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### **Pre-Dissertation Travel for Summer Fieldwork in South Korea**

For the past years, a growing number of South Koreans has demanded that the government impose tough sanctions on juvenile delinquency. Consequently, tough-on-crime policy has been becoming more popular in the country since the mid-2010s. However, it has not been discussed much that young offenders, particularly more serious and chronic offenders, have likely suffered multiple traumatic experiences in childhood. Even after they are sent to correctional facilities because of criminal charges, their psychological wounds from early negative events are typically left untouched, while various programs are offered. Another issue that has not been addressed is all the adverse experiences occurred in an interpersonal context, not in a vacuum, with their family or close people. But some notable cases that juveniles eventually changed their behaviors also occurred in another interpersonal context. Those young offenders had a strong connection with correctional staff, usually called a teacher rather than a security guard. That might mean a positive and supportive relationship with alternative adult figures, such as staff in juvenile corrections, moderates correctional outcomes.

With these concerns in mind, I travelled to South Korea to conduct an alternative correctional program focusing on the improvement of compromised psychological well-being, such as anger, anxiety, or depressive symptoms resulting from early negative events. When I arrived in South Korea in late May, a 14-day quarantine was mandatory for all incoming travelers. As soon as I completed the quarantine, I began my work at a juvenile training school for females in the Seoul Metropolitan Area.

My summer fieldwork was a two-phase work. The first was to gather data on the prevalence of past adverse experiences in serious juveniles prior to the current secure placement. With permission of the South Korean government, I was able to meet almost all the serious female offenders in the facility who received the long-term placement order. The results clearly showed that this group suffered a set of adverse experiences in childhood. When compared to U.S. data from similar groups, the average number of childhood adverse experiences was even higher than the U.S. results. Even more, they also reported higher levels of anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms than average.

Based on these results, I began my second study, examining the effects of my alternative education program in juvenile corrections. Two classes in this facility were assigned to my study, and one of them participated in my program. The other class, assigned to a control group, took the regular correctional program during the same period. Participants in the education group attended 50-minute

session on weekdays. While it was planned as an 8-week program, twice a week, the period had to be shortened to four weeks because of the COVID-19 situation in South Korea at that time, reaching the highest number of positive cases ever. Instead, I met those youth every weekday. Based on a curriculum for adolescents developed by Dr. Robert Enright, the participating youth were exposed to the themes of kindness, respect, generosity, moral love, and inherent worth that all people have. Then forgiveness was introduced through stories as well. However, they were never pressured to share their own stories at any point.

Pre- and post-test results showed that the levels of anger and anxiety were significantly reduced in the participating youth. They also reported improved forgiveness toward someone who hurt them. The other youth in the control group, however, did not show these changes. Regarding the moderating effect of strong bonds with staff, youth in both the groups with a high level of caring staff-youth relationships showed an improved perception and attitude toward their mother after the program ended. Given that most staff were females, this seems to indicate that a supportive relationship with caring female adults may lead those girls to rethink attachment to their mothers.

With these findings, I submitted a short report to the juvenile training school and discussed proposals with the principal of the juvenile training school that have the potential to make some changes to the current correctional approaches. Just before my return to Madison, I additionally conducted a follow-up test, which will be analyzed together in my dissertation.

This very first attempt in the Korean juvenile justice system was made possible thanks to the generous support of the 2021 Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-Dissertation Fellowship. In addition, after my fieldwork was over, I received thank-you letters from my students, who participated in the program. They told me they were able to move forward and tried to change their ways. All these would not have been possible without the SKJ fellowship. I will continue to help those juveniles change their lives through my further research.

