profile of physical child abuse in Korean-American families. This study also

assessed subjects' perceived parental relationships to determine if a supportive relationship with parents (i.e. attachment) mediated potentially negative consequences of child abuse. Although this study was exploratory, it suggests the following hypotheses:

Subjects who experience harsh physical discipline (physical abuse) will have a lower self-concept than subjects who did not have this experience. Currently, research on the relation between physical abuse and self-concept is inconclusive (Briere & Runtz, 1990). However, if self-concept is related to aversive interaction with parents, it is anticipated that physically aggressive punishment will result in a less positive self-concept.

Subjects with a history of harsh discipline (physical abuse) who experience a negative outcome (i.e., low self-concept) are expected to perceive their parents as less emotionally supportive than similar subjects who did not experience poor outcomes. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) found that for adolescents who were securely attached to their parents, negative life changes had a minimal impact on symptomatology, but the relationship was much stronger for adolescents who were not secure in their relationship with their parents.

Demographic correlates of child abuse and neglect also will be explored-examined in this study. It is hypothesized that children from low-income families are more physically and emotionally abused by parents in their Korean-American community. It is also hypothesized that Korean-American families whose children have been abused have a higher level of unemployment, less education after finishing school, and a higher incidence of marital breakdown.

III. Method

1. Data

Sixty-five university undergraduate (ages 18 to 23) Korean-American students participated. They were from the Southern California Korean College Student

Association (SCKCSA): University of Southern California; California State University, Fullerton; and California State University, Los Angeles. Los Angeles is the ideal place for this study because it has the largest concentration of Korean immigrants in the United States (Song, 1986). The subjects are first and second generations. Each school's SCKCSA meeting was visited and participants were asked to complete questionnaires during a 40-minute period. Five subjects were excluded because they failed to complete the demographic information. The remaining 60 subjects were utilized to investigate the proposed hypotheses.

The sample consisted of 62% males (37 subjects) and 38% females (23 subjects) with a mean age of 20.6 years ($SD=1.63$). A larger proportion of higher (55% had parents with college degree or more), rather than lower, SES levels are based on the parents' annual incomes in the sample. The 60 subjects were categorized into 2 groups, more physically punished and less physically punished groups, based on their mean score on the Physical Punishment Scale on the Assessing Environments- III (AE-III). Thirty-nine subjects were classified as more physically punished, representing 65% of the sample, and 21 subjects were classified as less physically punished, representing 35% of the sample. The sample was further investigated through t-tests, ANOVAs, and correlations. Subjects' gender, age, fathers' and mothers' education level, family structure, or current marital status had no association with scores on the Physical Punishment Scale. SES in subject's family of origin was estimated by using the parent's level of annual income.

2. Measures

A self-administered anonymous questionnaire was chosen so the respondents will be more comfortable and honest than they would be in interviews in discussing the sensitive issue of child maltreatment. Like most communities, child abuse is a sensitive issue within the Korean community.

1) Assessing environments-III (AE-III)

The AE-III, a 164-item questionnaire, was developed by Nichoolas and Bieber (1997) to assess self-reported punitive and abuse-related histories. A 20-item questionnaire was selected that requires respondents to answer true or false to descriptions of Their home environment. The scales based on clinical literature include physical punishment, negative family atmosphere, positive parental contact, and parental rejection.

2) Self-description questionnaire-III (SDQ-III)

The SDQ-III (Marsh, 1990) measures basic self-concept in 13 distinct factors with a 136-item questionnaire that is designed for older adolescents and young adults. 26-items selected require the respondent to rate descriptions on a 6-point scale in 5 areas: general academic, appearance, relations with parents, emotional, and general esteem.

3) Inventory of parent and peer attachment (IPPA)

The IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) is a self-report inventory, measuring an adolescent's current trust in the responsiveness and emotional support of attachment figures. Based on revisions to the IPPA (Greenberg & Armsden, 1989), the inventory consists of 25 items, each of which requires the respondent to rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which each statement applies to their mother, father, or close friends. Only the parent forms were used in this study.

3. Procedure

Subjects received \$ 5.00 for their participation and completion of the questions during a 40-minute period. Participants who elected to withdrawn from the study at any time still received payment.

The procedure was explained to each subject and an informed consent form was signed. Each subject was assured of the anonymity of their responses by coded

answer sheets. Questionnaires are administered in the same order, with the more sensitive measures regarding abusive experiences at the end. This procedure was chosen to minimize response sets regarding parenting practices that might have influenced other measures. The students were given instructions to return the finished survey in an envelope placed at the back of the room.

IV. Results

1. Descriptive statistics of history of child abuse in SES categories

The respondents' demographics were the following. The subjects consisted of 60 university undergraduate Korean-American students who were first and a half generation from the Southern California Korean College Student Association in the Los Angeles area.

<Table 1> Descriptive Statistics of History of Child Abuse in SES Categories

	section	N	%
Gender	Male	37	61.7
	Female	23	38.3
Age	18	6	10
	19	12	20
	20	11	18.3
	21	9	16.7
	22	11	18.3
	23	9	16.7
Father Education	High School	12	19.7
	Bachelor degree	30	50.6
	Master degree	14	23
	Doctoral degree	4	6.7
Mother Education	High School	21	35
	Bachelor degree	29	48.3
	Master degree	8	15
	Doctoral degree	2	1.7
Income	Less than \$10,000	3	4.6
	\$10,000~\$25,000	10	17.3
	\$25,000~\$40,000	11	18
	\$40,000~\$55,000	11	18
	Over \$55,000	25	42.1
total		60	100

2. Correlation between demographics and history of child abuse, parental attachment, and emotional support

As Shown in <Table 2>, there are no correlations between demographic variables (father and mother's education level, family structures, and family SES) and history of physical abuse, parental attachment and parental emotional support, which refuted hypothesis 3. There was no evidence to support the premise that children from low-income families were more physically abused by the parents in the Korean-American community. It was also not shown that the abused children's families had a higher level of unemployment, less education or more marital breakdown. <Table 2> represents the matrices of correlations among all variables included in the present study. Using a Pearson correlation, no significant relationships were found to exist between history of child abuse and father's education ($r = 0.12, p < 0.05$), between history of child abuse and mother's education ($r = 0.14, p < 0.05$), or between history of child abuse and family income ($r = -0.08, p < 0.05$). Significant relationships were found to exist between the history of

child abuse and self-concept ($r = -0.59, p < 0.01$), between history of child abuse and parental attachment ($r = -0.59, p < 0.01$), and between history of child abuse and emotional support ($r = -0.66, p < 0.01$).

3. Association between physical abuse and self-concept

It was hypothesized that a history of physical abuse would be highly associated with self-concept in older adolescence. To investigate the relation between a history of childhood abuse and current self-concept, an analysis was performed on the SDQ-III Total score and IPPA Total score using less and more physically punished groups (see Table 3).

As predicted in hypothesis 1, subjects with a greater history of physical punishment scored significantly lower on the measure of self-concept ($t = 2.921, p < 0.01$) (see Table 4). The SDQ-III is a multidimensional measure of self-concept and measures aspects of self-concept that are theoretically more associated with an abuse history. Specific scales that were hypothesized to be related to abuse were selected for further analysis.

<Table 2> Correlation between Demographics and History of Child Abuse, Parental Attachment, and Emotional Support

	Income	Father Education	Mother Education	Self-Concept	Parental Support	Physical Abuse	Emotional Support
Income	--	-.07	.06	.21	.23	-.08	.17
Father Education	-.07	--	.69	-.20	-.10	.12	-.13
Mother Education	.06	.69	--	-.16	-.02	.14	-.05
Self-Concept	.21	-.20	-.17	--	.77**	-.59**	.74**
Parental Support	.23	-.10	-.02	.76**	--	-.59**	.87**
Physical Abuse	-.08	.12	.14	-.58**	-.59**	--	-.66**
Emotional Support	.17	-.13	-.05	.73**	.87**	-.66**	--

** $p < .01$

<Table 3> SDQ-III and IPPA Total Scores with Less and More Child Abused Groups

	GRABUSE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Self Concept	Less physically punished	39	118.0256	14.9851	2.3995
	More physically punished	21	102.9524	25.0489	5.4661
Parents Attachment	Less physically punished	39	92.0769	15.2288	2.4386
	More physically punished	21	77.3810	20.3236	4.4350

<Table 4> T-test Analyses of Self-Concept and Parents Attachment by Level of Abuse

	GROUP Physical Punishment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Self Concept	Less physical punishment	39	118.03	14.99	2.92	.005
	More physical punishment	21	102.95	25.05		
Parents Attachment	Less physical punishment	39	92.08	15.23	3.17	.002
	More physical punishment	21	77.38	20.32		

4. Perceived parental support as a mediator of abuse

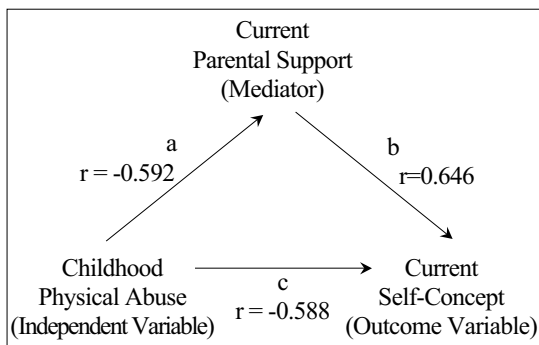
Perceived parental support was predicted to serve as a mediator in the relation between harsh physical discipline and the dependent variable, self-concept. A pictorial representation of this model is show in <Figure 1>. To test hypothesis 2, a series of regression models were estimated, as recommended by Baron and Kenney (1986), who stated that to establish mediation, the following criteria must be met:

The independent variable (childhood physical abuse) must affect the mediator (current parental support) (see arrow a);

The independent variable (childhood physical abuse) must be shown to affect the dependent variable (current self-concept) (see arrow c);

The mediator (current parental support), with the independent variable (childhood physical abuse), must affect the dependent variable (current self-concept) (see arrows b and c).

In addition, the effect of the independent variable



<Figure 1> A mediational Model Illustrating the Role of Current Parental Support in the Relation between Childhood Physical Punishment and Current Self-Concept

(childhood physical abuse) on the dependent variable (current self-concept) in the second model must be greater than its effect on the dependent variable (current self-concept) in the third model.

To measure perceived parental support, scores from both the mother and father scales of the IPPA were averaged to yield a single score. If only one scale was completed, the score on that scale was used.

In the analyses of the relation between the history of abuse, parental support, and self-concept, all three correlations were estimated and are presented in <Table 2>. The first model was statistically significant, indicating a significant association between harsh physical punishment and perceived parental support (see Table 5). The second model was also significant, revealing that abuse is associated with self-concept (see Table 5). Lastly, the third model was significant, indicating that abuse and perceived parental support, together, are associated with self-concept (see Table 5). As shown in <Table 5>, the Beta weight for abuse was

<Table 5> Regression Analyses for Determining Mediation Relation Between Physical Punishment and Parental Support and Their Prediction of Self-Concept

Variables	β	R ²	Adj R ²
Model 1 DV: Parent Support IV: Physical Abuse	-.592***	.350	.339
Model 2 DV: Self Concept IV: Physical Abuse	-.588***	.345	.334
Model 3 DV: Self Concept IV: Physical Abuse Parent Support	-.205* .646***	.616	.603

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

greater in model 2 than in model 3, fulfilling the last requirement for mediation. Sobel (1982) proposed a significance test for the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable via the mediator. This model, with both physical punishment and parental support as predictors, predicted the variance in self-concept. Considering the small predictions from the previous analysis, this model seems pivotal in understanding the dynamics of the long-term sequence of abuse.

V. Discussion

This investigation attempted to reveal how childhood physical abuse influences functioning in late adolescence. As suggested by the literature on the long-term effects of abuse, it was hypothesized that a history of physical abuse would be associated with poorer self-concept in older adolescence. To further explore the relation between abuse and self-concept, it was hypothesized that perceived parental support would mediate the effect of abuse. Specifically it was suggested that physical abuse would lead to a perception of lower parental support. If this formulation is accurate, an abused individual may have a strong self-concept as an older adolescent or young adult, providing he or she perceives an experience of good parental support, presumably from the non-abusive parent.

Preliminary analyses showed that this sample was similar to the normative sample (Berger & Knutson, 1988) in their responses to the AE-III. Based on AE-III items, the present sample was slightly more likely to report that their parents used physical discipline and slightly more likely to report that they were abused by a parent.

1. Association between physical abuse and self-concept

As predicted, analysis of the relation between abuse

and self-concept, after removing out the effect of SES, revealed that subjects with a greater history of physical punishment scored significantly lower on the measure of self-concept. A childhood history of abuse was negatively related to self-concept in young adulthood. Examination of five selected subscales revealed that Relation with Parents, General Self-Esteem and Emotional Stability were the aspects of self-concept most closely associated with physical abuse. Subjects' scores on the Physical Punishment scale were significantly related to their self-concept. However, the reported abuse experiences accounted for a relatively small portion of the variance in overall self-concept.

There are several factors that may have limited the relation between experience of childhood abuse and current self-concept. Because self-concept was measured at the present time and a history of harsh discipline was retrospective, the temporal distance between the two variables may have decreased their relation. Certainly, there are many other events in an individual's development that help to form his or her self-concept, and a childhood history of excessively punitive discipline will be one among many important predictive variables. It is likely that many experiences important to the development of self-concept have occurred to subjects between the time of childhood abuse and college. A non-clinical, college sample was sampled because it allows one to study childhood abuse outcomes on typical older adolescents or young adults, in addition to those who might seek treatment. However, college undergraduates are likely to be more successful than needs to be worded in a more specific manner. Because the assessment of a higher functioning population may have limited the range of self-concept scores, the amount of prediction possible may have been reduced. Therefore, a broader, more representative sample may have produced a stronger relation between self-concept and childhood physical abuse.

Due to the fact that this investigation was exploratory and because little empirical evidence exists regarding long-term child abuse outcomes, even a

small prediction can be helpful in directing further research. This finding suggests that researchers should examine individuals for whom abuse has a more detrimental impact and determine what factors may protect such individuals from deleterious outcomes.

2. A Mediation model

Final analyses investigated the pathway between abuse and self-concept. A model was hypothesized examining perceived parental support as a mediator for abuse. The model proposed that physically abusive experiences in childhood result in a perception of lower levels of support from parents, which, in turn, leads to a poorer self-concept. The model was supported by analyses, which showed that the relation between abuse and self-concept is mediated by perceived parental support.

In a similar study, Wind and Silvern (1994) found that parental support mediated the relationship between both physical and sexual abuse and depression and self-esteem. Abuse was no longer a significant predictor of depression and self-esteem when parental warmth was included in the prediction. The current study closely mirrors Wind and Silvern (1994) and provides further evidence for the importance of supportive parental relationship in understanding the impact of physical child abuse.

3. Association between physical abuse and cultural background

In the U.S. immigrant families are forced to raise their children in a bicultural background. New Asian immigrants have little option but to raise their children in the way they had been raised, but since Asian American children assimilate much faster into the mainstream culture than their parents do, they may not perceive their parents' child rearing practices such as use of physical punishment, as appropriate treatment. It is important to look at child abuse and neglect issues in the bicultural context(Song, 1994). Interestingly, 2 two

out of 60 subjects responded affirmatively to physical abuse questions that they were physically abused by a parent. Forty five subjects (75%) reported that their parents used physical discipline, 41 subjects (68%) reported that their parents hit them. It is a cultural irony among the two cultures.

4. Limitations and future research

Although this study provided validation of other studies and new directions for future research on childhood physical abuse in the Korean-American community, it was limited by several design features. First, the composition of the sample studied does not allow for generalization to individuals of other ages or in different environments. Most subjects lived with their parents and were likely to be still financially dependent on them. Perceptions of childhood experiences are likely to change as these subjects become older and experience other environments. Ideally, the developmental pattern of childhood abuse outcomes will be traced through research on adults of all ages and at different developmental levels. As research becomes more sophisticated, the span between abusive experiences and measurement of outcome can be increased.

This study was also limited by its reliance on self-report measures. The inconsistency between the number of people reporting they were hit and the number reporting their parents used physical discipline illustrates one of the many problems with self-report measures. Other methods of determining physical abuse are also problematic, but relying on self-reports serves to limit the interpretation to perceptions of abuse. Individuals may not fully recognize or report their own deficits in social competency. The retrospective nature of this investigation limits the ability to infer causation from the data. Although it is logical to assume that it is abusive experiences that lead to current lower self-concept, some aspects of self-concept that are poor in both childhood and older adolescence may also play a role in parents' harsh

discipline practices. Only through a longitudinal design can confidence be gained in the direction of the effect. However, at this point in the literature, further cross-sectional research may be more helpful by specifying promising variables for longitudinal studies.

Future research should focus on an attempt to corroborate self-reports of childhood abuse with more objective data. However, self-reporting does seem to provide valuable information about the subject's perceptions of childhood discipline events. In addition, sampling from a large, representative, non-clinical sample would provide information that could more easily be generalized to the given population. Current research is limited by its focus on clinical samples or highly educated non-clinical samples. Future research with older adolescent and young adult victims of child abuse should also begin to utilize observational data of outcome variables, instead of relying solely on self-reporting. Furthermore, researchers must begin to gather large samples of sophisticated multivariate analyses. As understanding of the long-term effects of physical abuse increases, researchers must begin to create a theoretical model that illustrates the multiple variables involved in the complicated reality of child development. The findings of the current study should provide an impetus for such research.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that childhood physical abuse has a negative impact on the self-concept of the older adolescent. However, this impact can be better understood by investigating its potentially harmful effect on parent-child relationships.

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