Suicide Prevention and Intervention in Different Cultural Settings: Adaptation of Interventions at STAR-Center for Korean Youth at Risk for Suicide

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Disclosures

No conflict of interests
Objectives

The participant will learn about:

- **Suicide data** of Korean youth

- **Social and cultural factors** related to suicidal behavior in Korean youth

- **Cultural considerations** in developing suicide prevention and intervention programs for Korean youth
Suicide Data of Korean Youth
Suicide Rate

Chart CO4.4.B. Teenage suicides, 1990\(^a\), 2000\(^b\) and 2013\(^c\) or latest available year

Suicides by people aged 15-19 per 100,000 people aged 15-19

Suicides per 100,000

Source: WHO (2015) WHO Mortality Database

Suicide Methods

- **South Korea**
  - Male: Jumping from heights (45.0%) > Hanging (35.6%) > Poisoning (11.0%)
  - Female: Jumping from heights (61.1%) > Hanging (28.6%) > Poisoning (7.1%)
- **United States**
  - Male: Firearms (45.5%) > Hanging (41.8%) > Poisoning (5.0%)
  - Female: Hanging (59.5%) > Firearms (19.9%) > Poisoning (13.4%)

*Fig. 2. Distribution of suicide methods in male and female adolescents in the four studied countries.*

Precipitating Factors of Suicide

- School grades: 40.4%
- Family conflict: 27.6%
- Peer conflict: 9.6%
- Economic difficulty: 2.0%
- Others: 20.5%

Korean Statistical Information Service (2013)
Social and Cultural Factors Related to Suicidal Behavior in Korean Youth

1. Academic Pressure
2. Family Change
3. Cultural Change
- Most of the factors are inter-related
1. Academic Pressure

- **Academic pressure and stress** has received much research attention in relation to suicidal behavior in Korean youth
  - This is *unique* compared to research trends of Western countries
- In Korea, the **rate of enrollment** at all levels of schooling is very high

![Graph 13.2: The rate of student enrollment at all levels of schooling in Korea](image)

![Graph 13.1: Number of Korean youth going abroad to study (Korean Educational Development Institute 2010)](image)

- Another notable phenomenon is Korean parents’ high aspiration for their children’s **early overseas education**

C.-C. Yi (ed.), The Psychological Well-being of East Asian Youth, Quality of Life in Asia 2 (2013)
More than 80% of Korean youth hope to attend a 4-year university program or want to pursue a graduate degree.
• Academic success has been considered a key to success and is viewed as a survival response in highly competitive societies like Korea.

• Korean parents pressure their children to perform well in national university entrance examinations in order to enter a prestigious university.

• This atmosphere makes Korea an “examination hell”, which is related to a saying “hell Chosun”
  – Chosun was the name of our country during the Lee Dynasty.

• The academic and subsequent economic success of the children is not only for themselves but for their entire family.
  – The children’s success or failure is the success or failure of the parents/family.
- **Study time** of Korean students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weekday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>6h 47min</td>
<td>1h 43min</td>
<td>1h 14min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>8h 5min</td>
<td>3h 12min</td>
<td>2h 45min</td>
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<td>High school</td>
<td>9h 3min</td>
<td>4h 13min</td>
<td>3h 45min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over college</td>
<td>4h 40min</td>
<td>2h</td>
<td>1h 57min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korean Statistical Information Service (2014)

**Table 13.2** Hours spent studying by youth in Korea (h)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Cram school or tutoring</th>
<th>Self-study</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>38.17</td>
<td>11.03</td>
<td>8.61</td>
<td>57.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.01</td>
<td>12.46</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>60.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.88</td>
<td>12.42</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>63.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>46.65</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>10.58</td>
<td>69.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>54.32</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>73.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>54.71</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>74.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>58.61</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>12.56</td>
<td>79.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lee (2009)
## Daily Life of a Korean Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06:00</td>
<td>Get up &amp; preparations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>Morning classes (45-50 min/class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Get up &amp; preparations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch &amp; rest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Afternoon classes (45-50 min/class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Private educational institute (or “Hagwon” in Korean)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:00</td>
<td>After-school classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:00</td>
<td>Night school self-study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free time</td>
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<tr>
<td>22:00</td>
<td>Private educational institute (or “Hagwon” in Korean)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:00</td>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Students in South Korea **study longer** hours and **sleep shorter** hours than students in other OECD countries (2010)
  - Study time per day: 7h 50min (Korea) > 5h 21min (Japan) > 5h 4min (US) > 3h 49min (England) > 6h 6min (Finland)
  - Sleep time per day: 7h 30min (Korea) < 8h 31min (Finland) < 8h 36min (England) < 8h 47min (US)

• The majority of Korean youth feel the **competitive academic pressure** as a significant stress (Lee et al., 2010)
• **Academic underachievement** is considered as **failure in one’s life**, leading to depression, anxiety and/or suicide

• Korean youth struggle with **parental pressure** to achieve academic success
  - Academically underachieving children were “**afraid of going home**” with poor grades; thought about “**running away from home or committing suicide**” (Cho, 1995)

• High expectations of Korean parents in combination with **authoritarian parenting styles** stemming from the Confucian cultural legacy
  - Major strain that puts some Korean youth at risk of suicide (Park, 2013)
• The most significant **stressors** in their life in **suicidal** high school students
  – Low academic achievement, amount of academic work and lack of rest

• **University entrance examination** has been reported as a major trigger for **suicidal attempts**

• **Hopelessness** related to academic achievement and college entrance
  – Hopelessness is a significant predictor of suicidal ideation for high school students (Park, 2004)

• **Reasons for living** of Korean adolescents = academic success and enter a prestigious university (mostly medical schools)
  – “There is nothing else I can do. I do not have any other skills or talents. So, entering a university is kind of the only hope I can have.”
2. Family Change: Family Structure

- **Lowest birth rate** in the OECD countries

- Korean parents having fewer children
  - On average **one** per couple
  - More women are going into the workforce
  - Leaves the child alone

- Korean business culture requires employees to participate in work-related dinners and stay late hours
2. Family Change: Communication with Parents

- **South Korea**
  - Mother: **26 min** (physical care) + **16 min** (teaching, reading, playing)
  - Father: **3 min** (physical care) + **3 min** (teaching, reading, playing) = 6 min

- **United States**
  - Mother: **88 min** (physical care) + **47 min** (teaching, reading, playing)
  - Father: **46 min** (physical care) + **30 min** (teaching, reading, playing)
• As academic success of children is the most important value in Korea
  – Korean parents overlook their children’s psychological needs; specifically, parents do not know about their children’s emotions

• Also, strong emphasis on academic excellence makes teachers less willing to recognize and deal with mental health issues of students
  – It is not their primary concern

• Lack of peer support: in part due to competitive and achievement-oriented school environment

• In sum, family members and friends/teachers of an adolescent may not be able to notice whether he/she has emotional problems like depression, anxiety, or has suicidal risk
3. Cultural Change

- **Collectivism** versus **Individualism**
  - Collectivistic society: the basic unit of a society consists of groups where inter-dependency or in-group harmony is emphasized (Lee, 2003) → suicide may be considered as a disrespectful or shameful act to family or society (Ayyash-Abdo, 2002)
  - Emphasis on interconnectedness or responsibility to family might serve as protective factors for suicidal behaviors

- **Rapid societal change**: Korean society is moving toward individualism (Lee, 2003) → the transition has led to youth struggling with their cultural identity
  - Many Korean adolescents tend to have more individualistic tendencies compared to previous generations (Nam, 2008)
  - Youth may feel trapped between two opposite cultures and struggle with their cultural identity, which could lead to suicidal behaviors (Nam, 2008)
Cultural Meaning of Suicide

• Negative evaluation of egoistic suicide: largely shaped by the legacy of Confucianism
  - Filial piety: the root of virtue and the origin of instruction (Goldin, 2011)
  - Self-harming behavior or suicide → usurping the authority of parents: defilement of the sacred cultural rule of familism, as well as the desecration of one’s own ancestors (Lo, 1999)

• Death of a child by suicide → not only feelings of loss but also a deep sense of shame in parents

• Stigma not only for the individual, but also for the family
  - Moral failure in fostering appropriate values, as well as providing discipline in cultivating a man of virtue

→ Many Korean families wish to hide a family member’s suicide

Im et al., OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying (2016)
Summary (1)

- **Suicide in Korean Youth**
  - Increasingly high suicide rate
  - Major methods: jumping from heights > hanging > poisoning
  - Major precipitating factors: school grades, family conflict

- **Unique sociocultural factors**
  - Academic pressure: high educational aspirations, longer study time & shorter sleep time
  - Familial factors: change of family structure, lack of communication with parents
  - Societal change: from collectivism toward individualism → struggle with cultural identity
  - Cultural meaning of suicide: negative evaluation largely shaped by Confucianism, shame & stigma in the family → hide a family member's suicide
Cultural Considerations in Developing Suicide Prevention/Intervention Programs for Korean Youth
Mood and Anxiety clinic of Youth (MAY)

• **MAY 5th** is Children’s Day and **MAY** is Children’s Month in Korea

• **MAY** is modeled after the **STAR Center** and treats youth with depression, anxiety disorders, and those at risk for suicide

• Specialized programs
  – Inpatient: regular, short-term, partial
  – Outpatient: intensive, regular, follow-up

• Psychiatric evaluation
  – Baseline (before treatment)
  – Follow up: 8 weeks (treatment response)
    6 months, 1 year, 2 year
• Psychiatric diagnosis: K-SADS-PL
• Depression: CDRS-R, CDI, BDI
• Suicide risk: C-SSRS
• Anxiety: SCARED
• Psychological trauma: ETI, PVS & BBS
• General behavior: CBCL, ADHD/ODD/CD
• General functioning: CGI, CGAS
• Side effects: SEFCA
• Family functioning: FACES-IV
David: “**MAY** the force be with you!”
Treating Depressed and Suicidal Adolescents
• Korean adolescents **do not have time** to come to the clinic and receive treatment

• Also, it is very difficult to conduct family sessions as a part of intensive outpatient program (IOP) since the family members of Korean adolescents do not have time to come as well
  – Family programs designed to teach and encourage positive parent-child communication is needed but it is not easy to develop such programs

• Sometimes Korean adolescents come to the clinic **on their own**
MAY Group Treatment

- **MAY** group treatment program provides 2-hour sessions, 1 day per week for ten weeks: a total of **10 sessions**
  - Group meets on **Wednesday from 6PM to 8PM**
    - Group session (1 h 30 min) + individual session (30 min)
    - School finishes early on Wednesdays
    - This may be the **only day and time** of the week the students in Korea can receive the group treatment
  - Participants: mostly SSRI-resistant depression with suicidal risk
Components of Group Treatment

• Session 1: Introduction
• Session 2: Chain analysis and treatment planning
• Session 3: Behavioral activation
• Session 4: Emotion regulation
• Session 5-7: Cognitive restructuring
• Session 8: Distress tolerance
• Session 9: Problem solving and interpersonal effectiveness
• Session 10: Summary
Safety Plan

Consider the difference in suicide methods: jumping from heights.

Making the environment safe: include access to alcohol.

External strategies: open communication about suicide.

도움을 청할 수 있는 연락처

1) 
2)

치료자 이름 / 연락처

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응급실 02-2072-4146
Chain Analysis

Consider the difference in precipitating factors: school grades, family conflicts. Provide specific examples related to these factors in chain analysis.
Introduction

- Have difficulty introducing oneself to others and resistant to participate in physical activity
  - Need more time and activity for **ice breaking**
    - A specific material to help self-introduction
    - Play BINGO using the items mentioned in self-introduction
      - Have to stand up and move around actively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My is</th>
<th>Month-of-birth</th>
<th>Blood type</th>
<th>Favorite entertainer</th>
<th>Favorite TV show</th>
<th>Favorite food</th>
<th>Hobby</th>
<th>Future hope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>Conan Show</td>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- March | Blue | Conan Show | Pizza | Reading book |
- Running | Bulgogi | July | Teacher | Coldplay |
- Adele | Doctor | Listening to music | Green | Traveling |
- Pink | November | Composer | Ice cream | B |
- Sleeping | AB | Gold | O | Cartoonist |
Behavioral Activation

• **Lack of leisure time** due to academic burden
  – **Limited repertoire** of behavioral activation

• Most high schools in Korea do not offer **arts, music, and physical education** courses: **all study and no play**

• We need to provide a list of activities one can do

• Also, we encourage participants to share their pleasurable activities
Emotion Regulation

• Have difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions

• We encourage participants to speak openly about their emotions

• When a participant shares her/his mood diary, we let others label emotions to the content
Cognitive Restructuring

• Because participants find it difficult to recognize and label emotions, it is a challenge for them to catch links between thinking, feeling, and acting as well.

• Have the worksheets completed as much as possible during the session instead of assigning homework.
  – Do not have time to do the homework of treatment due to academic burden.
Distress Tolerance

• Shortage of sleep, no time for physical exercise, always tired from academic pressure

→ Given more time and activity regarding stress reduction, relaxation, and/or meditation in the treatment
Interpersonal Effectiveness

• Lack of communication with parents or peers
  – Korea adolescents are not good at communication, problem solving other than studying, and interpersonal conflict resolution
  – Korean parents tend to be directive and authoritative to their children, especially in relation to studying

• We put a lot of emphasis on improving communication skills and resolving interpersonal conflicts with parents or peers
Summary (2)

• **Cultural considerations** in developing suicide prevention and intervention programs
  – **Cultural beliefs and values** related to suicide
  – **Safety plan**: suicide methods, suicide communication
  – **Chain analysis**: precipitating factors
  – **Group treatment**
    • Behavioral activation: leisure time and activities
    • Emotion regulation: recognize/label/express emotions
    • Cognitive restructuring: links between thinking/feeling/acting
    • Distress tolerance: daily life (sleep, physical exercise)
    • Interpersonal effectiveness: communication with parents/peers
Thank you for your attention