

Parental Role Satisfaction Among Korean Mothers (I)

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Abstract : Parental satisfaction is the foundation of a happy family. It is a key factor in overall life satisfaction and also a critical variable in the development of children, and thus an education program aimed at parental satisfaction improvement is needed. This study attempts to determine basic elements of parental satisfaction that could enable better parental education programs. To accomplish this, mother's parental satisfaction and factors related to it were examined. The subjects were 641 mothers of primary school and middle school students aged 10, 12, and 14 residing in Seoul, Pohang and Kwangyang. Structured self-administered questionnaires were used to ascertain mothers' parental role satisfaction, mothers' role values, children related variables, mother related variables, father related variables, and home environment variables. The findings indicate that the variables related to parental satisfaction are multi-dimensional, that mothers' parental satisfaction can be improved by other family member's effort, and that a family's external characteristics are less important than its internal characteristics. These results imply that it is essential to include the characteristics of the family system when designing parental education programs. Furthermore, the role of specific family members, namely the husband, should be expanded in more supportive ways in Korean families to improve mothers' parental satisfaction.

Key Words : parental role satisfaction, mothers' role values, Korean mothers.

I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A married couple leads a couple-oriented life until the birth of their first child. The transition to parenthood brings changes in the relationship between the couple and in the roles of the family members. For example, a married couple carries out the social roles of "husband" and "wife" in the family. But through the birth of their child, the husband

acquires the new social status of “father” and the wife “mother”. As father and mother, they begin carrying out their new roles as the parents. These newly imposed roles continue to change as the child grows; and the changes in the social role, following the changes in the social status within the family, are called the “role transition”.

Generally, for an individual, role transition to parenthood is considered a more significant adult life-event than the marriage itself. When a person becomes a “parent”, the performance of a new role is expected, and most new parents experience confusion and conflict while trying to do so. Due to the confusion and conflict created during the process of practicing the newly acquired roles, the early research on the parental role was mostly about the difficulties the couple had to face as they become parents; this research considered the transition to parenthood to be a crisis (LeMaster, 1957).

Transition to parenthood brings about changes in the individual’s lifestyle, the relationship with the spouse, and the kinship and/or social colleagues. These changes could be a positive and satisfying experience for the individual going through them. But the financial burden and psychological pressure of child-rearing and new interpersonal relationships make the transition an event that is hard to adjust to: these factors lower the life satisfaction of the individual and turn the transition into a pressure-filled crisis.

However a marriage, with some exceptions, is based on the assumption that the couple will have children in order to continue the family and thus, becoming parent is a normal life event that should be considered as a stage in adulthood socialization. Therefore the current studies suggest that becoming a parent is not a crisis, even though the transition to a parental role is one of the most important roles in the socialization process.

Since the advent of birth control, artificial methods to control fertility are being used widely. Giving births and rearing children, which in the past were a natural obligation have, therefore, taken an issue that requires decision making after a careful cost-benefit analysis. Thus, today, with an increasing number of adults preferring a single lifestyle, later marriage, or a voluntarily childless family, the level of satisfaction related to the parental role functions has changed. More and more adults look at the parental role decision as one that asks whether they will even become parents or how large their family will be. Parental satisfaction, thus, assumes new salience as a central factor in determining lifestyles and

general life satisfaction of adults (Guidubadi & Clemenshaw, 1989).

The degree of parental satisfaction is also a critical factor that could effect the development of the child. Generally, parents who feel satisfied with their roles as parents influence the development of their children in a positive way by showing motivating and affectionate concern. It is suggested that parental role satisfaction has a positive influence on the child's emotional well-being, self-control and peer relationships (Guidubaldi & Clemenshaw, 1989). On the contrary, parents who are dissatisfied with their roles as parents show avoidance responses or negative attitudes toward the child's needs, thus there is a higher probability of having negative influence on the development of children (Lerner & Galabos, 1985).

Recently in Korean society, the importance of the parental role has begun to be recognized; but the question of the most appropriate parental roles and the range of parental roles remains. What are the most appropriate parental roles? Is the parental role merely about a parent-child relationship or does it involve other relationships such as that with the spouse or other family members, as well? Previous studies on the parental role show that the parental role is not a concept with only one-dimension but a concept that is composed of multi-dimensional sub-domains. In other words, the role can only be performed within simultaneous interactions with other family members. The parental role can bring about positive results to the individual; but, at the same time, it can also bring about some negative pressure as well. Thus, parental role satisfaction is a concept that should consider both the satisfaction and confusion that are experienced when performing the parental roles. In terms of a cost-benefit analysis, parental role satisfaction can be described as what parental satisfaction remains after subtracting the cost created by conflicts from it.

Parental satisfaction is composed of several sub-domains such as general satisfaction with parental role, parent-child relationship, spouse support, parental role conflict and support from children (Hyun & Cho, 1994). Furthermore, it is not a concept restricted to those who actually perform the role of parents but a concept that includes interactions with other family members such as the spouse or other children as well. Therefore, it is not a mere subjective feeling of satisfaction but a concept that reflects an objective level of parental role

performance evaluated by other family members.

Though several research studies on becoming a parent and parental role satisfaction have been carried out in the West world, the researchers generally utilized open-ended response models, lacking reliability and validity (Guidubaldi & Clenirshaw, 1989). These studies, therefore, do not permit normative comparisons of subjects or comparisons of one area of satisfaction with other areas. Despite the rather obvious connection between parental satisfaction with child-rearing and their actual child-rearing behaviors, little research has been devoted to the assessment of parental satisfaction.

In Korean culture, having children is still considered a natural part of marriage that can be achieved with ease and thus, little research has been done on how to be a good parent or on the satisfactions and the conflicts that can be experienced while rearing the children. Recently research on parental satisfaction is beginning to be carried out, but still it is extremely inadequate in quantity and many methodological difficulties remain. As an appropriate scale for the cultural attributes of Korean society has not yet been developed, it is difficult to say whether the ideal parental roles based on research using the scales developed in Western society apply to Korea without examining the scale's validity in Korea.

Therefore, there is an urgent need in Korea to collect basic data -at the level of parental satisfaction and the factors related to parental role satisfaction considering the cultural attributes of Korean society - to set the norms for an ideal parental role and to develop parental education programs.

The primary purpose of this study is to find out the level of a Korean mother's parental role satisfaction and related variables in order to suggest ways to improve the parental role satisfaction. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What is the general parental role satisfaction of Korean mothers?
2. Does parental role value affect mother's parental role satisfaction?
3. What are the independent influences of related variables on parental role satisfaction of Korean mothers?

II. METHODS

1. Subjects

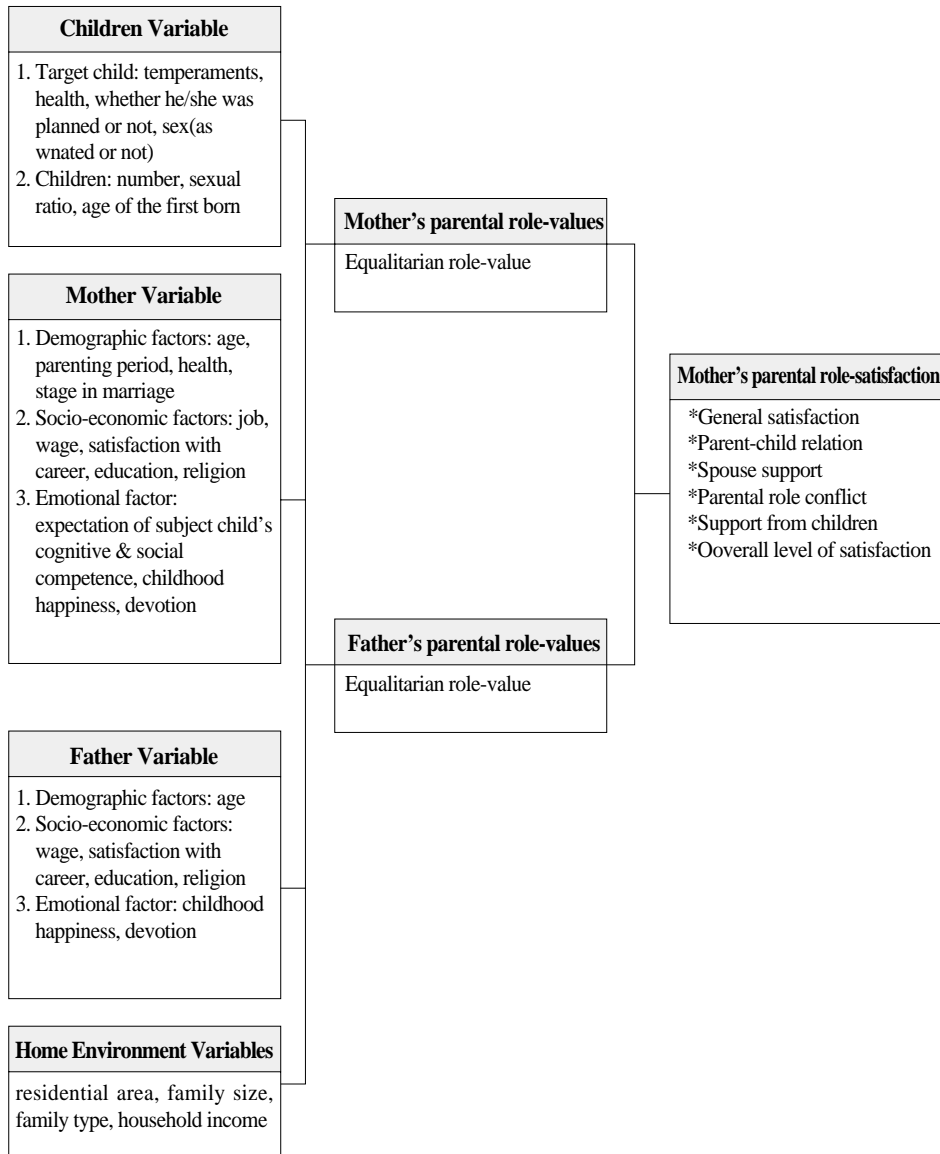
The data used in this study was collected from a probability sample consisting of 641 respondents residing in Seoul, Pohang and Kwangyang. Although parental role satisfaction is related to parents of all stages in the life-cycle, it was considered more appropriate to exclude mothers of very early stages to show the distinguishable differences in expectations of a child's cognitive and social ability. Thus, parents with children in primary and middle school were selected as the respondents. The sexual ratio of the children was taken into account in designing the study, and socio-economic level was controlled by limiting the eligible respondents to those residing in a middle-class area in Seoul. Two more minor cities, Pohang and Kwang-Yang, were selected to enable regional comparison.

2. Measures and Variables

A structured, self-administered questionnaire designed to include all of the scales needed for this study was developed by this researcher. After being tested in a pilot study and tested for validity, the questionnaire was distributed to subjects (mothers) through their children and collected. Scales to evaluate mother's parental role satisfaction, mother's role values, children related variables, mother-related variables, father related variables, and home environment variables were included in the questionnaire.

First, to measure mother's parental role satisfaction, the scale developed by Hyun & Cho (1994) was included in the questionnaire. The scale is composed of 5 sub-domains with 48 items: ① 11 items on general satisfaction($\alpha=.82$), ② 10 items on parent-child relation($\alpha=.80$), ③ 10 items on spouse support($\alpha=.89$), ④ 11 items on parental role conflict($\alpha=.82$) and ⑤ 6 items on children support($\alpha=.78$). The level of satisfaction in each item is assigned from 1 to 4 with the higher scores corresponding to higher levels of satisfaction.

Second, scales to measure a mother's role value were included. These scales were adopted from Yang's Parenting Beliefs Scales (1993) and were partially rephrased to suit the



<Figure 1> Research variables

subjects. A four point rating scale was used and the answers corresponded to a scale from 1 to 4 points and thus, the higher the score, the higher the level of equalitarian role values mothers had.

Third, various variables were measured in order to calculate the independent influences of related variables on mother's parental role satisfaction. The research variables measured for this study are presented in Figure 1.

Children related variables were measured as target child's temperament and health status as evaluated by their mothers using four questions designed for the study by the researcher based on previous research (Lee, 1984; Russell, 1974; Simons et al., 1990). Mother related variables were evaluated by using mothers' childhood happiness and devotion, measured using 4-point Likert scale. The higher score means the mother had a happier childhood and experienced more devotion from her mother. Mothers' expectation for their children's cognitive/social capability were measured using questions based on previous research by Harter (1982), Kong (1989), and Lee and Yu (1991). The questions were designed to find out whether mother's expectation for child's sociability is higher than her expectation for cognitive ability or vice versa. Finally, mother's career satisfaction was measured using three items where the higher score means the mother has higher career satisfaction.

To analyze the data, SPSS PC+ was used. The data were analyzed through several statistical tests including t-test, F-test, Scheffe range test, multiple regression analysis and descriptive statistics.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Level of Korean Mother's Role Satisfaction

The descriptive statistics for mother's parental role satisfaction are shown in <Table 1>. The total satisfaction score obtained by adding all the sub-domianial scores (i.e. mother's general satisfaction toward her child, satisfaction about parent-child relation, satisfaction about spouse support, felt parental role conflict, and satisfaction about support from

<Table 1> Mother's Parental Role Satisfaction

N = 631-639

Criteria (item)	Range	Average (SD)	Standardized Value*
General satisfaction (11)	20.00 - 44.00	38.43(4.40)	3.49
Parent - child relation (10)	17.00 - 40.00	31.47(4.71)	3.15
Spouse support (10)	10.00 - 40.00	28.57(6.38)	2.86
Parental role conflict (11)	11.00 - 40.00	24.33(5.48)	2.39
Support from children (6)	8.00 - 24.00	18.90(3.04)	3.15
● Total satisfaction	84.00 -188.00	148.13(17. 8)	3.09

* In order to enable comparison between criteria, total score was divided by number of items.

children) ranged from 84.0 to 188.0; the average score was 148.13. The scale's actual score range is 48.0-192.0; thus, the level of total satisfaction of Korean mothers appeared to be above average(standardized value = 3.09), but it appeared to have a larger variance indicating that there is quite a difference between individuals.

After standardization, general satisfaction appears to have the highest score and parental role conflict the lowest. These results imply that Korean mothers are fairly satisfied with their parental roles. These results also support Kwak's findings (1990) that Korean mothers show low levels of satisfaction in spousal support but are relatively satisfied with their relationship with their children. They also agree with Goetting's findings (1986) that generally, the level of parental role satisfaction appears to be high.

The correlations between sub-domianial satisfactions are reported in <Table 2>. Each

<Table 2> Correlations between 5 Sub-domains

N=588

	General satisfaction	Parent-child relationship	Spouse support	Parent role conflict	Support from children
General satisfaction	1.00				
Parent-child relationship	.57**	1.00			
Spouse support	.45**	.51**	1.00		
Parental role conflict	-.25**	-.54**	-.39**	1.00	
Support from children	.54**	.60**	.33**	-.29**	1.00
Total satisfaction	.72**	.85**	.77**	-.70**	.67**

correlation is significant at the level of $p = .001$.

It is interesting to focus on Criteria 4, the parental role conflict. This criterion is negatively correlated with the other variables. More specifically, the higher the level of general satisfaction, parent-child relationship satisfaction, satisfaction with spouse support and the support from the children, the mother tended to experience less conflict. Also parental role conflict shows stronger correlation with the parent-child relationship than any other criteria with correlation coefficient of $r = .54$. Thus, a mother who is highly satisfied in her parent-child relationship can be expected to experience less parental role conflict.

2. Parental Role Value and Parental Role Satisfaction

To examine the difference in mother's parental role satisfaction according to mother's equalitarian role values, the subjects were divided into three groups according to their equalitarian parental role values (i.e. low, middle, and high equalitarian role values). The differences in mother's parental role satisfaction according to equalitarian parental role values are reported in <Table 3>.

Mother's general parental role satisfaction is significantly different depending on the equalitarian role values. The higher the mother's equalitarian role values are, the higher her parental role satisfaction is. One interpretation of this is that mothers with higher equalitarian role values have more equalitarian relationships with their spouses in real life, making their life more satisfactory.

Mother's parental role conflict is significantly affected by her equalitarian role values. In

<Table 3> Differences in mother's parental role satisfaction according to equalitarian parental role value.

Variables	Range	General satisfaction	Parent-child relation	Spouse support	Parental role conflict	Support from children	Total satisfaction
Mother's equalitarian parent role-value	L(Below 15.0)	36.83(121)a	30.86(117)	28.73(124)	22.48(120)a	18.16(122)a	147.60(110)
	M(16.0~17.0)	38.25(260)b	31.30(250)	28.26(260)	24.72(260)b	18.77(267)ab	146.68(237)
	H(Above 18.0)	39.48(227)c	31.96(230)	28.78(229)	24.95(231)b	19.41(233)b	149.64(217)
	F	15.27***	2.39	.46	9.15***	7.35***	1.58

other words, the higher her equalitarian role values are, the more parent role conflict she feels. One might speculate that mothers sense differences between their parent role value and their parenting in real life and develop conflict from it. Also child's support was significantly different according to his/her mother's equalitarian role value. More specifically, mothers who raise their children with equalitarian role value get more support and help from their children in everyday life. Obviously, this relationship should be reexamined after controlling the other variables.

However, parent-child relationship and spouse support were not affected by the mother's equalitarian parent role value. Also the total parent satisfaction was not affected by a mother's parent role value.

3. The Independent Influences of Related Variables of Korean Mother's Parental Role Satisfaction

To find out the independent influences of related variables of parental satisfaction, multiple regression analyses is used. The level of total satisfaction is treated as the dependent variable and the independent variables are the child related variables, mother related variables, father related variables, home environment variables, father's equalitarian role-values and mother's equalitarian role-values (These variables were presented above in figure 1). The results of the multiple regression analyses are shown in <Table 4>.

Standardized regression coefficients show that a mother experiences more satisfaction in a parental role when her child has a more compliant temperament, when the mother has a happier perception of her childhood, when the child is healthier, when the mother received less education, when the mother is more devoted, when the household income is higher, when the mother has greater expectations of her child's ability, when the ratio of sons among her children is lower, when the fathers equalitarian role-values are higher, and when she is in a nuclear family.

These findings show that child's temperament and health, mother's childhood experience and characteristics, and father's equalitarian role-value are important variables in overall parental role satisfaction. Mothers with higher expectations of her child's social ability

<Table 4> Independent influences of variables on parental satisfaction

N=588

Dependent Variables Independent Variables	Total Parental Role Satisfaction	
	B	β
1. Temperament of subject child	4.00	.30
2. Mother's childhood happiness	2.42	.20
3. Health of subject child	1.65	.13
4. Level of mother's education	-1.09	-.13
5. Mother's devotion	1.79	.11
6. Household income	.02	.09
7. Social expectation about subject child	.58	.09
8. Sex ratio of children	-.06	-.10
9. Father's egalitarian role-values	.89	.09
10. Family type(extended=1, nuclear=0)	4.35	.08
constant	80.11	
R ²	.275	

appear to experience more satisfaction in performing parental roles. Also mothers with both sons and daughters or daughters only appeared to be more satisfied. The level of mother's education, household income and the type of family influenced the level of satisfaction.

Multiple regression analyses shows that among father variables, the equalitarian role-values appear to have independent effects and this agrees with the earlier findings that a husband's participation in household duties (Won, 1989), spouse's emotional or material support (Colletta, 1981) are related to mother's parental role satisfaction. Variables such as mother's level of education, household income, age of first born also appear to have independent effects. The level of mother's education has an independent, negative effect on parental role satisfaction, and this coincides with the findings of Dyer (1963), Uhlenberg (1970), Miller and Newman (1978), and Veroff (1970). Also, when controlling for other variables, household income appears to have a positive effect, and this coincides with the findings of Kwak (1990), Goode (1961), Russell (1974), Lerner and Spanier (1978). Among family life cycle related variables, only the age of the first child seems to have an independent effect, having a negative correlation with parent-child relationship but a positive correlation with support from children. Previous findings by Veroff et al. (1970),

Lowenthal (1975), Hoffman and Manis (1979) reported that the parental role satisfaction is lowest when the child grows into adulthood. However, Russel (1974) and Weisner and Gallimore (1977) reported that the more children in the family, the higher parental satisfaction is because the parents can obtain more help from the older ones. From these various results and findings, it is quite evident that parental role satisfaction must be understood as a multi-dimensional concept and depends on sub-domains of the parental role satisfaction. The related variables may vary; thus, the results of this study also need to be interpreted with caution and re-tested.

IV. CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, this study attempts to determine the level of a Korean mother's parental role satisfaction and the related variables. Parental role satisfaction is an important factor in parent-child relations and in family life satisfaction, and it may prove to be a dominant factor in the development of Korean society. Based on the theoretical overview and empirical analyses presented above, the following conclusions and suggestions are made.

First, the level of a Korean mother's parental role satisfaction was satisfactory. But analyses of each sub-domain show that spouse support is not adequate when performing parental roles and parent-child relationship is not satisfactory; thus, Korean mothers may experience conflicts in performing parental roles. This means that Korean mothers are satisfied as a parent conceptually, but in actual everyday life, they are dissatisfied and experience some conflict. Therefore, parental-role education programs should be more focused on a practical life; and, furthermore, there should be some guidance for the spouse and the children as well as guidance for mother. Mother's parental satisfaction is not only derived from the mother on her own, but it is also a result of close interactions with the spouse and the children and it eventually affects the satisfaction of the whole family.

Second, Korean parents strive vainly to find satisfaction by giving material and external support. This study shows that mother's parental role satisfaction is more dependent upon variables such as the child's health and temperament, mothers emotional traits; and role-

values of parental performance than on demographic, socio-economic variables such as income, age, job, education etc. This finding documents that without internal, emotional composure and open, equalitarian values, external factors alone cannot accomplish mother's satisfaction or even more the satisfaction of the whole family. Therefore, parental role education programs should emphasize that external socio-economic status does not decide the satisfaction and the happiness of the family. It especially should try to eliminate the idea that material support is sufficient in fulfilling the responsibility of being a parent.

Third, the question about a father's roles in Korean society needs to be raised. Also consistent efforts to change the prevalent traditional (authoritarian) father's role-values to equalitarian father's role-values are needed. Taking into account that the nuclear family is the most common family type in Korea, it's an undeniable fact that child-rearing is the responsibility of both mother and father. However, education for fathers is minimal in Korea. Therefore an education program for male students about the responsibilities and duties of being a father should be designed; and, when designing the program, practical skills of child-rearing should be included, as well as the appropriate role-value of being a father.

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