

# A Validation Study on the Mediating Effect of Parental Support on the Relationship Between Adolescents' Experiences of Discrimination and Depression

Chun-Ok Jang

Assistant professor., Department of Social Welfare, Honam University, Korea

E-mail: [spring@honam.ac.kr](mailto:spring@honam.ac.kr)

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of parental support in mitigating the impact of discrimination experiences on depression among children and adolescents. This focus was based on the premise that experiences of discrimination can negatively affect peer relationships as well as behavioral and emotional development in youths who spend a significant amount of time with their peers at school. We aimed to explore the mediating role of parental support and to present policy and practical recommendations from a social welfare perspective. For this purpose, data from the "2020 Survey on the Human Rights of Children and Adolescents" was utilized, involving 9,000 students ranging from 4th to 6th grade in elementary school, grade in middle school, and grade in high school from across the country. The study was conducted targeting these groups. For research analysis, frequency analysis using SPSS 26.0 was employed to calculate the general characteristics of the study subjects and the reliability coefficient of the testing tool. And regression analysis was conducted to verify the mediating effect of parental support on the impact of discrimination experiences on depression. The analysis revealed that there were 4,473 males (51.9%) and 4,150 females (48.1%), and that experiences of discrimination had a negative effect on depression ( $B=311$ ,  $P<0.001$ ). It was found that the more frequent the experiences of discrimination, the higher the level of depression, and the more a youth experienced discrimination, the greater the psychological depression they endured.

**Keywords:** Depression, Parental support, Discrimination experience, Adolescence, Variance Inflation Factor

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone experiences discrimination at least once in their lives. However, experiences of discrimination negatively impact social relationships, and anyone can become a target of discrimination [1]. Particularly, children and adolescents who are classified as socially marginalized are more vulnerable to discrimination due to uneven power relations in society [2]. Their experiences of discrimination may include being teased by peers or marginalized due to their appearance or physical condition, which can lead to school violence [3]. Such experiences of discrimination significantly discourage growing children and adolescents, adversely affecting their mental health [4].

As children and adolescents develop symbolic and abstract thinking skills, they become more sensitive to aspects of discrimination, detecting not only overt but also covert discriminatory actions. Discrimination

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Corresponding Author: [spring@honam.ac.kr](mailto:spring@honam.ac.kr)

Tel: +82-62-940-5244

Assistant Prof. Dept. Social Welfare, Honam University, Korea

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experienced in childhood can leave deep psychological scars, becoming lifelong trauma that hinders healthy development and increases aggression towards peers [5]. Moreover, a statistically significant relationship has been found between adolescents' experiences of discrimination and suicidal thoughts [6]. In Korea, suicide is the leading cause of death among adolescents. Over the past four years (2017-2020), the youth suicide rate has increased by 44%, and attempts at suicide and self-harm have risen by 69% [7].

Maintaining a healthy mental state in children and adolescents can reduce suicide rates and serve as a catalyst for healthy growth. The home environment plays a crucial role in the mental health of children and adolescents. The more positively adolescents perceive their parents' parenting attitudes, the lower their levels of depression. Conversely, when parents are indifferent or negative towards their children, depression and suicidal thoughts intensify [9, 10]. The home atmosphere, parents' behavioral patterns, and the relationship between parents and children significantly influence adolescents' school adaptation. A positive parenting attitude helps adolescents become more active and independent, enhances their ability to trust and follow others, and improves their school adjustment abilities [11, 12].

Therefore, this study focuses on experiences of discrimination and parental support, which are closely linked to mental health. These are crucial variables in assessing the impact of others' attitudes at school and at home on depression in children and adolescents. Particularly because children and adolescents spend a significant amount of time with their peers at school, experiences of discrimination can negatively affect peer relationships and lead to behavioral and emotional decline. The aim of this paper is to explore the mediating role of parental support in the impact of discrimination experiences on depression in children and adolescents and to propose policy and practical recommendations from a social welfare perspective.

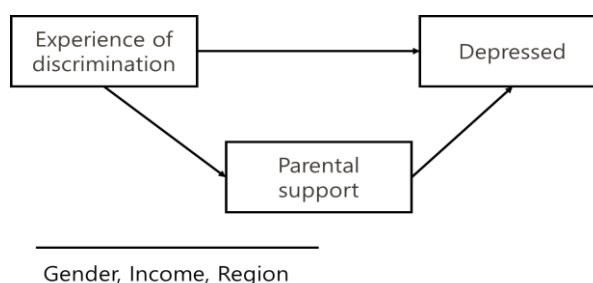
## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to investigate whether parental support mediates the effect of discrimination experiences on depression in children and adolescents, and the research model aims to determine the effect of the hypotheses at each stage.

Step 1: How does adolescents' experiences of discrimination affect depression?

Step 2: Does Parental Support Affect Depression in Adolescents?

Step 3: Is parental support mediating on the effects of adolescents' experiences of discrimination on depression?



**Figure 1. Research Model**

In order to implement this research model, the data were extracted from the 2020 Survey on the Human Rights of Children and Adolescents, and the population was stratified by calculating the number of students in each city and province according to the status of elementary, middle, and high school students across the country. The study was conducted on 9,000 students in grades 4 to 6 of elementary school, 1st to 3rd grades of middle school, and 1st to 3rd grades of high school across the country.

For the study analysis, frequency analysis using SPSS 26.0 calculated the general characteristics of the study subjects and the reliability coefficient of the test tool, and T-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to verify differences in general characteristics, experiences of discrimination, depression,

and parental support. In addition, regression analysis was used to examine the mediating effect of parental support on the effect of discrimination experiences on depression.

### 3. RESEARCH CONTENT AND RESULT

This chapter presents the scales and measurements according to three items: the Discrimination Experience Item Scale, the Depression Item Scale, and the Parental Support Item Scale to implement the research model.

#### 3.1 Discrimination Experience Item Scale

Based on the definition provided by Levin and Levin (1985), the survey utilized a question that encompassed five sub-factors of discrimination: gender, age, appearance and physical condition, grades, and family economic situation. The survey asked respondents whether they had experienced discrimination, with the scoring structured as follows: 0 points were assigned for responses indicating 'never' and 'almost never', and 1 point was assigned for 'sometimes' and 'often'. The total possible score ranged from 0 to 5, with higher scores indicating more frequent experiences of discrimination. The reliability of this item, as measured by its Cronbach's alpha, was 0.749, suggesting a fairly reliable measure.

**Table 1. Area of Discrimination Experience Question**

Area	Measurement
Gender	I have experienced unfair discrimination because I am a man (or woman)
Age	I have experienced unfair discrimination because of my young age
Appearance and physical Condition	I have experienced unfair discrimination because of my appearance or physical condition (height, weight, etc.)
Result	I have experienced unfair discrimination because I couldn't study
Household Economic Situation	I have experienced unfair discrimination because my family is poor

#### 3.2 Depressive Item Scale

The depression scale used in this study comprised three questions: 'I have been lonely for no reason,' 'I have been anxious for no reason,' and 'I have been sad or depressed for no reason.' The responses were scored using a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 point indicated 'not at all like that,' 2 points indicated 'rather like that,' 3 points indicated 'a bit like that,' and 4 points indicated 'very much like that.' Higher scores on this scale suggest a higher level of depression. The reliability coefficient for this scale in the study was found to be 0.892.

#### 3.3 Parental Support Item Scale

Social support is defined as the positive attitude and behavior that an individual receives from others with whom they have a relationship. The presence and level of perceived social support are protective factors against problem behaviors and mental health issues in individuals. Consequently, this study aimed to examine parental support, a crucial form of support from others, by asking questions related to parents' attitudes when making decisions. The questions were: 1) My parents listen to and respect my opinion when deciding on important family matters. 2) When deciding on my future aspirations, my parents also respect the career path I want to pursue. Responses were scored as follows: 1 point for 'not at all true,' 2 points for 'not true at all,' 3 points for 'somewhat true,' and 4 points for 'very true.' A higher score indicates higher levels of parental support, and the reliability coefficient for this scale in the study was .665.

#### 3.4 Results for Item Measurement

- 1) Subject of Investigation

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the main variables are presented in Table 2. Observing the averages of the main variables, there were slightly more males (4,473 (51.9%)) than females (4,150 (48.1%)). By school classification, high schools had the highest number of students, totaling 2,994 (34.7%), followed by elementary schools with 2,882 students (33.4%) and middle schools with 2,747 students (31.9%). Regarding economic levels, 4,824 individuals (55.9%) were at various levels, and 3,100 individuals (36.3%) were at the middle level, with 624 individuals (7.3%) in that order.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables**

Division		Frequency (persons, households)	Percentage(%)
Gender (n=8623)	Men	4,473	51.9
	Women	4,150	48.1
School Classification (n=8623)	Elementary school	2,882	33.4
	Middle school	2,747	31.9
	High school	2,994	34.7
Economic level (n=8548)	Upper	4,824	55.9
	Middle	3,100	36.3
	Lower	624	7.3

2) Experience of discrimination based on gender

To determine whether there was a significant difference between the means of gender and discrimination experience, a t-test was conducted on paired samples as presented in Table 3. The results revealed a significant difference between gender and discrimination experience ( $t = -5.304, p < .001$ ). When comparing the averages, women ( $M = 1.168$ ) scored higher than men ( $M = 1.135$ ).

**Table 3. Differences in discrimination experiences based on gender**

Division		N	Average	Standard Deviation	T-value
Gender	Men	4,426	1.135	0.313	-5.304***
	Women	4,417	1.168	0.261	

3) Experiences of discrimination based on school classification and economic level

To examine the difference in the average discrimination experience according to school classification, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted as shown in Table 4. The results indicated a significant difference in discrimination experience based on school classification ( $F = 5.572, P < .001$ ) and economic level ( $F = 5.4022, P < .001$ ). Following a Scheffe's post-hoc analysis of the variables, the school classification showed the highest discrimination experience in high school, followed by middle school and elementary school. Regarding economic level, the experience of discrimination was highest among those with a low economic level, followed by those in the upper middle economic level.

**Table 4. Experiences of discrimination based on school classification and economic level**

Division		N	Average	Standard Deviation	T-value	Scheffe
School Classification	Elementary school	2846	1.105	0.231	5.572***	a<b<c
	Middle school	2732	1.154	0.254		
	High school	2975	1.192	0.356		

	Upper	4798	1.130	0.269		
Economic level	Middle	3091	1.161	0.294	5.402***	a<b<c
	Lower	621	1.267	0.289		

#### 4) Correlation Analysis

To confirm the correlation between the main variables of this study: gender, school classification, economic level, experience of discrimination, parental support, and depression, Pearson's correlation analysis was performed as shown in Table 5. As a result, gender was determined by economic level ( $r = .051$ ,  $p < .001$ ), experience of discrimination ( $r = .057$ ,  $p < .001$ ), parental support ( $r = .026$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and depression ( $r = .239$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and school classification was economic level ( $r = .221$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and experience of discrimination ( $r = .124$ ,  $p < .001$ ). , showed a significant positive (+) correlation with parental support ( $r = .762$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and depression ( $r = .206$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Economic level was significantly positive (+) with discrimination experience ( $r = .112$ ,  $p < .001$ ), parental support ( $r = .087$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and depression ( $r = .208$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A correlation was shown, and discrimination experience showed a significant positive (+) correlation with depression ( $r = .319$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and parental support showed a significant positive correlation with depression ( $r = .078$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A positive (+) correlation was shown.

**Table 5. Correlation of variables**

Division	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender	1					
School Classification	-.006	1				
Economic level	.051***	.221***	1			
Experiences of discrimination	.057***	.124***	.112***	1		
Parental Support	.026**	.762***	.087***	.014	1	
Depressed	.239.***	.206***	.208***	.319***	.078***	1

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## 4. RESULTS OF APPLYING THE RESEARCH MODEL

In order to examine whether parental support plays a mediating role in the impact of discrimination experiences on children and adolescents' depression, a mediation test was conducted on the hypotheses of three research models using hierarchical regression analysis. As a result, the first hypothesis of the research model, "How does youth's experience of discrimination affect depression?" resulted in a regression model ( $F = 398.985$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the second hypothesis, "Parental support is a positive influence on youth's depression." The regression model result of "Does it affect depression?" was statistically significant ( $335.771$  ( $p < .001$ )). And the third hypothesis, "Does parental support have a mediating effect on the impact of adolescents' discrimination experiences on depression? As a result of checking with the regression model, it was found to be statistically significant ( $432.854$  ( $p < .001$ )). Therefore, all three models were statistically significant, and the explanatory power of the regression model was 12.4% for the first hypothesis of the research model, the second hypothesis showed 13.7%, and the third hypothesis showed 20.4%.

In addition, as a result of checking the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to check multicollinearity between independent variables, all results were found to be less than 10, so it is judged that there is no multicollinearity problem. As a result of testing the significance of the regression coefficient, the first hypothesis of the research model showed that all control variables were significant. Gender ( $\beta = .217$ ,  $P < .001$ ), school classification ( $\beta = .144$ ,  $P < .001$ ), and economic level ( $\beta = .135$ ,  $P < .001$ ) were statically significant, and experiences of

discrimination ( $\beta = .274, P < .001$ ) was found to have a significant positive effect on depression, meaning that the more discrimination experiences there are, the higher the adolescent's depression. The second hypothesis also showed that all control variables were significant. Gender ( $\beta = .039, P < .001$ ) and school classification ( $\beta = .788, P < .001$ ) have a positive influence on parental support, and economic level ( $\beta = -.081, P < .001$ ) was found to have a negative (-) effect, and the experience of discrimination ( $\beta = -.077, P < .001$ ) was found to have a negative (-) effect. In other words, the higher the experience of discrimination, the lower the parental support. For the third hypothesis, all control variables were found to be significant. Gender ( $\beta = .222, P < .001$ ), school classification ( $\beta = .246, P < .001$ ), and economic level ( $\beta = .124, P < .001$ ) have a positive influence on depression. It was found that discrimination experience ( $\beta = .264, P < .001$ ) had a positive (+) effect, and parental support ( $\beta = -.129, P < .001$ ) had a negative (-) effect. In other words, the higher the discrimination experience, the higher the depression, and the higher the parental support, the lower the adolescent's depression. As for the mediating effect of parental support in the effect of discrimination experiences on children and adolescents' depression, the first hypothesis positively and significantly explains discrimination experiences and depression ( $\beta = .274, P < .001$ ), and the second hypothesis explains the effects of discrimination experiences and parents. It can be seen that support is significantly explained negatively ( $\beta = .264, P < .001$ ). The third and final hypothesis included both discrimination experience and parental support, and the influence of discrimination experience on depression decreased ( $\beta = .274 \rightarrow \beta = .264$ ). This shows that parental support acts as a partial mediating factor in the effect of discrimination experience on depression.

**Table 6. The resulting value of the step-by-step model**

Dependent Variables	Step 1.			Step 2.			Step 3.		
	Depressed			Parental Support			Depressed		
Independent Variables	B(SE)	$\beta$	t	B(SE)	$\beta$	t	B(SE)	$\beta$	t
Constant	.756 (.030)	-	25.574***	5.575 (.145)	-	38.479***	.861 (.032)	-	26.965***
Gender	.238 (.011)	.217	22.162***	.297 (.053)	.039	5.634***	.244 (.011)	.222	22.735***
School Classification	.096 (.007)	.144	14.327***	3.612 (.033)	.788	110.087***	.164 (.010)	.246	15.733***
Economic level	.118 (.009)	.135	13.419***	-.485 (.043)	-.081	-11.287***	.109 (.009)	.124	12.344***
Experiences of discrimination	.520 (.019)	.274	27.731***	-1.000 (.092)	-.077	-10.890***	.501 (.019)	.264	26.658***
Parental Support	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.019 (.002)	-.129	-8.479***
F	398.985(p<.001)			335.771(p<.001)			432.854(p<.001)		
R2	.124			.137			.204		
adjR2	.124			.137			.204		

As a result of the analysis, there were 4,473 men (51.9%) and 4,150 women (48.1%), and the experience of discrimination was found to have a negative effect on depression ( $B=311, P<0.001$ ). It was found that the more experiences of discrimination victimization, the higher the level of depression, and the more experiences of discrimination victimization adolescents had, the more psychological depression they experienced. These results show that in the relationship between discrimination experiences and depression, support from family and friends is related to discrimination experiences. This can be seen as the same result as the results shown to improve the ability to cope with depression and thereby alleviate depression.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the research results based on the three hypotheses of the research model show that adolescents' experiences of discrimination are closely related to depression. In order to lower adolescents' depression and help them grow psychologically healthy, they must understand discrimination and the negative effects of discrimination experiences. There is a need to accurately recognize. Adolescence is a time when peer relationships are very important, and various things are learned through peer relationships. Therefore, we would like to suggest a method of social welfare practice to reduce youths' experiences of discrimination and victimization. First: Improving awareness of discrimination must occur first. In order to properly recognize discrimination, discrimination prevention education and human rights education must be systematically conducted. Currently, human rights education in schools is conducted superficially, making it difficult to improve awareness of discrimination. Therefore, education should be provided step by step starting from early childhood to create a familiar environment in which children can learn correct human rights. Second: Adolescents are experiencing psychological depression and anxiety due to experiences of discrimination, so a therapeutic approach must be taken to deal with this. Currently, experiences of discrimination are not included in the category of school violence, so there is no therapeutic approach to the consequences of such damage. Therefore, social interest should be expanded so that systematic research can be conducted on the negative effects of youth's experiences of discrimination and treatment can be provided based on the results of the research. Third: Parental support has a positive impact when children or adolescents experience discrimination. As a result of various studies on experiences of discrimination, children and adolescents can cope more actively with experiences of discrimination and maintain their identity more firmly if they have parental support. Parental support plays a role in helping adolescents maintain a strong sense of emotional stability even in difficult situations. Without parental support, adolescents may feel more uncertainty and negative emotions about their identity and may develop mental health problems. As the possibility increases, a parent education system that can expand parental support must be created. Currently, Korea's parent education system can be said to be absent. Rather than compulsory education that is provided when a problem arises, parents need to systematically provide education such as role learning and emotional support as the child grows naturally at the national level.

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