

# A Study on the Correlation Between the Self-Esteem of Parents of Infants and their Ability of Empathize

En-Young Lee<sup>1\*</sup>, Sung-Je Cho<sup>2\*\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education at Dongbang Graduate Univ, Sungbuk-gu, Seoul, Korea  
E-mail: [ckscks1995@daum.net](mailto:ckscks1995@daum.net)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Education at Dongbang Graduate Univ, Sungbuk-gu, Seoul, Korea  
E-mail: [chosj715@daum.net](mailto:chosj715@daum.net)

## Abstract

This study hopes to find out the correlation between the self-esteem of parents of infants and their ability to empathize. For this study, data was collected by conducting a survey on 201 parents of children who attend daycare centers in the city of Ulsan from April 5 to June 16, 2015. The data was analyzed by conducting a frequency analysis, a t-test, and a one-way analysis of variance, and a significant difference was tested at  $p < .05$  through Scheffe's multiple range test. A correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were conducted, and the SPSS WIN 18.0 program was used to perform the statistical analysis. The research results showed, first, that though the difference in self-esteem according to a parent's monthly income was significant, the difference according to gender, age, number of children, academic background, occupation, and religion was not significant according to the significance level of 5%. Second, though the difference in ability to empathize according to a parent's general characteristics was significant according to gender, academic background, occupation, and monthly income, the difference according to age, number of children, and religion was not significant according to the significance level of 5%. Third, there showed to be a significant positive correlation between the self-esteem of parents of infants and their ability to empathize. The results of this study are expected to become an alternative for the development of a parental education program that takes into consideration the self-esteem and empathy skills of childcare center parents, and the improvement of welfare for parents.

**Keywords:** Childcare Center, Infants, Parent, Self-Esteem, Empathy Skills

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Necessity

For a child, the cultivation of their parent's ability to understand, accept, and control themselves, and having the opportunity to understand and empathize with others is an environment that is important to the social adjustment of the child. A parent making it possible for their child to know their heart and be able to understand and sympathize with others and react appropriately is an important factor in the development of desirable human relations. Because impulsive tendencies are strong during infancy, it is not easy to act appropriately and control emotions depending on the situation. However, with the gradual increase of self-consciousness and

socialization it is also an important period in which the foundation for the ability to control one's feelings is formed. An observation of an advanced research concerning the spatial ability and self-esteem of parents on whom the closest parental character education that supports children had an absolute influence showed that a parent's self-esteem had a positive correlation to their child's ego-resilience.

An observation of the difference between each group showed that the higher the father and mother's level of self-esteem, the higher the child's ego-resilience. Consequently, it was revealed that a parent's self-esteem has a close relationship with their child's ego-resilience[1]. A parent's rearing behavior showed to directly influence an adolescent's self-esteem. This means that if a parent pays attention and affection to their child and encourages their autonomy the child will recognize themselves as a valuable and important being and evaluate themselves positively[2]. This is also an study that investigated the path of influence that rearing behavior has on an adolescent's pro-social behavior and aggression through the medium of the child's self-esteem. Affectionate rearing as seen by adolescents was reported to have a positive(+) influence on their pro-social behavior; a fruit of an adolescent's positive development[3].

Affectionate and autonomous rearing behavior between a parent and child showed to have a passive influence on an adolescent child's cognitive ability to empathize; partially corresponded with the fact that an adolescent's extroversion, integrity, and openness was identified as playing the role of medium among the affectionate and autonomous rearing behavior between a parent and a child, and an adolescent's ability to empathize[4]; and as a result of identifying the importance of the harmonious suitability between a child and their rearer in both infancy and after school-age by observing the relationship between the child and mother's organic harmonious suitability and rearing stress, it shows the importance for mothers of school-aged children to also understand and adjust to their child's organic characteristics. Also, the rearing stress that can be experienced due to difference between a parent's expectations and the organic characteristics shown by a child can differ depending on the mother's level of ability to empathize[5].

Though there have been various studies conducted on self-esteem and empathy skills, the need for research on self-esteem and empathy skills depending on the general characteristics of a parent of an infant is on the rise.

Hence, this study hopes to research the correlation between the self-esteem and empathy skills of childcare center parents.

## 1.2 Research Problems

The detailed problems are as follows.

Research Problem 1. What is the difference in a parent's self-esteem depending on their general characteristics?

Research Problem 2. What is the difference in a parent's empathy skills depending on their general characteristics.

Research Problem 3. What kind of influence does a parent's self-esteem have on their empathy skills?

### 2.3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The research tool concerning the general characteristics of parents of infants was an investigation of their Community Health Survey categories of gender, age, level of education, marital status, number of children, monthly income, occupation, religion, etc.

### 2.3.2 Self-Esteem

In order to measure the self-esteem of the parents of infants, Yang's (2002) translation of the scale developed by Osenberg (1979) was used as it is and consisted of a total of 10 questions, with 5 positive questions and 5 negative questions. Each question had a 5-point scale from 'Never (1)' to 'Always (5)'. The total for negative questions was calculated after being reversed. A higher score signifies higher self-esteem. For the translated scale, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$ , and for this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ .

### 2.3.3 Ability to Empathize

The empathy skill scale developed by Bryant (1982) was adapted by Seong-Hee Park (1997) and revised and supplemented to be used in order to measure the empathy skills of the parents of infants. This scale consisted of a total of 30 questions, with 11 questions on cognitive empathy, and 19 questions on emotional empathy. Each question was made up of a 5-point Likert scale of 1 point for 'Never', 2 points for 'Almost Never', 3 points for 'Average', 4 points for 'Somewhat', and 5 points for 'Always', and a higher score signifies a higher ability to empathize. The reliability of this scale according to Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient showed to be .78 for cognitive empathy, .76 for emotional empathy, and .96 all round for the Seong-Hee Park (1997) study. And the reliability of this study according to Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient showed to be .79 for cognitive empathy, .78 for emotional empathy, and .83 all round.

### 2.3.4 Data Processing & Analysis Method

In performing this study, the data went through the following statistical processing.

1. A frequency analysis was conducted in order to find out the general characteristics of the parents.
2. The reliability of the self-esteem and empathy skills of the parents was gauged using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient.
3. A t-test and one-way analysis of variance was conducted in order to find out the difference between a parent's self-esteem and empathy skills depending on their general characteristics, and through Scheffe's multiple range test a significant difference was tested at  $p < .05$ .

4. A correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were conducted in order to find out the influence that a parent's self-esteem has on their empathy skills.

The empirical analysis of this study was all tested at a significance level of 5%, and the statistical processing was analyzed using the SPSS WIN 18.0 program.

Cohen's sample extraction formula according to the statistical power analysis program, G\*Power 3.1, was used for the sample size; and with a 5% significance level, 95% statistical power, and an effect size set as the medium index of 0.15, the minimum sampling number was calculated to be 129 people.

## 3. Research Results

### 3.1 The General Characteristics of the Parents

An observation of the general characteristics of the parents is as follows.

For parental composition, 18.1% were 'fathers' and 81.9% were 'mothers'; for age in order from highest to lowest, 46.7% were '36-40', 29.0% were '31-35', 17.0% were '41-50', and 7.3% were '25-30'. For number of children, 50.2% had '1 child', 45.2% had '2 children', and 4.6% had '3 children'; for education, 43.6% 'graduate college' and 42.1% 'graduated junior college'; for occupation in order from highest to lowest, 34.4% were 'unemployed or a full-time housewife', 12.7% were a 'specialist or technician', and 'service work' and 'office work' each made up 10.0%. For the monthly income in order from highest to lowest, 30.9% had 'no income', 23.9% earned 'less than 1.5-2.5 million won', 18.9% earned 'less than 2.5-3.5 million won', and 12.4% earned 'less than 3.5-5 million won'; and for religion in order from highest to lowest, 39.0% were reported to be 'non-religious', 37.5% 'Buddhist', 15.4% 'Christian', and 7.3% Catholic.

### 3.2 The Self-Esteem of the Parents

An observation of the self-esteem of the parents is as follows. With the total average for the self-esteem of the parents being 3.28, self-esteem showed to be highest in the order of 'relationship with others' ( $M=3.45$ ), followed by 'leadership and popularity' ( $M=3.25$ ), then 'self-assertion' ( $M=3.22$ ), and then 'dignity' ( $M=$ ).

### 3.3 Ability to Empathize

An observation of empathy skills is as follows.

With the total average for empathy skills being 3.39, empathy skills showed to be highest in the order of 'emotional empathy' ( $M=3.47$ ) followed by 'cognitive empathy' ( $M=2.91$ ).

### Research Problem 1. The Difference in a Parent's Self-Esteem Depending on their General Characteristics

An observation of the difference in a parent's self-esteem depending on their general characteristics showed that though the difference in self-esteem depending on the parent's monthly income was significant, the difference depending on gender, age, number of children, education, occupation, and religion showed to be insignificant according to the significance level of 5%. The self-esteem of parents with a

monthly income over 3.5 million won showed to be the highest( $F=5.424$ ,  $p<.01$ ), with monthly income in order from highest to lowest being 'at least 3.5 million won'(3.52), followed by 'less than 2.5-3.5 million won'(M=3.26), 'less than 1.5 million won'(M=3.26), then 'less than 1.5-2.5 million won'(M=3.19).

## Research Problem 2. The Difference in a Parent's Empathy Skills Depending on their General Characteristics

An observation of the difference in a parent's empathy skills depending on their general characteristics showed that though the difference in empathy skills depending on parent's gender, education, occupation, and monthly income was significant, the difference depending on age, number of children, and religion showed to be insignificant according to the significance level of 5%.

Empathy skills were higher in mothers(M=3.43)( $t=-3.001$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than in father(M=3.25) for gender; for education, empathy skills were highest in parents with less than a high school graduation( $F=3.422$ ,  $p<.05$ ) with education in order from highest to lowest being 'less than high school graduation'(M=3.57), followed by 'at least college graduation'(M=3.39), then 'junior college graduation'(M=3.35). For occupation, in order from highest to lowest were 'unemployed or full-time housewife'(M=3.50), followed by 'other'(M=3.42), then 'specialist, technician, or businessman'(M=3.3), 'administration, management, or office job'(M=3.35), 'manufacturing, service work, or sales'(M=3.29)( $F=3.113$ ,  $p<.05$ ); for monthly income, in order from highest to lowest were 'less than 1.5 million won'(M=3.47), followed by 'at least 3.5 million won'(M=3.40), then 'less than 1.5-2.5 million won'(M=3.33), then 'less than 2.5-3.5 million won'(M=3.30)( $F=3.039$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

## Research Problem 3. The Influence that a Parent's Self-Esteem has on their Empathy Skills

An observation of the correlation between a parent's self-esteem and empathy skills showed a positive correlation to self-esteem from highest to lowest in the order of 'relationship with other'( $r=.492$ ,  $p<.001$ ), followed by 'leadership and popularity'( $r=.382$ ,  $p<.001$ ), then 'self-assertion'( $r=.374$ ,  $p<.001$ ), then 'dignity'( $r=.290$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In detail, the sub factors 'emotional empathy' and 'cognitive empathy' of empathy skills both showed to have a significant positive correlation to a parent's self-esteem.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study looked into the correlation between the self-esteem and empathy skills of a parent of infants. A summary of the primary research results, and a discussion regarding this summary, is presented as follows.

First, an observation of the difference in a parent's self-esteem depending on their general characteristic showed that though the difference in self-esteem depending on the parent's monthly income was significant, the difference depending on gender, age, number of children, education, occupation, and

religion showed to be insignificant according to the significance level of 5%. The self-esteem of parents with a monthly income over 3.5 million won showed to be the highest( $F=5.424$ ,  $p<.01$ ), with monthly income in order from highest to lowest being 'at least 3.5 million won'(3.52), followed by 'less than 2.5-3.5 million won'(M=3.26), 'less than 1.5 million won'(M=3.26), then 'less than 1.5-2.5 million won'(M=3.19). This partially corresponds to the result that having conducted a parental education program in order to test the efficacy of parental education programs that aim to enhance the self-esteem and rearing behaviors of parent in overseas Korean families, and also a before-after test using the self-esteem scale and rearing behavior scale, the self-esteem of parents who participated in this program statistically enhanced significantly[6].

Second, though the difference in a parent's empathy skills depending on their gender, education, occupation, and monthly income was significant, the difference depending on age, number of children, and religion showed to be insignificant according to the significance level of 5%.

Empathy skills were higher in mothers(M=3.43)( $t=-3.001$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than in father(M=3.25) for gender; for education, empathy skills were highest in parents with less than a high school graduation( $F=3.422$ ,  $p<.05$ ) with education in order from highest to lowest being 'less than high school graduation'(M=3.57), followed by 'at least college graduation'(M=3.39), then 'junior college graduation'(M=3.35). For occupation, in order from highest to lowest were 'unemployed or full-time housewife'(M=3.50), followed by 'other'(M=3.42), then 'specialist, technician, or businessman'(M=3.3), 'administration, management, or office job'(M=3.35), 'manufacturing, service work, or sales'(M=3.29)( $F=3.113$ ,  $p<.05$ ); for monthly income, in order from highest to lowest were 'less than 1.5 million won'(M=3.47), followed by 'at least 3.5 million won'(M=3.40), then 'less than 1.5-2.5 million won'(M=3.33), then 'less than 2.5-3.5 million won'(M=3.30)( $F=3.039$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The result of finding out the correlation between a mother's empathy skills and rearing stress supports the result that showed that both cognitive empathy and emotional sympathy both had a significant negative influence only on the problematic interactions among the sub-factors of rearing stress[4]. Also, the empathy skills, rearing behavior, and playfulness of mothers showed to have a significant positive correlation to most subdivisions; and among the empathy skills of mothers, taking a viewpoint, empathic concern, and personal pain showed to have an influence on a societal rearing behavior, and imagination showed to have an influence on an educational rearing behavior, meaningfully corresponding to the result that the appearance of influence given to empathy skills shows to be different[7].

Third, the empathy skills of parents showed a positive correlation to self-esteem from highest to lowest in the order of 'relationship with other'( $r=.492$ ,  $p<.001$ ), followed by 'leadership and popularity'( $r=.382$ ,  $p<.001$ ), then 'self-assertion'( $r=.374$ ,  $p<.001$ ), then 'dignity'( $r=.290$ ,  $p<.001$ ); and, in detail, the sub factors 'emotional empathy' and 'cognitive empathy' of empathy skills both showed to have a significant positive correlation to a parent's self-esteem. In terms of the size of influence of the 4 latent variables that influence the

pro-social behavior of adolescents, in order of most to least influence exerted, cognitive empathy had the biggest influence, followed by personal values, self-esteem, and then emotional empathy. In order to promote the pro-social behavior of adolescents through this, we can deduce that cognitive empathy, which has the highest direct and indirect influence on pro-social behavior, must be increased, and also the importance of personal values, which mediates cognitive influence and has the second biggest direct influence. This study is supported by the research that shows that because out of sub-factors of cognitive empathy, taking a viewpoint has a big influence on directivity our of the sub-factors of personal values, taking a viewpoint and directivity can be seen as the most important predicting variables in explaining pro-social behavior[8]. Also, in terms of the size of influence of the 4 latent variables that influence the pro-social behavior of adolescents, in order of most to least influence exerted, cognitive empathy had the biggest influence, followed by personal values, self-esteem, and then emotional empathy. In order to promote the pro-social behavior of adolescents through this, we can deduce that cognitive empathy, which has the highest direct and indirect influence on pro-social behavior, must be increased, and also the importance of personal values, which mediates cognitive influence and has the second biggest direct influence. This study is partially supported by the research that shows that because out of sub-factors of cognitive empathy, taking a viewpoint has a big influence on directivity our of the sub-factors of personal values, taking a viewpoint and directivity can be seen as the most important predicting variables in explaining pro-social behavior[9].

Consequently, when observing the study on preliminary nurses where, though empathy skills showed a tendency to increase before and after arbitration for the experimental group, it was statistically insignificant; the control group showed a significant difference in both before and after arbitration; and the self-efficacy scores of the preliminary nurses showed a significant increase after arbitration for the experimental group, and showed a significant difference among both groups[10], it academically supports this study for the promotion of the self-esteem and empathy skills of parents of infants.

Based on the above results of this study, the following is proposed.

First, though the difference in self-esteem depending on the parent's monthly income was significant, the difference depending on gender, age, number of children, education, occupation, and religion showed to be insignificant according to the significance level of 5%. Hence, a variety of studies is needed concerning the enhancement of the self-esteem of parents of infants.

Second, though the difference in a parent's empathy skills depending on their gender, education, occupation, and monthly income was significant, the difference depending on age, number of children, and religion showed to be insignificant. This demands diverse political consideration for the promotion of empathy skills in parents of infants.

Third, there showed to be a significant positive correlation between a parent's self-esteem and empathy skills. From this result it can be deduced that there is a correlation between the

self-esteem and empathy skills of a parents of infants, and is expected to become data for the alternative development of parental education programs.

In the future, attention and research is needed on political development concerning the improvement of the self-esteem and empathy skills of parents of childcare center infants.

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