

DO KOREAN YOUNG CHILDREN'S DAILY ROUTINES AND THEIR MOTHERS' PARENTING STRESS DIFFER ACCORDING TO SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS?

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We examined the differences in Korean children's daily routines and their mothers' perceived level of parenting stress according to socioeconomic status (SES). Mothers from low-income (239) and high-income (338) families with young children completed questionnaires regarding their perceived level of parenting stress and the daily routines of their children. We found significant differences between the 2 SES subgroups in terms of some of the dimensions of their children's daily routines. In addition, the low-income mothers experienced higher levels of maternal parenting stress compared to their high-income counterparts. Implications for research and parenting are discussed.

Keywords: Korean children, daily routines, maternal parenting stress, socioeconomic status.

As the period when the groundwork for the physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development of young children is laid, the first five years of life are very important. Young children's continuous interactions with their surrounding environments not only help them advance in their current developmental stage, but also influence their future growth (Park, Seo, & Bornstein, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological system theory was developed to further understanding of the continuous process of human development by focusing not only on the characteristics of young children as individuals growing and

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developing, but also on the objects, incidents, and activities these children come into contact with and experience within multiple layers of their surrounding environments. From an ecological perspective, human development relates to how young children, as active agents in their development, explore and understand themselves through meaningful daily experiences within their microsystem (Seo, Ha, & Lee, 2010).

In contrast to the ecological perspective, the emphasis in Vygotsky's sociocultural approach (Vygotsky, 1986, cited in Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992) is on in depth analysis of interactions with the surrounding environment in the social context of human beings as subjects of their development. This approach, along with the ecological perspective, can provide researchers with an understanding of the daily life of young children.

So far, the concept of daily life, based on the continuity, regularity, and repetitiveness that the term itself characteristically connotes, has been widely discussed in the literature (Daily Culture Society, 1998; Lee, Park, Kim, & Kim, 2004; Seo et al., 2010) as being unconscious and unreflective of life rhythms (Daily Culture Society, 1998). Our daily lives are not only structured by society, but are also regarded as a succession of work that structures our society (Lee et al., 2004). Research on the daily lives of humans has been overlooked in the field of social science. Recently it has been realized that social phenomena that are in a state of great change require a research approach that is not based solely on social and economic theories, but rather on a broader approach in which the actions and habits of a group of individuals are analyzed to get an overall picture of the topic being studied (Seo et al., 2010).

Literature Review

To date, empirical findings in Korea suggest that the daily lives of young children are assisted and managed by their mothers, and feature more indoor than outdoor play activities (Lee, Chung, & Kim, 2006; Lee & Kim, 2010; Seo et al., 2010; Song, 2005). In addition, computer or video games have become a major part of young children's daily lives (Moon, 2000). In Korea most young children attend some form of infant child care and participate in after-school learning or extracurricular activities (Lee et al., 2004; Song, 2005). Researchers of related topics have recorded that very young children in Korea are currently exposed to sociocultural circumstances that differ greatly from those common in the past in that today young children are exposed to computer games and the Internet environment and are under pressure to learn English from an earlier age (Seo et al., 2010).

It has been suggested that more systematic research should be conducted because an in depth understanding and analysis of young children's daily lives

can provide insights for stakeholders including parents, teachers, and social policy advisers in the context of the healthy growth and development of young children. Research into the daily life of underprivileged young Korean children in financially disadvantaged families who are eligible to receive free child care services, and other medical and social benefits from the central government is imperative in order to give equal opportunities for their development. It has consistently been reported that when families are advantaged in terms of their socioeconomic status (SES), they can afford to purchase for their children an array of services, goods, parental actions, and social networks (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Melhuish, 2010). However, there is a concern that children from underprivileged families lack equal access to such resources and experiences, thereby putting these young children at risk of developmental problems (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

The environments in which children live have received much attention in literature on the potential causes of variation in academic achievement among school-aged children, especially children from families living in poverty. In empirical studies it has consistently been reported that stimulating environments during a child's early years are related to later outcomes – for example, the environments of most children living in poor families were found to be much less stimulating than the environments of their counterparts in families with a higher SES (McCulloch & Joshi, 2001). This finding can be understood in parallel with the finding that poor families have not always been able to provide their children with the abundant materials and resources that middle-income families provide (Melhuish, 2010). It has been found that low-income mothers use a much more limited vocabulary in conversation with their young children, which has a negative effect on the early literacy development of their children (Nielsen & Monson, 1996). Differences according to family SES have also been discussed in related studies with regard to both quantity and quality of parental involvement in child-rearing practices (Melhuish, 2010; Shin, 2007). Parents from low SES families were reported to tend to spend less quality time with their children than did their higher SES counterparts, and the childrearing practices low-income parents used were found not to be positive (Shin, 2007).

Economic hardships have been found to have indirect – rather than direct – effects on young children by affecting their parents' psychological state in negative ways (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007). The majority of research conducted in Korea available to date has been focused predominantly on the relationship between mothers and stress associated with the parenting role, and this relationship has been observed in a sample of low-income parents when compared to their higher SES counterparts (Seo, 2006). The low-income parents' vulnerability to external stress because of economic difficulties may negatively influence their children because low SES parents may use physical punishment

or coercive parenting practices as a result of that stress (Chung, Kwak, & Yoon, 2007; Kwak, Kim, & Yoo, 2007). It is well documented that in Korea young children from low SES families feel lonely, are unlikely to participate in educational activities, and are often isolated from their peers at school in comparison to children from higher SES families (Yoo, 2009).

Even though children in families living in poverty are in an unfavorable position compared to their high SES counterparts it has been reported that, to some extent, such negative conditions can be improved by external support or through the provision of early intervention programs (Kwak et al., 2007; Yoo, 2009). Coupled with this finding, the younger the children were, the more their parents favored center-based child care over maternal care at home (Seo et al., 2010). This evidence implies that it is necessary to examine how the child care needs of very young children whose families are on welfare are implemented. Again, the reciprocal influences between the child and the environment should be examined based on the ecological perspective, which puts the child at the center of a series of nested circles of social and cultural influences such as home (microsystem and mesosystem) and education and sociality in general (macrosystem).

The daily routines of Korean children have been addressed in very few studies, and even those extant studies were predominantly focused on kindergarteners (Lee et al., 2004). As already described, Korean children's daily lives were reported as being directed and monitored by their mothers, and watching television or videos and playing with a computer were found to be the main types of activity (Moon, 2001a). The daily lives of very young children in Korea have not been extensively explored. In the current study the use of very young children and their parents as a research sample reflects the growing interest in the subject of parenting in the form of a family policy that addresses the needs of mothers with very young children. Early intervention programs in Korea are in their infancy and, coupled with this situation, relatively little is known about how to deliver early intervention programs to groups according to SES in order to meet the needs of young children and parents with diverse resources and concern (Seo, 2006).

In a recent study, Seo et al. (2010) conducted an in depth analysis of the daily routines of Korean children aged up to 36 months and compared the patterns in the daily lives of young children in two subgroups according to their use of different types of child care. The two subgroups were found to differ significantly in a variety of daily activities encompassing self-skills such as toilet training, indoor and outdoor play activities, exposure to multimedia devices, closeness to family members, and participation in private education. The infants, especially those being cared by their mothers at home, were more likely to play outside, to be exposed to multimedia devices, and to experience a variety of types of private

education than were their counterparts being cared for at center-based facilities (Seo et al., 2010).

Seo et al. (2010) stated that follow-up research was necessary, in order to understand what social support measures need to be put in place for infants and their mothers. A comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in a number of aspects, including demographic characteristics of young children and their parents, would provide a starting point for removing gaps in knowledge about social support for very young Korean children and promoting the developmental outcomes of young children through provision of useful information to policy makers. This argument concurs with the ecological perspective in that the nation, society, and culture in which the child lives form an intricate web of childrearing culture as a macroenvironment system that, in turn, affects the child's development (Lee & Joo, 2000). In Korea, mothers have been found to be too involved in childrearing and preparation for school because of their preference for the child to be dependent on them (Lee & Joo, 2000). Korean mothers were found to feel high levels of maternal parenting stress because of this belief (Seo et al., 2010), although they did not spend much time with their children. For example, Lee and Joo (2000) found that in Korea the most common duration of direct interaction between mother and children was 30 minutes to 1 hour, with the average being 2 hours. In comparison the most common duration in Japan was 1.5 hours to 2 hours with the average 2 hours and 20 minutes. Regardless of SES, this result is also in agreement with the finding reported in the same study, that Korean mothers' overall parenting stress levels were much higher than the stress level of Japanese mothers and Korean children spent less time with their mothers than did their Japanese counterparts (Lee & Joo, 2000). It has also been reported that Korean children spend a great deal of time in various private educational facilities instead of spending time with their mothers (Seo et al., 2010).

At the core of these results are questions about how the individual characteristics of children are shaped by the environments in which they are brought up. To sum up, in terms of the child's upbringing, parental values, attitudes, and psychological states all function as the microenvironment that have the greatest influence on the child's development. From this point of view, investigations into the daily lives of young children and maternal parenting stress are imperative to explore some of the implications of the research for development of services for young children and their families in the near future.

The overarching research question behind this study was: Do the daily routines of young children and maternal parenting stress vary according to socioeconomic status? In this study, the daily routines of young children relates to the array of activities experienced by young children on a daily basis as a result of interactions with their surrounding environments. These encompass a broad

range of self-skill-related activities, indoor and outdoor play activities, exposure to multimedia devices, organization of the home environment, use of child care centers and private education, and parental involvement with the child. Maternal parenting stress relates to the mother's perceived levels of stress in association with their child-rearing practices.

Method

Participants

Family characteristics. Participants in this study were 577 mothers of young children aged between 7 and 60 months. In terms of demographic characteristics, the sample was divided into two subgroups according to family income level: families with an income at or below what is determined as the poverty line in Korea (on welfare), and those with an income above the poverty line (not on welfare). Those earning \$35,000 or less were termed low-income families, along with seven families earning over \$35,000 but receiving a child care subsidy, comprising 239 families in total. A further 338 were termed high-income families. Specifically the average monthly income of these families was; 10.4% of the families = US \$18,000 or less, 29.1% of the families between \$18,001 and \$35,000, 47% of the families between \$35,001 and \$75,000, and 12.8% of the families \$75,001 or more. The mean ages of the fathers and mothers were 37.87 ($SD = 5.17$) and 35.30 ($SD = 4.23$) years old, respectively, in low-income families and 37.65 ($SD = 4.44$) and 35.06 ($SD = 4.13$) years old, respectively, in high-income families. With regard to maternal employment status and type, 66.5% ($n = 210$) and 24.7% ($n = 78$) of mothers worked full-time and part-time, respectively.

Child characteristics. The child participants comprised 302 males (52.3%) and 275 females (47.7%). There were 134 males (56.1%) and 105 females (43.9%) from low-income families and 168 males (49.7%) and 170 females (50.3%) from high-income families. The mean ages of the children from low-income and high-income families were 40.54 months ($SD = 16.34$) and 32.34 months ($SD = 10.35$), respectively.

Procedure

Preliminary study. Prior to developing the survey questionnaires a review of the literature was conducted. Then in depth interviews were conducted with four mothers of young children who met the criteria of this study, as set out above, and lived in Seoul. The interviewed mothers were classified into four types: (1) employed and using daycare centers, (2) employed and having their children cared for by others, (3) unemployed and using daycare centers, and (4) unemployed and caring for their children by themselves at home. Content validity

was established through these in depth interviews, a review of the literature, and consultations with a panel of experts in this field. The questionnaire draft of 120 items was then compiled.

Preliminary surveys were conducted with the mothers of 40 children (aged between 6 and 36 months) in cooperation with two daycare centers. The final 100-item survey questionnaire was then developed, with items that showed low response rates being deleted or revised.

Main study. The questionnaires were distributed via mail to all of the mothers who met the criteria for participation in this study in collaboration with nine local child care centers and three young plazas (i.e., a government-sponsored parenting support center located in a local community) in Seoul. In addition, families on welfare who did not use center-based care or were not provided with child care subsidies were contacted through the local officials who were in charge of social welfare services. The families who agreed to participate in this study were provided with incentives (approximately US\$10 in gift certificates) after completing the survey questionnaires. We distributed 700 questionnaires and 590 of these were returned to the researchers (response rate = 84%). Of the collected surveys, 13 were incomplete and were discarded, so that 577 surveys were used for data analysis.

Measures

The Daily Life of Young Children. We developed the Daily Routines of Young Children (DRYC) questionnaire for use in this study.

The DRYC questionnaire consists of 100 questions/items describing a variety of dimensions in the daily routines of young children in activities initiated by themselves or significant others in different environments (e.g., home, child care centers, communities).

Specific questions about the daily routines of young children were divided into five subscales: 1) activities related to children's self-skills; 2) play activities (indoor and outdoor); 3) multimedia exposure; 4) maternal involvement with child; and 5) mothers' views of early childhood education and care. In terms of internal consistency, Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each of the five subscales as well as the full DRYC scale. Cronbach's alphas were .70, .73, .72, .68, and .82 for self-skills, play activities, multimedia exposure, maternal involvement in childrearing practices, and maternal views on early childhood education and care, respectively, and the internal consistency reliability for the full scale was .79.

In the DRYC questionnaire binary choices (1 = *yes* or 0 = *no*) were used for all items. A subtotal score was determined by counting the number of items to which the answer had been "yes". In this study, each of the subtotals on the DRYC scales was included in statistical analyses.

Maternal Parenting Stress. Mothers also completed the Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF; Abidin, 1990). The PSI-SF has been translated into Korean and used in previous studies with Korean samples (see e.g., Lee & Seo, 2009). The PSI-SF is a 36-item instrument used to measure the level of stress of the parent in the parent-child relationship and had been found to be appropriate for use with children aged from 1 month to up to 12 years. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) to produce a total stress score. The items also cluster to produce three subscales scores for parental distress, difficult child, and parent-child dysfunctional interaction. The PSI-SF has been reported to have acceptable levels of validity and reliability (Abidin, 1990) and in the present study Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .91.

Results

To examine whether there were significant differences in the daily routines of young children and mothers' perceived levels of parenting stress according to SES, a series of chi-square and *t* tests were completed. We found significant differences between the two SES subgroups in terms of the five dimensions of the DRYC scale and maternal parenting stress levels.

Self-help Skills

We found a significant difference in time for toilet training between the two subgroups ($\chi^2 = 16.87$, $df = 5$, $p = .01$). Specifically, in low-income families children progressed from needing diapers when aged between 19 and 24 months (33.5%), 25 and 30 months (16.3%), and 31 or more months (13%). By comparison, in the high-income families, 29.5% of young children progressed from needing diapers when aged between 19 and 24 months, 16.3% did so between 25 and 30 months, and 14.8% did so at 31 or more months.

Table 1. Mothers' Perceived Levels of Strictness in Relation to Toilet Training According to Socioeconomic Status

	Low-income families		High-income families		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Very relaxed	16	9.0	45	18.7	61	14.6
Relaxed	77	43.5	115	47.7	192	45.9
Neutral	73	41.2	68	28.2	141	33.7
Not usually relaxed	10	5.6	12	5.0	22	5.3
Not at all relaxed	1	.6	1	.4	2	.5
Total	177	100.0	241	100.0	418	100.0

Notes: $\chi^2 = 12.15$, $df = 4$, $p = .02$.

Table 1 contains results of strictness of the mothers in relation to toilet training for their young children according to SES. There were significant differences based on SES. A lower percentage of low-income families than high-income families were in the relaxed response category, but a higher percentage of low-income than high-income families were in the neutral category.

Play Activities

We found significant differences in terms of indoor play types of young children based on SES ($\chi^2 = 27.71$, $df = 9$, $p = .001$). Make-believe play (role play) was found to be the most common activity among young children from both low- (20.8%) and high-income families (26.5%), followed by playing with blocks (17.3% and 18.7% of low- and high-income families, respectively). Children from low-income families were more likely to watch television and movies (12.6%) than were their higher SES counterparts (5.1%). By contrast, young children from high-income families were more likely to read picture books (18.7%) than were their lower SES counterparts (11.3%).

In addition, there were significant differences in types of play with siblings according to SES ($\chi^2 = 22.24$, $df = 9$, $p = .008$). Children from high-income families played block games more often with their siblings than did those from low-income families (23.1% versus 14.8%). By contrast, children from low-income families watched television or movies more often together with their siblings than did those from high-income families (47.4% versus 37.8%).

With regard to special outings, there were several significant differences between the two SES groups. High-income families visited museums or galleries more frequently than did low-income families. There was also a higher number of high-income than low-income families visiting bookstores once or more each month (see Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in Going on Monthly Special Outings Between the Two SES Levels

Places		Low-income families		High-income families		Total	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Museums and art galleries	None	234	79.1	234	69.2	423	73.3
	1 or more	104	20.9	104	30.8	154	26.7
	Total	338	100.0	338	100.0	577	100.0
$\chi^2 = 6.94$, $df = 1$, $p = .008$							
Bookstores	None	143	59.8	171	50.6	314	54.4
	1 or more	96	40.2	167	49.4	263	45.6
	Total	239	100.0	338	100.0	577	100.0
$\chi^2 = 4.82$, $df = 1$, $p = .028$							

Table 2 continued

Places	Low-income families		High-income families		Total		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Visits to relatives	None	92	38.5	106	31.4	198	34.3
	1 or more	147	61.5	232	68.6	379	65.7
	Total	239	100.0	338	100.0	577	100.0

$\chi^2 = 3.16, df = 1, p = .075$

Parental Involvement with Child

Contrary to our hypothesis, there were no significant differences between the two SES subgroups in terms of number of picture books available to young children at home. However, significant differences were found with regard to how often, and for how long, parents read books to their children (see Table 3). Parents from high-income families read books to their children more often and for a much longer time compared to their lower SES counterparts.

Table 3. Differences in Parental Involvement in Terms of Reading Between the Two SES Levels

		Low-income families		High-income families		Total	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Frequency of reading books	Every day	106	44.9	221	65.4	327	57.0
	3-4 times/week	83	35.2	93	27.5	176	30.7
	1-2 times/week	27	11.4	16	4.7	43	7.5
	Once/month	10	4.2	4	1.2	14	2.4
	Never	10	4.2	4	1.2	14	2.4
	Total	236	100.0	338	100.0	574	100.0

$\chi^2 = 31.85, df = 4, p < .000$

Reading time	Before going to bed	122	53.0	161	47.9	283	50.0
	Before nap time	4	1.7	8	2.4	12	2.1
	Morning	5	2.2	4	1.2	9	1.6
	Afternoon	13	5.7	31	9.2	44	7.8
	Not specified	86	37.4	132	39.3	218	38.5
	Total	230	100.0	336	100.0	566	100.0

$\chi^2 = 4.18, df = 4, p = .38$

Reading duration	< 10 minutes	48	20.9	47	14.1	95	16.9
	10 to 30 minutes	143	62.2	187	56.2	330	58.6
	30 minutes to 1 hour	36	15.7	84	25.2	120	21.3
	More than 1 hour	3	1.3	15	4.5	18	3.2
	Total	230	100.0	333	100.0	563	100.0

$\chi^2 = 14.73, df = 3, p = .002$

Multimedia Exposure

We examined a series of issues relating to young children's multimedia exposure using the following items: "At what age were your children first exposed to electronic media?"; "What types of electronic media were the children exposed to?"; "How long did they use them for?"; "Where did they use them?"; and "With whom did they use them?"

The only significant difference found related to the first time the children were exposed to multimedia. In general, children from low-income homes were exposed to electronic media earlier than were children from high-income families. Children from high-income families were exposed to educational videos and movies much earlier than were their lower SES counterparts (see Table 4).

There were also significant differences in experience with television, computers, and game machines according to household income levels. In general, children from low-income homes were exposed to electronic media at an earlier age than were those from high-income families, as shown in Table 4.

In terms of average hours of using electronic media each day, there were significant differences between the two SES levels, in that children from low-income families used electronic media more often than did those from high-income families.

There was a similar trend for television and video in terms of with whom the children experienced the multimedia. Television was watched by children together with their mothers (63.9%), brothers and sisters (42.0%), and fathers (29.8%). Videos were watched by children with mothers (54.4%), brothers and sisters (41.9%), and fathers (20.1%). Computer co-users were mothers (44.6%), brothers and sisters (43.8%), and fathers (21.3%), and game machine co-users were mothers (42.8%), brothers and sisters (28.2%), and fathers (20.0%). Electronic media were most commonly used together with mothers in both groups, but they were used more with siblings in low-income families than in high-income families. By contrast, they were more commonly used with fathers in high-income families than in low-income families.

Table 4. *Differences in the Uses of Multimedia Between the Two SES Groups*

Type		Television			Movies		
		Low-income families	High-income families	Total	Low-income families	High-income families	Total
First time to use	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	14.49 (10.15)	13.26 (9.05)	13.80 (9.55)	19.92 (11.50)	16.87 (9.50)	18.05 (10.41)
		$t = 1.39, df = 472, p = .166$			$t = 2.67, df = 399, p = .008$		

Table 4 continued

Type		Television			Movies			
			Low- income families	High- income families	Total	Low- income families	High- income families	Total
Duration of use	Weekdays	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.64 (.99)	1.36 (.80)	1.48 (.90)	2.14 (4.80)	1.01 (.57)	1.38 (2.90)
				$t = 2.95, df = 36, p = .003$			$t = 2.30, df = 148, p = .023$	
	Weekend	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2.27 (1.38)	1.94 (1.39)	2.10 (1.39)	1.84 (3.96)	1.14 (.49)	1.40 (2.44)
			$t = 2.02, df = 275, p = .045$			$t = 1.69, df = 145, p = .093$		
Place of use	Living room	<i>n</i> (%)	152 (70.40)	229 (85.40)	381 (78.70)	86 (66.70)	169 (83.30)	255 (76.80)
	Bedroom	<i>n</i> (%)	54 (25.0)	34 (12.70)	88 (18.20)	33 (25.60)	30 (14.80)	63 (19.0)
	Day care	<i>n</i> (%)	1 (.50)	2 (.70)	3 (.60)	3 (2.30)	-	3 (.90)
	Others	<i>n</i> (%)	9 (4.20)	3 (1.10)	12 (2.50)	7 (5.40)	4 (2.0)	11 (3.30)
	Total	<i>N</i> (%)	216 (100.0)	268 (100.0)	484 (100.0)	129 (100.0)	203 (100.0)	332 (100.0)
				$\chi^2 = 18.06, df = 3, p < .000$			$\chi^2 = 15.24, df = 3, p = .002$	

Views on Early Childhood Education and Care

For the mothers in this study using external child care facilities there were significant differences in their choices of types of child care according to SES (see Table 5-1). Specifically, low-income families were more likely to consider educational programs when choosing types of child care than were their higher SES counterparts. In addition, low-income families took educational expenses into consideration more than did high-income families.

The views or perceptions the mothers held about curriculum quality varied according to SES. As shown in Table 5-2, mothers from high-income families were more likely to identify key dimensions as being social development and character education than were mothers from low-income. By contrast, cognitive development was more valued over other dimensions by low-income mothers than by mothers from high-income families (see Table 5-2).

Table 5-1. *Factors Influencing Child Care Choices According to SES*

Variables	Low-income families		High-income families		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Education	35	16.7	14	7.4	49	12.3
Physical aspects	84	40.0	80	42.6	164	41.2
Staff qualifications	15	7.1	31	16.5	46	11.6
Location	51	24.3	50	26.6	101	25.4
Fees	21	10.0	4	2.1	25	6.3
Hours of operation	4	1.9	9	4.8	13	3.3
Total	210	100.0	188	100.0	<i>N</i> = 398	100.0

$\chi^2 = 27.02, df = 5, p < .000$

Table 5-2. *Differences in Parents' Preferred Curriculum According to SES*

Preferred curriculum	Low-income families		High-income families		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Social development	77	36.8	79	42.5	156	39.5
Cognitive development	34	16.3	12	6.5	46	11.6
Art education	8	3.8	4	2.2	12	3.0
Creativity development	20	9.6	19	10.2	39	9.9
Character education	70	33.5	70	37.6	140	35.4
Others	-	-	2	1.1	2	.5
Total	209	100.0	186	100.0	<i>N</i> = 395	100.0

$\chi^2 = 12.62, df = 5, p = .027$

Maternal Parenting Stress

Perceived maternal parenting stress levels were compared according to SES. In Table 6 it is shown that significant differences were found between the two SES groups in only one subscale of the PSI, that of the difficult child. Low-income mothers experienced more stress about their child's behavioral manageability than did their higher SES counterparts.

Table 6. *Differences in Perceived Maternal Parenting Stress According to SES*

Variable	Low-income families		High-income families		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Parental distress	2.67	.645	2.64	.66	.43
Parent-child Dysfunctional interaction	1.72	.518	1.65	.547	1.70
Difficult child	2.24	.66	2.10	.612	2.53*
PSI total	2.22	.52	2.13	.514	1.93

* $p < .05$.

Discussion

We conducted this study to gain an understanding of the daily routines of Korean children aged between 7 and 60 months and their mothers' perceived levels of parenting stress according to socioeconomic status. With regard to children's self-help skills, it was found that young children from low-income families accomplished the task of toilet training at a later age than their higher SES counterparts. However, low-income mothers were found to be less strict about toilet training than were mothers from high-income families. Mothers from high-income families tended to put a lot of pressure on their young children to accomplish toilet training at a very early age, as compared to the mothers from low-income families. This is in line with the general tendency of Korean parents to prepare their children for school from a very early age (Lee & Joo, 2000; Lee & Kim, 2010; Seo et al., 2010). This preparation consists of basic numeracy and literacy skills and learning of English. Because it has been found that strict toilet training can negatively affect the development of young children's autonomy and self-control (Seo et al., 2010), dissemination of information to primary caregivers or mothers on positive toilet training methods and its effects on young children would be a useful and positive step.

We found significant differences based on SES in terms of types of indoor play activities. This finding concurs with those gained in previous studies in which it has been reported that young children from low-income families spent more time with their siblings watching television or movies than did their higher SES counterparts. Similarly, as in previous studies, we found that children in high-income families spent more time with their parents reading picture books at home (Lee & Joo, 2000; Lee et al., 2004) compared with children in low-income families. Early childhood is a time when a variety of developmentally appropriate stimuli should be provided through continuous and qualitative interactions with primary caregivers, as these affect young children's development. The agreement in findings across studies provides implications for practitioners as well as

researchers. A variety of resources and referral services should be offered to young children from low-income families in collaboration with multi-agencies that provide counseling, support, medical, financial, job-training, and education services for parents receiving welfare assistance from the government. Given the importance of early intervention programs for children and their families, a comprehensive and holistic perspective should be taken in order to investigate bottom-up and top-down needs in early childhood educational and care settings (Melhuish, 2010).

Over the last 10 years, there has been considerable policy development in early childhood education and care in Korea. The focus is now shifting from the federal government to grassroots initiatives or efforts in local communities in order to provide information or programs tailored to promoting effective parenting skills at home. In spite of the positive steps being taken in development and implementation of parenting programs specifically targeted at families receiving welfare payments, there are still concerns associated with their use and effectiveness. Insights from both the ecological viewpoint and the results of this study will help in the construction of meaningful ways to provide foundations for empowering parents and families in need (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Seo et al., 2010). Our recommendation is that parents and practitioners should collaborate in order to create healthy environments for children and families in the form of dynamic and constant partnerships between family and early childhood education and care facilities. In order to put these into effect, a family-centered curriculum for caring should be developed within ecological systems.

We found it interesting that the quantity of picture books read in low- and high-income families was the same. Regardless of SES, all mothers in the group studied pursue the same purpose of creating an early literacy home environment for their children. However, we recorded significant differences between the two SES groups in the number of hours spent reading books to the children. It has consistently been reported that children reading with their parents for a certain amount of time every day before entering primary school has positive effects on literacy and numeracy skills in the first two years at school (Melhuish, 2010). We, therefore, recommend that low-income parents should be made aware that initial development in reading comprehension is significantly related to learning performance in primary school. Additionally, it is necessary not only to offer the opportunities of using library services and other such facilities in local communities to rent picture books for low-income homes, but also to provide parents with more practical and specific child care guidelines to encourage effective language interactions through reading picture books with their children.

In addition, children from high-income families had more and more varied cultural experiences that did those from low-income families, such as visits to museums and galleries. Children from high-income families also went

to bookstores far more frequently than did those from low-income families, giving them a potential advantage of earlier exposure to creative and artistic opportunities. In Korea, some local governments have begun providing subsidies every three or six months in the form of cultural and art vouchers to families receiving welfare payments with young children, but these are limited to daycare users. Young children need – and, indeed, thrive on – opportunities to grow and learn. In order to nurture this, children need appropriate avenues to develop, practice, show, and further elaborate on their potential talents and skills from a very early age. Given that more than 50% of Korean children under the age of three are cared for by their mothers at home rather than by teachers at subsidized daycare centers (Korean Statistics, 2009), the scope of eligibility to receive a cultural subsidy of the type described should be extended to all families with young children who are receiving a welfare payment to allow for the cultivation of every child's cultural and artistic capabilities.

With regard to children's exposure to multimedia, we found significant differences according to SES in terms of length of exposure to, and methods of contact with, electronic media. Children (aged 16.87 months on average) from high-income families were enrolled in educational programs from an earlier age than those (aged 19.92 months on average) from low-income families. Compared with children in high-income families, children from low-income families used more electronic media together with their siblings without adult guidance. We found that the total time spent watching television and movies was more than two hours. Research findings consistently suggest that children who had been exposed to multimedia from a very early age show more aggressive behaviors and perform less well academically compared with children not exposed to multimedia because of the absence of adults who can explain the differences between reality and television shows, as reported in the *Korean Child and Adolescent Development Report* (Korean Association of Child Studies, 2009). Characterized by one-way information with no filtering process, electronic media may make young children passive and dependent, so it is important for caregivers to take an active role in supervising and participating in their children's use of multimedia (Moon, 2001b).

In our study, mothers, who are considered to be the main guiding influences in their children's lives, were sampled to find out their views on early childhood education and care programs. Owing to the demand the number of these programs has grown, but understanding is lacking of what makes a good program among central stakeholders. As evidenced by the results gained in this study, there were differences between the two SES groups in relation to factors influencing their choices of child care. Specifically, low-income mothers were more likely than their higher SES counterparts to select center-based care settings over other types on the basis of program fees and education programs. This finding is inconsistent

with that gained in a previous study (Seo, 2003), in which it was found that American mothers receiving social welfare payments considered parent-oriented factors (e.g., fees, location, availability) more than child-centered factors (e.g., dimensions associated with program quality) in selecting daycare centers.

We also examined what mothers thought were the factors contributing to a good program curriculum. Those from high-income families thought socioemotional development and character education should be the focus of the curriculum of early childhood education. By contrast, those from low-income families valued cognitive development and kindergarten readiness. Although we focused only on center-based child care users' views in this study, this distinct finding parallels results gained in previous studies conducted in countries in the Western world. As Seo (2003) found, middle-class white parents tended to emphasize socioemotional development when choosing an early child care program, but African-American parents of lower SES valued school readiness or cognitive development in programs.

As supported by the findings reported in this study, mothers, as primary decision makers in the choice of care for their children, bring their own values and perspectives based on their particular contexts. It is also worth noting that learning through play has not been considered by parents as facilitating cognitive, social, and emotional development, but is strongly endorsed for its developmental benefits by researchers and practitioners in Korea. Even though each program exists for different purposes and educational goals, all programs should conform to the same guidelines and regulations (Kim, 2010). The criteria on which quality early childhood programs are based respond with flexibility to changing needs or values by paying attention to context-specific local needs. Therefore, on the basis of our findings we believe that it is imperative to establish age-customized child care policy roadmaps for young children in low-income families, as child care needs vary according to age.

Finally, we also found differences in maternal parenting stress between the two SES groups in this study. We found that mothers from low-income families had higher levels of maternal parenting stress than their higher SES counterparts, only for the difficult child subscale of the PSI-SF. This result could be compared to the findings gained in other studies in which significant correlations were reported between the children's temper and parenting stress caused by parents' relationships with their children. We found that mothers from low-income families spent less time with their children than did those from high-income families. Kim (2010) found that Korean mothers did not support the independent growth of their children, and this attitude seemed to be related to a higher levels of parenting stress. In view of these findings in our study we believe that up-to-date information about child development and parenting should be provided to mothers of young children, because dissemination of this information

to parents of young children could positively influence their parenting practices, and, in turn, reduce their levels of parenting stress. This suggestion should be more rigorously investigated in future studies.

Lastly, it would be worthwhile to replicate this study using a larger sample across various areas throughout Korea. Such replications may indicate whether the results recorded in this study could be generalized to other populations. In our study we lacked information concerning the children's outcomes as related to both their daily lives and maternal parenting stress levels in social, cultural, and economic contexts in Korea. Future researchers could include assessments of these contexts, as well as additional cultural and social information, including parents' ideas about parenting, which may be essential to understand how the dynamic interactions between the activity, the environment, and the child influence his or her development.

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