

## Paternal Involvement in South Korea

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### **Abstract**

*Fathers' roles are now changing in South Korea. In addition to the role of economic provider, many Korean fathers assume their roles of care providers, playmates, teachers, disciplinarians and protectors. Present study empirically examines paternal involvement of highly educated Korean young fathers. In order to perform survey, male married workers from S-electronics were interviewed. The finding shows that more than half of male respondents define themselves as loving and free fathers while they usually define their own fathers as authoritarian fathers. The finding also says that most of male respondents agree to share parenting responsibility with their wives. Also, the finding indicates that Korean fathers are participating less time in childcare than mothers, especially on weekdays. Yet, the difference is decreased when they take care of children on weekends. Those findings may have meaningful implications for social policies designed for improving paternal involvement in South Korea.*

**Keywords:** *Father involvement, Fathering, Childcare, Fatherhood, South Korea*

### **1. Introduction**

In the last decade, public interest in the roles played by fathers in childcare has increased enormously. Fathers may have an important role to play in child rearing, even if their involvement (relative to that of mothers) is still limited. Specifically, the current attention to fathers can be accentuated by the discovery of the new fatherhood. The new father now is an active, involved, nurturing participant in child care and child rearing.

In South Korea, fathers' roles for childcare are continuously changing. The shape of Korean families is transformed with respect to women's role and changing structure of family. Such changes play a role in redefining paternal involvement in childcare. Korean women are increasingly participating in the labor market with respect to both their highly educational level and increasing necessities of sharing breadwinning role with their husbands in the household (women's sharing breadwinning role can partially be because of economic downturn and widespread culture of low income-irregular workers of South Korea). Korean married women perceive substantial difficulties in raising children when they have occupation. Given such conditions, Korean fathers can no more resist to involve in childcare. While fathers' involvement with children in South Korea remains lower relative to that of mothers, several studies provide some evidence for an increased level of fathers' involvement

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over time in various aspects of childcare, particularly for men with higher education. studies on fathering in Korea, however, are limited and have primarily focused on fathers' role in development of children [1]. Little is known about the attitude, belief, time used for childcare of Korean fathers?

Present paper aims to gain a better understanding about the Korean men's changing role and participation as a father and to raise awareness about importance of father involvement. Past studies on Korean fathers' involvement with children has mainly focused on social and emotional development (i.e., [2][3][4]). Few empirical studies have investigated the contemporary fathers' involvement in South Korea Research questions of present paper are followings: first, how do fathers of south Korea identify their attitude toward childcare? How is their thought about role sharing for childcare? Second, what extent do Korea fathers participate in childcare compared to their spouses?

Spectrum of fathering would be very wide, which may be very different depending on the stage of children and socioeconomic level of fathers. Thus, present study only focuses on highly-educated young fathers, especially who have children in age range of zero to pre-school age.

## **2. Related researches**

### **2.1. Changing role of father in South Korea**

Today's fathers are expected to actively involved in child care than in the past, and to a modest extent the average contemporary father is more involved than was his predecessor in South Korea. The focus highlights a shift from a concern with fathers as persons primarily involved in the economic support of the family and control of older children to a view that places increasing stress on the role that fathers play in the care of children of all ages [5]. There might have been increases over time in average degrees of fathering, so the notion of a "caring and playing father" is not mythical. In a complex and pluralistic society like ours, various conceptualizations of the fathering coexist, but many current people have a very different conception of fathering. In addition, one must recognize that fathers fill many roles, that the relative importance of each varies from one context to another, and that active fathering must be viewed in the context of the various other things that fathers do for their children[5].

## **3. Research method**

By performing survey, about two hundred males are interviewed but the valid ones were 167. Due to practical restriction in time and finance, non-probability sampling was employed. We approached S electronics where highly-educated fathers in the age of 30's to 40's is employed. This survey was lasted for about one month. In terms of statistical analysis, descriptive statistics was mainly used including mean and frequency analyses. Paternal involvement is measured by several questions asking them 1) hours that fathers spend in childcare on both weekends and weekdays. Belief about childcare responsibility was also asked by means of specialized questionnaires. Questions asking attitude of childcare of both those young fathers and their fathers (grandfathers to their children) were also included in the questionnaire. This study has limitations in that it is cross-sectional and gathers data using non-probability sampling. Since a sample was collected from S-electronics which is big and influential in South Korea, the males are expected to be married, highly educated, young (30-40's), living with one or two children and making high income.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Result I: Socio-economic characteristics of fathers

This section presents descriptive statistics about the sample of males used in this study. Focusing on the sample of males, total sample size (N) is 167, as shown in Table 1. The mean of age is 38.5 years old. The mean of number of children is found as 1.6. All are married; approximately ninety-nine percent of males are married living with spouses and only one male is married living without spouse. Neither single parent families nor divorced males are found. Approximately 87.4% of males are living with their spouses and children, while 11.4% are living with grandparents as well as their spouses and children. Neither Single father who are living with children without spouse nor single father who are living with children and grandparent are found. The mean value of income among dual earner family (about 9084 dollars per year) is about 1.5 times of the mean of income among single earner family (about 5500 dollars per year), as expected

In terms of educational attainment, all males are more than or equal to college education. The 61.7% of males are college graduates and the remaining 38.3% is either master's degree (31.7%) or doctoral degree (5.4%). Likewise, most of their wives are highly educated; The 76.7% of wives are college graduates and about 21.6% is either master's degree (20.4%) or doctoral degree (1.2%). Only one wife is found as high school education.

Somewhat highly educated, highly earning, two parent married families are found in this sample. These findings make sense, since the S-electronics is one of the mostly idealized work places for highly educated, white collar male workers in South Korea.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristic of male respondents

Number of children	1.6	
Age	38.5	
Family income	Single earner (Mostly husband's earing)	9,084 dollars
	Dual earner (husband + wife)	5,500 dollars
Marital status	Married (with spouse)	166(99.4%)
	married (without spouse)	1(0.6%)
	Divorced	0 (0.0%)
	Others	0 (0.0%)
	Total	167(100.0%)
Household type	Husband + wife + children	146 (87.4%)
	Grandparents + husband + wife + children	19 (11.4%)
	Single parent + children	0 (0.0%)
	Grandparents + single parent + children	0 (0.0%)
	others	1 (0.6%)
Educational attainment	Males	Wives

	High school	0 (0.0%)	High school	1(0.6%)
	College	103(61.7%)	College	128(76.7%)
	Master's	53(31.7%)	Master's	34(20.4%)
	Doctoral	9(5.4%)	Doctoral	2(1.2%)

**4.2. Result II: Paternal involvement- child care belief, attitude, hours and responsibility**

[Table 2] shows males respondents' belief on childcare responsibility and childcare attitude. The third row indicates the answers for questions asking "who do you think is the primarily responsible for childcare?" The 77.8% of male respondents answered that they think childcare responsibility should be equally shared between husband and wife. It is also found that the 35% of males think that childcare responsibility can be shared between husband and wife given that the primary responsibility lays with wife; this finding implies that 35% of male respondents agree with responsibility sharing but they internalized typical gender roles in mind, especially for child care. Yet, this finding can also be associated with male's higher hours of work or higher responsibility of breadwinning. Only one father answered that he thinks that child care responsibility should be shared given that male is primarily responsible. Also, one father answered that he thinks wife should be primarily responsible for child care without responsibility sharing.

Table 2. Father's involvement: Belief and attitude

Belief: Responsibility Sharing Between Male and Female for Child Care						
	Myself (male)	Sharing but male is primarily responsible	Equal sharing between husband and wife	Sharing but wife is primarily responsible	wife	
(Belief) who do you think is primarily responsible for childcare?	0(0.0%)	1(0.6%)	130(77.8%)	35 (21.0%)	1(0.6%)	
Attitude toward Child Care						
	authoritarian father (①)	free and loving father (②)	blindly child-following father (③)	in the middle of ① and ②	in the middle of ② and ③	in the middle of ① and ③
Myself (male)	7(4.2%)	90 (53.9%)	5(3.0%)	51(30.5%)	9(5.4%)	3(1.8%)
My father (Grandfather of children)	55(32.9%)	42(25.1%)	3(1.8%)	46(27.5%)	3(1.8%)	2(1.2%)

In terms of defining attitude of themselves and their own fathers (that is, grandfathers of children), more than half of respondents define themselves as free and loving fathers, which may imply fathering of caring, nurturing, communicating and emotional roles; the 53.9% among respondents answered so. Only 4.2% of respondents define themselves as authoritarian fathers, which may imply fathering of strong, educating, teaching and breadwinning roles. The 30.5% of respondents define themselves as fathers who are in the middle of authoritarian father and free and loving fathers. This finding may indicate that those fathers of 30.5% define themselves as fathers who play roles of both educating breadwinner and loving nurturer. The 3.0% of respondents define themselves as blindly child-loving and following fathers. Also, the 5.4% of respondents define themselves as fathers who are in the middle of free and loving fathers and blindly child-following fathers. Only three respondents (1.8%) define themselves as fathers who are in the middle of authoritarian fathers and blindly child-following fathers.

Table 3 shows a substantial difference between result of father himself and result of children’s grandfather. Note that the result of grandfather is solely based on the respondents’ answers. The 55 respondents (32.9%) define their fathers as authoritarian fathers, which may imply fathering of strong and breadwinning roles; this proportion is the biggest among the results of grandfather. The 25.1% of respondents define their fathers as free and loving fathers, which may imply fathering of caring and nurturing roles. The 27.5% of respondents define their fathers as fathers who are in the middle of authoritarian fathers and free and loving fathers. This finding may indicate that their fathers could demonstrate them fathering of both educating breadwinner and loving nurturer, in the past of their growing periods. Only 1.8% of respondents define themselves as blindly child-loving and following fathers. Also, the 1.8% of respondents define themselves as fathers who are in the middle of free and loving fathers and blindly child-following fathers. Only two respondents (1.2%) define themselves as fathers who are in the middle of authoritarian fathers and blindly child-following fathers.

Table 3. Father’s involvement: Hours and responsibility

Hours spent in Child Care`				
	Husband		Wife	
	weekdays	weekends	weekdays	weekends
	1.5	8.4	7.9	10.2
(In real) Who is primarily responsible for childcare?				
Myself (Male respondent)	Sharing but male is primarily responsible	Equal sharing between husband and wife	Sharing but wife is primarily responsible	wife
0	0	36(21.6%)	101(60.5%)	29(17.4%)

How is paternal involvement in childcare of the respondents in real? Among 167 male respondents, the mean value of hours of childcare is 1.5 hours in weekdays while the value is 7.9 hours on weekends. On the other hand, their wives are participating in childcare for 8.4hours in weekdays and also participating for 10.2 hours on weekends. The difference in childcare hours between husbands and wives is 6.4 hours on weekdays whereas the difference is reduced to 1.8 hours on weekends. The difference between weekdays and weekends among

wives is likely to be small, compared to the difference between weekdays and weekends among husbands. This finding means that women are more likely to be engaging in childcare in weekends as well as weekdays, compared to their husbands. It is also noted that answers from employed mothers as well as answers from housewives are included in this finding. Thus, it would be necessary for us to view separately the results of two groups.

## 5. Conclusion and suggestions

In summary, Korean young fathers show changing belief toward childcare. The findings show that more than half among Korean young fathers identify themselves as loving and free fathers while they usually identify their own fathers (that is, grandfathers of their children) as authoritarian father. The findings also indicate that the young Korean fathers try to make adjustment to adopt the new fathering practice embedded in Korean society's new culture of fathers' roles. However, it also seems that the fathers encounter some barriers and problems, including too many hours of work and twisted view for nurturing men at workplace.

According to [5], four factors affect the degree of paternal involvement; 1) motivation, 2) skills and self-confidence, 3) support from family, especially from women(mothers) and 4) institutional practice. Motivation means the extent to which fathers want to be involved. There is no clear picture on the extent of desirability of increased paternal involvement; substantial number of men can be motivated to be more involved whereas many fathers can want to spend no more time with their children they currently do. For example, media can play a positive role when attempting to increase father's motivation for child care. Many men feel active parenting and masculinity are incompatible, however ways like media (media hype) can convey the message that good fathers are the men who are actively involved in child care.

Skills and self-confidence are also necessary for increasing paternal involvement. Even motivated men often complain that a lack of caring skill prevents their involvement. Those complaints constitute father's excuses. However, the key is not father's lack of skill but father's self-confidence. Skills can be acquired after they achieve self-confidence for child care; skill-development program would be helpful. Many fathers need to realize that most first-time mothers also feel incompetent and terrified as men are. The difference is that women are expected to know how to care and cannot withdraw from child care responsibility [5]. The goal should be for fathers to develop a sense of self-confidence, so that's they come to enjoy being with their children and to feel increasingly self-confidence[5].

The third factor affecting paternal involvement is support within the family from wives or mothers. Unexpectedly, some surveys show that many women do not want their husbands to be more involved than they currently are (see [9]), which means that substantial number of wives are quite satisfied with the status quo. The reasons can be followings; women may feel that father's involvement may create more work than it saves. More importantly, women may feel being threatened when they are asked to give up power in child care area. Many women may prefer to maintain authority in child care arena [5]. However, women's attitudes toward paternal involvement should change and those discomforts can happen mostly among unemployed women (that is, house-wives). Women must increasingly be aware of the goodness and importance of paternal involvement, especially for child development in all area.

The last and probably most important factor affecting paternal involvement would be institutional practices. The barriers imposed by the work place rank among the most important reasons given by fathers to excuse low levels of paternal involvement (e.g., [10]). It would be, however, also worthwhile to note that being at work reduce the amount of time that

fathers can spend with their children, but when they have time, they spend only a small portion of it with their children[5]. Thus, paternity leave is the most frequently discussed means of increasing paternal involvement. Also, flexible time scheduling would certainly be of greatest value to many involved but employed fathers, as Pleck suggested [5].

Recently, the Korean government has taken an approach that aims to promote paternal involvement in child care. Policies have been put in place to encourage fathers to become more involved in helping to raise their children; one policy allows fathers to request up to three days of parental leave when their wives are giving birth. Another policy allows for fathers to request up to one year of paid leave for childcare [11]. However, it is reported that only less than 2 percent of male workers have requested for paid paternal leave and those who have used the leave are even workers employed in public sector.

Moreover, the corporate atmosphere has been found to not be positive to the idea of paternal involvement in childcare [11]. It is common in Korea that fathers who use either paid paternal leave or unpaid paternal leave are taking a risk of laid-off. In efforts to change negative perceptions about paternal leave, the Korean government has recognized private company that encourages their employees for involving in childcare [11]. Specifically, the Ministry of Labor gave an award to companies which were identified as making efforts in the Creating a Better World to Raise Children movement [12]. Companies received the awards had implemented practices that included enforcement of paternal leave. Those companies had also allowed employers to have flexible work hours. There are several private organizations which are interested in promoting paternal involvement. The example is “father school”; the most well-known father school is Duranno which was started by church in 1995 in Korea. It currently offers a two-weekend course consisting of four 5.5-hour classes [11]. The class encourages fathers to reflect on themselves and think about the influence they have on their families [11]. Lamb and colleagues ([5][16]) have identified three types of paternal involvement: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility; Engagement refers to direct, one-on-one interactions with the child including feeding, bathing, or changing the young child; reading stories with the child; and taking walks or playing with the child. Accessibility refers to times when a parent is available for interaction with the child, but is not presently engaged in direct interaction including cooking in the kitchen while the child plays in the same or a different room of the house. Responsibility refers to the extent to which a father takes responsibility for his child’s care and welfare including planning for and taking a child to a doctor’s appointment and ensuring that the child has clothes to wear. Responsibility may be the most important component of father involvement, especially in terms of equal sharing of childcare between men and women. However, this study does not differentiate these three types of paternal involvement since it measures paternal involvement by means of absolute time used for child care or belief.

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