

A Phenomenological Study on Multicultural Adolescent Trauma

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Abstract: This study was attempted trauma experience of multicultural adolescents in South Korea. This study is a cross-sectional qualitative research design by in-depth interview. The participants were 8 adolescents from multicultural families. The current research was analyzed Colaizzi' phenomenological approach to the experiences of multicultural adolescents. The result was follows: the investigation of experience phenomenon was identified with 5 themes of 17 categories. The five themes are follows: alienation in relationship, colors of diverse emotions, memories that I want to erase, holding back to endure all or nothing. Due to the characteristics of multicultural family children, they suffer traumas. On the other hand, the trauma not appears when they interact with friends with similar conditions. The multicultural adolescents chose this environment and protected themselves from any more traumas. Unfortunately, trauma victims can be another attacker as shown in a trauma cycle, thus, it is required to pay more careful attention to them.

Key words: Trauma, qualitative study, main phenomenon, multicultural adolescent, experience, Korea

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Anonymous (2015), students who maladjusted to school due to housework, study, personal relations, school rules, behavior and other reasons except diseases and leaving the country and finally gave up their studies are considered school maladjustment. On the contrary to the domestic case in which the number of students who gave up their studies owing to school maladjustment tends to decrease ever year in the case of multicultural adolescents (students), these students are annually increasing: 215 students (0.7% of enrolled ones) in 2011, 319 (0.8%) in 2012, 477 (0.98%) in 2013 and 572 (1.03%) in 2014.

As a result of "The National Survey of Multicultural Families 2012" conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the reasons for school dropout include relationship problems with friends or teachers (23.8%), financial difficulties of family (18.6%), study problems (9.7%) and family problems such as divorce of parents (5.1%).

The complete enumeration survey by Jeon *et al.* (2010) aimed at multicultural elementary, middle and high school students lived in the Gyeonggi Province revealed that 20% of the multicultural students (33% in high school) are facing financial problems in addition, 25.8% of

elementary school children, 17.0% of middle school students and 14.8% of high school students were teased, discriminated and ostracized. The reasons for such treatments include Foreign parents (36.6%), no special reasons (29.4%), difficulties of communication (15.6%), different attitudes and actions (13.3%), others (19.5%), and different appearance (9.4%). For the correspondence strategies of multicultural students, patience (35.7%) and disregard (25.7%) account for the highest rate, followed by talking to teachers or parents (12.5%), immediate complaint (10.8%), expressing emotions after some time (5.8%) and violence (4.0%). The study presented that impulsive experiences for school dropout, teasing, bullied experiences and negative recognition for parents were increased, comparing the results for multicultural students investigated in 2007 and 2010.

The damage for teasing, discrimination and bullying was also explored aimed at multicultural students from elementary (5, 6th grade) to high school and showing 20.8% of the students experienced such treatments (Kyeongsook and Yangami, 2011). The study reported that immigrated children of Mongol and multicultural children of Foreign parents had the most trouble in adapting to school. Moreover, children with Foreign nationality and those of Foreign parents had a great deal of damage experiences such as teasing, discrimination and

bullying. Especially, multicultural children with Chinese nationality are highly aware of difficulties in school life, resulting that one out of five subjects experienced these damages. And the study also revealed that the extent of the damage and difficulty in adaptation may differ depending on nationality.

As a result of investigating adaptation problems of multicultural family adolescents dividing them into city and rural community, more damage experiences were found in rural communities (38.7%) compared to cities (8.6%) and 18.2% of subjects experienced bullying and violence. In particular, it suggests that a great part of multicultural family adolescents in rural communities have relatively more serious maladaptation problems than those in cities. Kyung-Sook *et al.* (2016) showed that, they made frequent use of oppressive defence mechanisms such as pretending not to hear, ignoring and not responding even if expressing their discomforts due to discrimination, disregard and bullying from their friends. Very few cases were found to be serious ones such as posttraumatic stress disorder, however, they could not speak with confidence that mother or father is a foreigner and said that they sometimes wanted their parents to be Korean. Considering these points, it can be easily imagined that they suffer from an identity crisis and have low self-esteem.

In addition, a study revealed that diverse discriminative experiences of adolescents have an effect on their emotional behavior problems (Soyeon, 2016). Such prejudice and discrimination are capable of raising the risk of health, emotion and behavior in multicultural family adolescents and traumatic damage experiences may lead to depression, anxiety, sociality problems, emotional anxiety problems (Whajung, 2004) and externalizing and internalizing behavior problems (Gwanghack, 2009). That is, these adolescents-who should grow up as a member of society by interacting family, friends and school-suffer from internalizing or externalizing problems such as depression, anxiety, aggression and delinquency when experiencing a variety of social prejudice and stress.

For the mal adaptation problems of multicultural adolescents, children immigrated from Canada or emigrated to this country also showed similar characteristics. Such subjects were experiencing discrimination due to visible differences (appearance, etc.) at school and reacted negatively and positively to it. Moreover, they became silent because of fear for identity exposure or took such prejudice and discrimination as a joke (Khanlou *et al.*, 2008).

In addition, Verkuten and Thijis (2002) reported that minority group children in Netherland, Turkey, Morocco and Surinam suffered more damages including racist

curse and social elimination than those in Netherland, thus, showing that minority groups experience more damages compared to majority groups.

Monks *et al.* (2008) showed that social demographical characteristics of Norway adolescents were associated with violent damages and that adolescents immigrated from a third country (Asia or Africa) suffered more violent damages compared to other ones. Colaizzi (1978) also investigated the recognition and experience for 7 damage patterns of students with various cultural backgrounds in England and Spain aimed at 620 people aged 11-16 years, indicating that damage types were personal not cultural. Most frequently reported damage types included personal linguistic, directly relational, physical and indirectly relational damages, which were arranged in order of priority.

Trauma is characterized by a mental injury after the event that caused external injuries, shocks or serious injuries which is called, that is, a mental scar by external shocks not enough for an individual to resist or overcome. It is also difficult to be treated due to aftereffects of external shocks by sexual violence, wars, accidents and crimes, calamities and disasters, showing diverse pathological symptoms. Accordingly to approach traumas experienced by multicultural adolescent, phenomenological qualitative research methodologies exploring in-depth and personal stories should be employed.

The present study aims to figure out properties of damage experience by investigating damage experiences of multicultural adolescents and their core feelings and problems exposed by these experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Characteristics of subjects and considerations: The subjects were selected by criterion sampling. That is, all subjects are multicultural adolescents and a total of 8 multicultural adolescents capable of providing plentiful information for career development were selected considering their sex and age in Table 1. In this study, multicultural adolescents were limited to those who were born between mothers immigrated from foreign countries and Korean fathers and who grow up in Korea and are now in regular middle and high school. In accordance with the purposes of this study, 8 multicultural adolescents who have experienced traumas were interviewed and we desired to acquire a sufficiency of data through in-depth interviews with the subjects until new data are not found. The in-depth interviews were performed targeting the subjects who live in Seoul, Gyeonggi, Chungcheong regions. Considering that the adolescents can voice their

Table 1: Characteristics of subjects

Subjects	Sex	Age	Countries of mother	Mother's age	Father's age	Mother's jobs	Father's jobs	Experiences
A	Male	14	Philippine	47	Death	English lecturer		School violence and bullying (bread shuttle)
B	Male	17	Vietnam	44	54	Interpreter	Blue-collar worker	Disregard of friends
C	Male	16	China	42	52	Agriculture	Agriculture	Teasing of friends due to appearance
D	Female	15	China	41	55	Child care teacher	Agriculture	Disregard of friends
E	Female	15	Vietnam	43	50	Agriculture	Agriculture	Teasing of friends due to appearance
F	Female	16	Japanese	47	49	No job	White-collar worker	Disregard of friends
G	Female	14	Japanese	48	52	Japanese lecturer	Agriculture	Teasing of friends
H	Female	14	Vietnam	47	51	No job	Blue-collar worker	School violence and bullying

opinions for traumas that they have experienced and their problems and difficulties in family and school can be discovered through interviews, they were limited to multicultural adolescents who are now in middle and high school and recommended from the Multicultural Family Support Center of each region. The subjects consist of a total of 8 students aged 14-17 years including 5 females, 3 males and their mothers are from China, Philippine, Japanese and Vietnam.

Data collection: In this study, we applied the Geonglim *et al.* (2004) method as a phenomenological research method to collect and analysis data. Qualitative research method is argued that it is possible to reach an overall understanding for humans through daily experiences in the life world and placed stress on data collection. In this regard, data collection and analysis are conducted at the same time in the last two ones among four data collection methods originated from the written data and protocol analysis method. It is regarded as an ascription of meaning to the importance of data collection process. Thus, this research method which put more meanings on the data collection process will contribute to understanding trauma experiences of multicultural adolescents as they are. Accordingly, we conducted faithfully the listening process by drawing their expressions, identifying common factors, eliminating expressions not related to phenomena and confirming a structural hypothesis. Data analysis is a process closely associated with data collection. The analysis method proposed by 12 is to describe the essential structure of experience by extracting significant sentences or phrases from described contents, constituting meanings by making general and abstract statements on the basis of the extracted ones and categorizing them into each bundle of topic (Pederson, 2001).

In this study, data were collected by recording the contents after performing in-depth interviews with subjects with questions for career development from June to August in 2014. Even if making it a rule to collect date until the amount is saturated, we applied the rule differently by each subject. Subjects were interviewed twice on average for one or 2 h. The in-depth interview was conducted in the counselling office of the institution,

which is prepared to communicate comfortably with them. The interviews begun with open-ended questions, the contents were recorded to collect and analysis data at the same time, then those were saved and printed for data analysis after produced as recorded transcripts.

Data analysis: Based on the Colaizzi (1978)'s method that focuses on deducing common properties of subjects rather than personal ones as a phenomenological research method, the six-stage method was applied as follows.

Strictness evaluation method: The evaluation criteria, which are proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) including realistic value, applicability, consistency and neutrality were applied to the study method. In the realistic value, a process to confirm whether the interview records match with the analysis results was performed by professionals engaged in multi-culture. This study did not go through the process in which multicultural adolescents reconfirm the results. In the applicability, actual and theoretical applicability of research processes and results was explored by researchers. In the consistency, we desired to maintain consistency of the study, thus, the research methods were prepared in detail and the whole process was evaluated by direct participation of qualitative research professionals. Lastly, in the neutrality, prior understanding of researchers for the study and hypothesis were confirmed and reflective consideration was continued throughout the study process.

Ethical consideration of the study: To minimize ethical problems that can be caused during the study, we complied strictly with the principle of confidentiality considering characteristics of subjects. The interviews were recorded only if subjects understood purposes and intents of the study and approved the consent form by preparing the consent form and confirmation letter beforehand, then the recorded contents were destroyed just after transcription. For the secret information of subjects, we paid attention not to leak out except necessary records corresponding to the study purpose. Names of subjects and places were written with their initials. And, we acquired an informed consent for study publication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Topics and bundles of topic for multicultural adolescent trauma were presented in Table 2.

Topic 1; Alienation in relationship: Difficulties and traumas experienced by multicultural adolescents were produced mainly in the relation with their friends at school. These experiences were composed of ignoring and teasing by friends, avoiding personal relations and victims of school violence.

Ignoring and teasing of friends: They made me do small matters and my presence was unappreciated. I was ‘a bread shuttle’ in the first year of middle school (subject B).

My friends teased me saying “you are small and weak.” That’s why they bullied me and I could not make friends well, since, then (subject H).

The statements indicate that two subjects were not recognized from their friends and became the subject of ridicule or disregard doing their errands. In particular, subjects suffered difficulties in relation with their friends due to small height and weakness.

Longing for the ordinary: I am special but I hate it. I want to make money like ordinary people and I don’t want to be treated as a different person. I want to have a normal life, but I don’t do, so due to my skin color (subject A).

I hate multi-culture, discrimination and differences. I dislike also to study separately and take part in the program. I want to hide my family. I hate special treatments provided to multicultural adolescents (subject F).

The subjects refused different treatments, although such measures were planned for good intentions to help multicultural children. They wanted to be treated like ordinary adolescents and rejected the word itself, ‘multi-cultur’e, even wanted to hide it.

Victims of school violence: I was small in the first year of middle school. I quarreled with my friends before fourth lesson and during a break and I was hit by soccer team students. Two people of them looked me sitting on their hands and they kicked my chest. There were no people around. It was miserable (subject A).

Immediately, they told me to follow and I held the wall behind the mart and they threatened me with a lighter hitting the wall, taking the light to my face. It was scared (subject E).

Table 2: Experiences for career development of multicultural adolescents

Topics	Bundles of topic
Ignoring and teasing of friends	Alienation in relationship
Longing for the ordinary	
Victims of school violence	
Upset and irritation	Colors of diverse emotions
Lethargy and depression	
Anger	
Desire to forget	Memories that I want to erase
Desire to hide	
Desire to avenge	
Trying not to think	Holding back to endure
Keeping the house	
Change to timid personality	All or nothing
I am also an attacker	
Like draws to like	

The subjects experienced the tragic events that they became unilaterally victims of school violence by their friends. And they couldn’t ask anyone for help. As presenting an act of violence of a number of people to a person, that is a fight between a group and a person, these aspects of violence took place in the condition not enough for a person to stand against a group.

Topic 2; Colors of diverse emotions: The emotions of multicultural adolescents who have experienced traumas varied widely. In particular, they were oppressed with negative emotions. Mainly, those were upset and irritation, lethargy and depression and anger. In this context, some subjects attempted even suicide due to the negative emotions.

Upset and irritation: I am so, distressed and irritated. I hate to think why this happens only to me (subject E). It is not a prank to me, although, they say it is a prank. That’s why I am more irritated (subject D).

A variety of emotions such as upset and irritation by traumas were expressed from them. Considering that they are adolescents, these emotions could be inherent in them due to studies or other problems but intensified by the trauma experience.

Lethargy and depression: I became silent after the event. I am originally a little noisy but I don’t want to do anything when studying and also in my house. I spent time with my mind empty (subject E).

I didn’t want to live anymore. I attempted suicide in 6th Grade. I sat on the parapet of the school rooftop. My friends found me and informed the teacher, then I could come back home (subject A).

The subjects presented lethargy and depression due to such traumas and a subject attempted suicide in a series of extremely depressive emotions.

Anger: I am angry and feel unfair, so, I want to avenge all things. I wanted to show something to all people and to hit someone because of the angry (subject C).

Most subjects who have experienced traumas expressed frequently angry emotions. This angry is not finished as angry itself and may lead to the risks of negative wave such as revenge or violence to others.

Topic 3; Memories that I want to erase: The multicultural adolescents expressed a wish to erase trauma experiences themselves. It suggests that trauma have a great negative effect on an individual by itself. The subtopics of this topic include desire not to think, desire to hide and desire to avenge.

Desire to forget: I don't want to think anymore. I am embarrassed whenever thinking about the event (subject D).

I don't mind. If I think repeatedly about the event, it is disadvantageous to me. So, I live as if nothing ever happened (subject F).

The subjects insisted repeatedly that they didn't want to recollect trauma experiences. As the similar emotions may be triggered again when negative experiences are recalled, they don't want to think about it consciously.

Desire to hide: I'm afraid that someone takes a tumble to the event. I want to keep it to myself. So, I didn't tell even my mother about it and I was worrying sick (subject B). The subjects didn't want to tell anyone or even family their experiences. It is lucky if they can heal the trauma by themselves without the help of others around them but if negative experiences of trauma remain in them, proper treatments should be immediately implemented using supportive resources.

Desire to avenge: I tease other friends because I was teased. I want to return as much as I received. Actually, I think also that it's bad to bully friends. But I want to punish them like 'an eye for an eye' (subject C).

A desire to avenge disproves that negative emotions are not still resolved. Given that greater disasters can be brought about if they put such desires into practice, the statement alerts us to the risk.

Topic 4; Holding back to endure: This topic is concerned with the strategies of multicultural adolescents to cope with traumas. It was found that they tried not to think or did something different or totally unexpected.

Trying not to think: I try not to think about the event shaking my head despite coming into my mind repeatedly. If thinking about it, I feel bad and it's a waste of time, I guess. It will take time (subject B).

As subject's thoughts affect their emotions and behaviors, they controlled to consciously think about negative experiences.

Keeping the house: I keep the house after the event, because I didn't want to meet anyone. I played games and slept in the house. I was only in my room, sometimes communicating with friends on internet (subject C).

The trauma experience tends to make them go to the inner side and reduce the area of activities. The subjects blocked the relation with other people due to traumas related to relationships. They keep to themselves or communicate online rather than face-to-face relations.

Topic 5; All or nothing: The results for trauma experiences of multicultural adolescents show that victims become attackers and like draws to like.

Change to timid personality: Now, I tell something after I think or I don't try to tell, if possible (subject E). In the old days, I sometimes tell hurtful words but I think before speaking now. I am also surprised by this change. My character was changed from extroverted to introverted (subject F).

Personal characters and behaviors can be changed by one event. These cases revealed that subjects' personalities were changed from extraverted to introverted and from talkative to timid.

I am also an attacker: I teased also others because I was teased. I don't want to be a victim (subject E).

It is bad to hit friends but if they insult my parents and it becomes serious, I let them go once but later I beat them much (subject G).

Victims of trauma experience became another attacker. It suggests that negative ripple effects of trauma are continuous like a negative cycle.

Like draws to like: It is more comfortable to be with friends similar to me. So, I am down with friends whose mothers' countries are identical to each other (subject B). We talk the same language with each other. And I know their thoughts very well enough that I do not need to talk because we spent much time together since the first year of life (subject F).

Due to the characteristics of multicultural family children, they suffer traumas. On the other hand, the

trauma not appears when they interact with friends with similar conditions. The multicultural adolescents chose this environment and protected themselves from any more traumas.

CONCLUSION

The number of immigrants has increased, since, the early 1990's in South Korea and thus, the number of adolescents in multicultural families is now on the rapid increase. Numerous studies pointed out that multicultural adolescents experience difficulties in adapting to school. Actually, many adolescents in multicultural families have difficulties in establishing good peer relations because they are alienated, teased or bullied or become a victim of violence in schools. By the way, these negative experiences at school remain trauma and finally, it makes school adaption difficult. Therefore, the present study was attempted to understand the trauma experienced by multicultural youth through a phenomenological method. There was identified with 5 themes of 17 categories through investigation of experience phenomenon: The themes are follows alienation in relationship, colors of diverse emotions, memories that I want to erase, holding back to endure, All or nothing due to the characteristics of multicultural family children, they suffer traumas. On the other hand, the trauma not appears when they interact with friends with similar conditions.

Based on the results above, we developed discussions and conclusions as follows. First, for the topic of 'alienation in relationship', it was shown that multicultural adolescents did not pass the bounds of school and friend in accordance with developmental characteristics of adolescent period and were also involved in trauma experiences and characteristics of 'relation' which were emphasized by them. Ignoring and teasing of friends, damage of school violence, appearance different from friends and family environment have a role as an inevitable trauma environment. Accordingly, aside from unalterable environments such as race and skin color, interventions for the importance and method of relation experience are required. In addition, it is most urgent to establish social atmosphere and conditions that may show love and sharing to them in terms of socio-structural environment.

Second, emotions by trauma are a scar by wound with one word. We should listen attentively to inner sufferings of those who live with such emotions inhering, and interventions for trauma are more required in that negative emotions are finished simply and have a close effect on thoughts and behaviors.

Third, it is impossible to erase all memories that we want to erase. There are always some traces. Desires and thoughts to erase, hide, furthermore, avenge are another negative result of trauma. It is crucial to support cognitive behavioral interventions for finding proper locations of emotions and memories.

Fourth, multicultural adolescents cope passively and inactively with trauma restricting it intentionally and keeping the house in order to overcome it maximally. Thus, trauma exhausts individual energy and restrains us from exerting powers. It is required to prevent the transition to another negative alternative behavior and help them to take a turning point.

Finally, multicultural adolescents became timid or another attacker or find friends with conditions similar to themselves owing to traumas. It is considered that their measures and strategies for traumas are reduced and passive after passing through the stages of experience, emotion, recognition and handling and finally they move to the safe direction. However, unfortunately, trauma victims can be another attacker as shown in a trauma cycle, thus, it is required to pay more careful attention to them.

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