The Influence of Family Dynamic, Attachment to Fathers, Attachment to Friends, Self-esteem, and Stress on School Adaptation: A Comparative Study of Adolescents from Non-military Families and Military Families

This study examined the factors that influenced school adaptation by adolescents from non-military families and military families; subsequently, our research targeted 387 middle school children located in Chungnam province. Questionnaires were used and data analysis was conducted by t-tests and multiple regression analysis. The results were as follows: First, adolescents from non-military families perceived higher levels of attachment to fathers and self-esteem than adolescents from military families. However, the stress level for adolescents from military families was higher than adolescents from non-military families and adolescents from non-military families adapted better to school than adolescents from military families. Secondly, family dynamic, attachment to fathers, and stress influenced school adaptation by adolescents of non-military families and family dynamic and the attachment to friends influenced the adaptation to school by adolescents from military families.

School is a place of learning where students develop values and attitudes. It is also a place of socialization where adolescents prepare their future lives in society as well as a place to gain knowledge. How students adapt themselves to school is an important issue because they can establish a sense of identity and learn about interpersonal skills that can influence their lifestyle. School is the extended social ground from home and is a place that can influence the socialization of adolescents directly or indirectly; however, many adolescents complain about difficulties and dissatisfaction with school.

Adolescents experience physical, cognitive, emotional development through the transitional period from the childhood to adulthood. Adaptability is highlighted during this period while these various changes are happening (Lee, 2005).

School adaptation is defined as an active and creative process to balance school environments and individuals by changing the school to satisfy personal needs as well as internally changing to meet the requirements of the school (Danielsen, 2009). School adaptation by adolescents requires a positive attitude towards school and the display of socially and emotionally desirable behaviors (Min & Kawn, 2004) and it also defined as active participation in educational process to develop intelligence and moral character (Kim, 2009). Scholars have differed on the exact definitions of school adaptation; however, school adaptation is a vital element for the social and
emotional development of adolescents (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2009). It is perceived as an important element because it can significantly influence adaptability to society.

School adaptation is the ability to cope with internal situations and adapt to a school environment where adolescents spend the majority of their time. Active participation in school can influence personal growth and developments (Lim & Lee, 2007). This serves an initiation into a society that they will experience as adults; however, a failure to adapt can cause stress, bullying, school violence and problematic behavior such as drug abuse, depression, and suicide (Lee, 2001).

Korea remains the only divided country in the world and has the highest proportion of soldiers per capita (including professional soldiers) in Asia. Military power is significant in terms of both expenditures and population. Korea maintains both a professional and a conscript soldier system. The professional soldier system allows individuals to serve and build a financially stable long-term career in the military (Choi, 2009). However, the children of soldiers are raised in unique circumstances; and face frequent migration due to station transfers. School age children of military families are known to experience psychological conflicts due to the absence of fathers in unstable household environments and unique educational environments (Choi, 2005). The occupational characteristics of soldiers influence household environments and rearing attitudes towards children (Lee, 1983). It is reported that adolescents from military families have more difficulty to adapt to school than adolescents from non-military families due to frequent changes in schools (Kang, 2000). Conversely, adolescents from military families and adolescents from non-military families perceived the same level of quality of life and the characteristics of military families did not influence the quality of life for school age children or their behavioral patterns in the study of Choi (2005). Marchant and Medway (1987) claimed that frequent migration and frequent changes in schools themselves did not negatively influence children. Moon (2009) stated that the cultural experiences that adolescents from military families have through frequent school changes widened their understanding of new worlds and improved adaptability; however, there were some problems and the ability to utilize interpersonal skills to deal with emotions. Korea remains the only divided country in the world with a significant soldier population; therefore, it is necessary to look at inconsistent previous research results and understand if the frequent environmental changes experienced by adolescents from military families negatively influence their adaptability versus the experiences of adolescents from non-military families.

Related school adaptation variables can be classified into family related variables, friend related variables and individual related variables. Family relationship has recently been emphasized in research that emphasizes family benefits from a family relationship point of view (Bascoe, Davies, Sturge-Apple, & Cummins, 2009; Nam & Park, 2009). Shek (2002) said that a smoothly function family has a positive impact on psychological status and mental health. Research results into family and school adaptation indicate a correlation between of these two (Choi, 2010; Lee, 2005; Lim & Lee, 2006).

Parental attachment influences the mental stability of adolescents that helps facilitate school adaptation (Lee, 2001) and it is reported that the positive impact of parent-child relationships increases at the beginning of middle school (Bascoe, Davies, Sturge-Apple, & Cummins, 2009). Attachment is a continuous interpersonal emotional bond (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970) and the attachment function in life development theory is to conquer environments and continuously develop self-esteem and social ability throughout life (Kalish & Knudston, 1976). Attachments formed as a teenager are important for development and adaptation during adolescence. Fostering was considered the role of the mother in the past and fathers were emotionally distant and authoritarian; however attitudes have changed as fathers increasingly help raise children (Morman & Floyd, 2002). More emphasis is placed on the roles of fathers as disparities in the two parental roles for each parent disappear (Yoon, 1998). However, existing research on