Mongolian Social Workers' Perceptions of Protective Factors against Child Maltreatment

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Research Aim and Objectives:

Aim: To understand social workers' perceptions of protective factors that protect children under six years old against child maltreatment.

Objectives:

- To define distributions of perceived factors that protect preschool age children against child maltreatment

- To examine the associations among frequencies and distributions of common perceived protective factors and demographic characteristics of social workers

- To understand social workers' rationale for selecting certain factors as protective factors

- To develop recommendations for further improvement of social work education and child protection.

Literature Review:

Definition: Protective factors are defined as "Attributes of individuals and environments, which serve as buffers between person and stressful situations" (Garmezy, 1985).

- Child related factors:
  - Easy temperament, Gender, Competency (Garmezy,1985; Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005)

- Family Related Factors:
  - Maternal warmth, etc., (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Bowes, et al., 2010; Scanapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005)
  - Marital quality, quality of child rearing condition, supportive significant other in the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1990, Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005; Vanderbuilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008).

- Community related factors:
  - Adequate formal and informal supports; living in a resourceful community and connection of parents or care givers with the community (Browne et al. 2001; Garbarino & Sherman, 1980; Gillagan 2000; Pelton, 1994; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005).

- Cultural factors
  - Cultural value of promoting nonphysical forms of punishment, cultural value of protection children (Beazley, et al., 2006; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005).

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Theoretical Framework

Ecological theory of human development

• Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the ecological theory of human development in the field of developmental psychology looking at interactions between a developing person and that person's environment.

• *Implication of the ecological theory of human development in the study of child maltreatment*

• Garbarino (1977); Belsky (1980); Brofernbrenner & Evans (2000); Brooks-Gunn (1995); Drake & Pandey (1996); Ernst (2000); Kohrt et al., (2000); Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, (2005).

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Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology

- Edmund Husserl (in the early 1900s) - classical and transcendental phenomenology- meaning of perception

- Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponte – existential phenomenologists challenged Husserl's essence of consciousness (Crbich, 2007) - a linkage of the meaning of perceptions and human experiences

- Martin Heidegger- hermeneutic phenomenology- not used but two notions such as historicality of understanding and hermeneutic circle

- Interpretive phenomenological inquiry – to look at people's experiences in connection with social, cultural and political contexts (Lopez & Wills, 2004).

Implication of two different theories in one study

Ecological theory of human development

Phenomenology

A modest mix of two theories allowed to keep the boundaries of two distinct theories separate on the one hand, and creating one theoretical framework for some mixing of the two extensions on the other.

Methodology

Research design: A mixed method with the explanatory sequential design.

Data and Sample: Primary data collected through the questionnaire (N=254) and semi-structured interviews (N=30).

Unit of Analysis: Social workers and welfare officers who work at khoroo level, the smallest administrative units of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The number of khoroo covered in the study is 152.

Questionnaire Design: A five point Likert Scale was used for the questionnaire with the aim to collect data on (1) demographic and educational data of social workers; (2) social workers' agreement with the protective factors; and (3) perceived frequency of use of social work skills.

Data analysis methods:

Quantitative data analysis: descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests by SPSS, v 22

Qualitative data analysis: thematic data analysis based on selections of common themes

Demographic Characteristics and Work Experience of Questionnaire Participants

Variables		N (%)
Gender	Female Male No response	204 (80.3%) 49 (19.3%) 1 (0.4%)
Age Group	20-29 years old 30-39 years old 40-49 years old 50-59 years old No response	106 (41.7%) 85 (33.5%) 40 (15.7%) 18 (7.1%) 5 (2.0%)
Current Occupation	Khoroo social worker Khoroo welfare officer No response	119 (49.9%) 134 (52.8%) 1 (0.4%)
Length of work experience at current position	1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 20-25 years No response	198 (77.3%) 27 (10.5%) 12 (4.7%) 3 (1.2%) 2 (0.8%) 14 (5.5%)

Demographic Characteristics and Work Experience of Interview Participants

Variables		N (%)
Gender	Female Male	26 (86.7%) 4 (13.3%)
Age Group	20-29 years old 30-39 years old 40-49 years old 50-59 years old	7 (23.3%) 11 (36.6%) 11 (36.6%) 1 (3.5%)
Current Occupation	Khoroo social worker Khoroo welfare officer	18 (60%) 12 (40%)
Length of work experience at current position	1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years	19 (63.3%) 5 (16.7 %) 6 (20 %)

Agreement with Protective Factors by Frequency

Variables	N	Median	IQR	Disagreement	Undecided	Agreement
Happy relationship of parents	241	4	1	6 (2.5%)	7 (2.9%)	228 (94.6%)
Maternal warmth	243	4	1	8 (3.3%)	10 (4.1%)	225 (92.6%)
Quality of child rearing condition	237	4	1	10 (4.2%)	13 (5.5%)	214 (90.3%)
Culture of protecting children	240	4	1	8 (3.3%)	15 (6.3%)	217 (90.4%)
Accessible child care	244	4	1	36 (14.7%)	12 (4.9%)	196 (80.4%)
Connection of parents with the community	241	4	0	25 (10.2)	34 (10.2%)	184 (75.7%)
Adequate formal support	238	4	1	36 (15.1%)	34 (14.3%)	168 (70.6%)
Cultural value of promoting nonphysical forms of punishment	233	4	2	65 (27.9%)	37 (15.9%)	131 (56.2%)
Child who has competent behavior	245	3	2	87 (35.5%)	53 (22%)	105 (42.9%)
Child who is perceived as adorable	242	2	2	134 (55.3%)	35 (15%)	73 (30.1%)

Significance of Gender and Occupation in 3 Protective factors

Variables		Female	Male
A. Adequate formal support in the community	No Yes N	14.3% 85.7%* 161	31% 69% 42
B. Accessible child care and kindergarten in the community	No Yes N	12.3% 87.7%** 187	29.5% 70.5% 44
C. Connection of parents or care givers with the Community	No Yes N	9.5% 90.5%* 168	22.5% 77.5% 40
		Social Worker	**Welfare Officer**
D. Accessible child care and kindergarten in the community	No Yes N	10.5% 89.5%* 114	20.5% 79.5% 117

(A)*X^2 = 6.342, df =1, N=203, p<.05
(B)**X^2 = 8.053, df =1, N=231, p<.005
(C) *N=208, P=.031, p<.05 (by Fisher's exact test)
(D) *X^2 = 4.377, df =1, N=231, p<.05

SWs' Descriptions of Most and Least Agreed Protective Factors:

MOST

- **Happy relationship of parents defined as follows :**
  - Respect to each other (11)
  - Positive and friendly communication (9)
  - Loving and caring relationship (7)
  - Happy smile (6)
  - Child is everything of human life (6)
  - No quarrel and no conflict (5) etc.,

- **Maternal warmth defined as follows:**
  - Unconditional love (13)
  - Warm heart (8)
  - Breastfeeding (3)
  - Togetherness with a child (3) etc.,

LEAST

- **Child who is perceived as an adorable:**
  - It was perceived as a discrimination. Almost of all participants said that "children should not treated by their physical appearance."
  - Mongolian traditional quote about three adorable animals on the earth was another common explanation:

    Toddler who is walking, puppy who is playing with and calf (baby camel) that is trying to stand are the most adorable on the earth.

- **Child who has competent behavior:**
  - Common response was that *"Children under 6 are not able to protect themselves even they have competent behavior."*

Social workers' explanations about some significant associations

Female practitioners indicated that they were more likely to agree with the factors of "Adequate formal support" and "Accessible childcare and kindergarten in the community" than male practitioners.

- The themes of the explanations:
- Gender roles such as men are expected to be breadwinners and women are expected to be responsible for taking care of children;
- Women think that it is safe to leave their children at kindergarten, because kindergarten is a safe place, plus there is a meal;
- Employment opportunities, particularly for women;
- Most social workers are female, and probably responded to this question based on their own experiences;
- Accessibility to kindergartens is becoming a huge issue;
- Women are more sensitive and close to the issues while men do not take this work seriously; and
- Most of the respondents were female social workers, which is why the weight of female respondents became heavier than the weight of male respondents statistically.

Discussions: General trend of social workers' perceived protective factors

- Safe and child-friendly environment, particularly "Accessible child care and adequate formal supports in the community" were commonly agreed protective factors for young age children. That was consistent with previous studies such as Benzies & Mychasiuk (2009).

- The previous studies emphasised the high quality of childcare, but social workers of the current study highlighted the accessibility.

- Generally, social workers stressed the factors in the closest environment to the children as the most agreed protective factors.

Discussions: Most versus least agreed protective factors

- From the ecological perspective, SWs frequently accepted the factors related to children's immediate environment and primary caregivers, whereas they did not accept children's own characteristics as protective.

- Protective characteristics of parental relationship were consistent with the previous studies (Belsky & Vondra, 1989; Scannapieco & Connel-Carrick, 2005; Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008).

- Descriptions of maternal warmth were expressed the words of love, care, close connection and commitment. SW's suggested ways of assessing maternal warmth were   consistent with the previous studies. For instance Bowes et al., 2010 & Kin-Cohen et al., 2004 used the similar characteristics when they measured maternal warmth (tone of voice, sympathy and empathy towards children).

Discussions: Connections between social workers' perceptions and their background

- Social workers' gender and perception:
  - Gender performativity –common acceptance of traditional roles;
  - Huge demand of accessibility to kindergartens;
  - Understanding about formal supports; and
  - Parent' connection with and participation in the community activities).

- Social workers' age and perceptions
  - The personal and professional lives of middle-aged practitioners (30-39) were more stable than those young practitioners.
  - The work and life experiences of the middle-aged practitioners were noted as important elements that contributed to their perceptions about the "Cultural value of protective children."

Discussions: Use of protective factors in practice

- Both khoroo social workers and welfare officers indicated that they used often protective factors in the direct practice of working with individuals and families rather than working at program development, advocacy and policy formulation.

- They address the basic needs of parents and children by linking them with available resources or providing materialistic assistance and providing emotional support.

- The qualitative results illustrated social workers' roles of investigators and brokers. SWs' work appeared to be mostly fragmented and not aimed to support family as whole.

Discussions: Use of protective factors in practice

- As frontline government practitioners, social workers and welfare officers saw their role as the important government agent who can link the families and children with available services.

- At the same time they acknowledged the difficulties of providing some direct services by themselves due to their lack of qualifications and the poor working conditions.

- Quantitatively, out of all the 254 questionnaire participants, only 50 (19.7%) identified themselves as social workers with a social work degree qualification.

- Most of the respondents (85.9%) had certificates of social work training lasting from one week to three months.

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- Quantitatively, out of all the 254 questionnaire participants, only 50 (19.7%) identified themselves as social workers with a social work degree qualification.

- Most of the respondents (85.9%) had certificates of social work training lasting from one week to three months, which were not comparable with the diploma of social work or the bachelor and master's degrees.

Discussions: Profession versus Occupation

- Bartlett (1970, p. 19) added that profession's knowledge, skills and values are transmissible through education and a profession is responsible for standards of practice and the competence of its members. Occupations, on the other hand, are defined as having technical skills and practice-based knowledge (Bartlett, 1970).

- Khoroo social workers' current knowledge about protective factors could be based on factual knowledge that includes knowledge of key legislations and law, knowledge of social policy and knowledge of agency policy, practice and processes and knowledge of particular problems or particular groups (Trevithick, 2012).

Discussions: Profession versus Occupation

- Social work scholars highlight the importance of both "knowing how to do something" and "knowing about … some aspects of the world" (Payne, 2014).

- If social workers learned about protective factors for the first time from practical and personal experiences rather than from training or textbooks, their knowledge about protective factors is more likely to be unformulated practical knowledge.

- Universal human rights principles and societal values were key justifications in selecting certain factors as protective factors.

Conclusions

- The most agreed protective factors for children under 6 were parents and family related factors, whereas the least agreed factors were related to the child.

- Female social workers were more likely to agree with the community factors including adequate formal support, accessible child care and kindergarten and connection of parents with the community than male social workers.

- Detailed descriptions about protective factors informed lived experiences that reflect both universal and contextual descriptions.

- Both quantitative and qualitative findings found that frontline social workers' qualifications did not influence their perceptions of protective factors of children under six years of age.

- Instead, social workers' perceptions accepting family, community and cultural factors were dependent on their gender, age and occupational positions.

- The study also found that khoroo social workers often used societal and personal values in their daily practice that was supported by unformulated practical knowledge and experience rather than formal academic knowledge and professional skills.
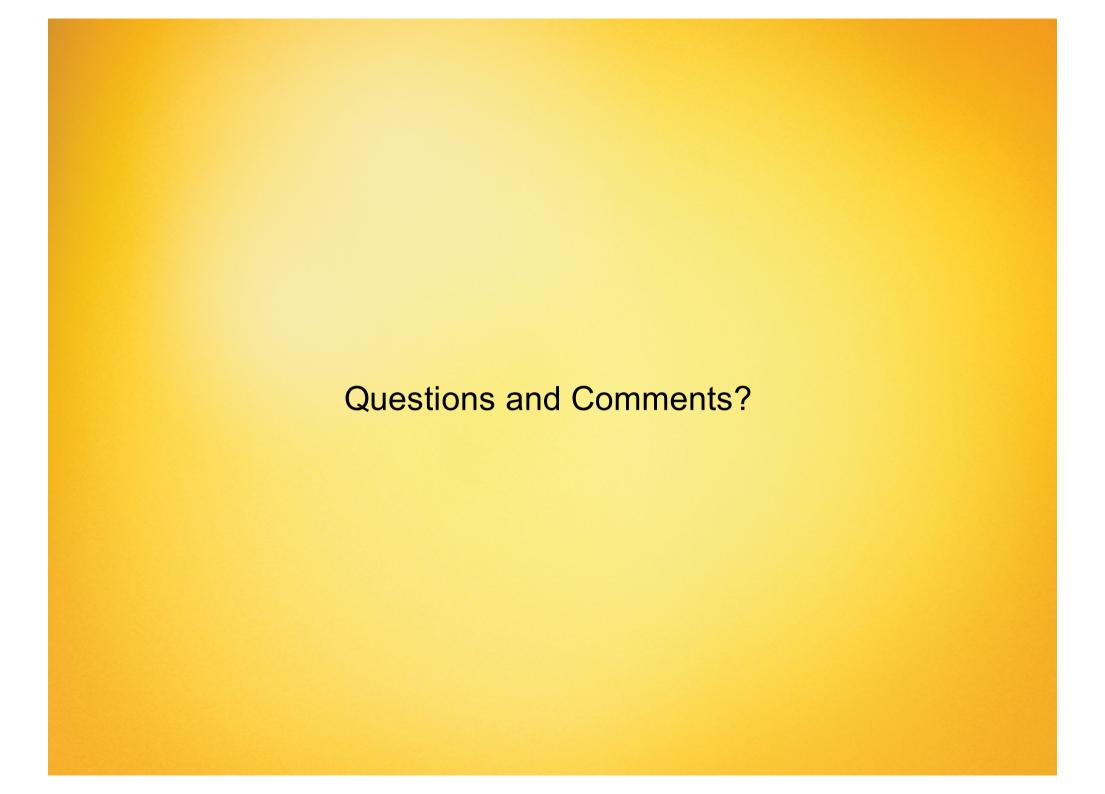
Recommendations

- *Child protection research:* comprehensive baseline study of the prevalence of child abused followed by a systematic recording and follow-up system on the incidence of child abuse.

- *Social work education:* Increased roles of social work education in transferring knowledge about protectiveness and risks of child maltreatment into social work practice; development of an inventory and handbook on assessment and intervention in the use of different types of protective factors

- *Social work practice:* shift from practice based occupational approach to the approach that respect social work as a profession; development of a comprehensive family support program that include both child protective and preventative approach and services.

Questions and Comments?

Thank you for your attention!