

The Psychological Status of Contemporary Korean Young People and the Influencing Factors

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Abstract. With the continuous development of society, people's living standards and quality are constantly improving. However, there are also many problems that come with it, such as excessive pressure on teenagers and increasingly fierce social competition. South Korea can be regarded as a typical country with these problems. In fact, these problems exist globally. As a new generation, this is a very good opportunity for people to understand the physical and mental conditions of teenagers in other countries, and to explore in more detail the causes behind social phenomena. It can also help people better solve and deal with these problems. The research mainly focuses on exploring the psychological conditions of young people in South Korea and some of the factors that influence them. It mainly summarizes and summarizes some of the research results of previous scholars, and combines the phenomena in people's own lives for understanding and analysis. The psychological condition of young people in South Korea is mainly reflected in social loneliness, low happiness index, excessive pressure, and social conformity. Many factors in society have led to these problems, typical of which include educational pressure, dependence on electronic products, and troubles brought about by the pandemic. In addition to psychological problems, there are also many advanced cognitive changes. For example, under the influence of the Korean Wave culture, the public has a diversified understanding of gender cognition.

1 Introduction

With the continuous growth and advancement of society, it is apparent that the quality of life and standards of living of individuals are increasing. Progress is taking place in various spheres of life, including education, healthcare, and technology. However, with these advancements, there are more and more problems bothering youths nowadays. These challenges prominently exist among teenagers, leading to excessive pressure and even psychological disorders, especially in countries such as South Korea. South Korea is renowned for its traditional values that people attach great importance to educational issues. However, with limited resources, there is extensive competition between students which overwhelms the pressure on them extensively. As a result, many Korean youths are feeling too much pressure under this kind of tense growing atmosphere. In recent years, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on society and the country. Social isolation is no doubt the biggest issue that society needs to pay attention to. Since countries need to take some measures such as social distancing to keep citizens safe. Social isolation is a phenomenon that actually appeared before the breaking of the pandemic, however without doubt, this issue has been subsequently accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social isolation is a risk factor for depression and mental illness, which can lower the quality of life and happiness. In addition,

socially isolated individuals are more likely to lose control of their lives, have difficulty obtaining help from others, and face greater risks of loneliness, poverty, and death. Furthermore, due to traditional Korean thinking and culture, Koreans are more inclined to digest psychological stress on their own and are reluctant to seek help from mental health professionals. Additionally, Korean society emphasizes conformity over individual development. This means that Koreans tend to conform to the majority in their daily lives and work, which may suppress the exploration of individual potential. In addition to some social phenomena and problems, Koreans have also demonstrated advanced cognitive abilities, particularly with regard to gender equality. Under the influence of Korean Wave culture, the public's understanding of gender has become more developed and diverse, as seen in the evolution of K-pop music and fashion trends. As the new generation, it is necessary for us to understand these issues and their causes and impacts because they are actually similar in development on a global scale. Society needs to create an environment that supports and nurtures young people, and encourages them to explore their potential while ensuring their physical and mental well-being. Only by understanding the challenges they face, can we help provide sustainable solutions and promote a healthy balance between academic excellence and human development.

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2 The psychological status of contemporary Korean youths

2.1. Social isolation

According to a report by a Korean newspaper, more and more Korean youths are living in seclusion because they find no matter how hard they work, it is almost impossible to reach their ideal life standard [1]. Social influences include not only the loss of social interaction, but also the loneliness within oneself. Under the influence of the pandemic, the required social distancing led to the relationship of people all over the world. In a survey conducted by the National Youth Policy Institute, 13.4% of young people responded that they felt isolated from others, and 16.6% experienced acute feelings of loneliness, which made them feel as if they were completely alone in the world [2]. A large number of Koreans are facing the problems of academic pressure, high unemployment and high house rates which turn worse due to the impact of COVID-19. Because of this, it is hard for Koreans to balance their ego and reality. They have to give up lots of things such as dreams, marriage and social in order to make progress in work and study. Against this background, many young people in society lose hope and experience social isolation and social withdrawal. Some of them will choose to enclose themselves and live a life without social interaction.

2.2 Low happiness index

According to the World Happiness Report, quoted in the recently released Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs' "Preliminary Study of the Social Trends Monitoring," in 2021, South Koreans' happiness level was 6.11 out of 10, the seventh lowest among the 38 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [3].

The World Happiness Report ranks countries based on various factors that contribute to happiness and well-being. Among all members of society, the pressure on teenagers is relatively high. They usually have been through more pressure than the older due to education or life problems. Happiness requires people both have to be positive and satisfied with their present life, and at the same time, they can make some contributions to society in order to realize personal value. Korea's study opportunities have been intensive all along. As a result, teenagers in Korea may face more problems in studying or entering school. It is relatively difficult for them to chase their dreams or live their ideal life. Anxiety though is unavoidable through the way of growth, but people should pay enough attention to this problem since higher happiness index can help form a healthy and adaptive lifestyle.

2.3 Stigma and depression

For South Korean children, academic stress is a regular feature of childhood and adolescence, the most common reason for life dissatisfaction, and the leading

explanation for youth impulse to commit suicide [4]. Over the last decade, suicide has been reported as the most common cause of death among Korean adolescents, and suicide rates for this demographic have also been increasing [5]. While Korea's school dropout rates is still increasing in recent years, Korean students must put more effort into studying in order to enter high school or college. Also, compared to high school students, those who drop out of schools will withstand more anxiety. This may lead to shame, which in turn can lead to psychological disorders. Shame weakens a person's identity; it is characterized by exclusion or devaluation based on negative judgments [6]. In a country highly values education such as Korea, teenagers who lack degrees will withstand much social pressure. Parents expect that an education degree will bring high living standard and honor to their children. Usually, children without a high degree are stigmatized explicitly or implicitly by society or even their families. Stigma further on can lead to recrimination among those teenagers. This social phenomenon results in a serious stigma on Korean youths, and greatly influences their health and happiness index.

2.4 The conformity of Korean

Traditionally, "group mentality" or "crowd psychology" has been prevalent in Korean society [7]. While individualistic cultures focus on the distinctiveness of individuals from one another, collectivistic cultures emphasize cooperation and interdependence in the group. In East Asia countries, people may even regard people with higher levels of conformity are more mature or sociable. This behavior definitely can bring benefits to a group perspective. But at the same time, this can limit individual development and bring more pressure. If group conformity is widespread in society, people will easily lose self-identity and become emotional to those who do not belong to their group. For example, young people in Korea always follow a trend in fashion like in a period, all people dress in only three colors white, black and grey. If a makeup style is very popular at a specific time, most women will choose to follow the trend instead of persisting in themselves. From the historical aspect of Korea, Koreans will always fight against other countries besides it. Under a relatively rigid and conservative social environment, Koreans are afraid of being different from others.

2.5 The changing thoughts in masculinity and feminism

Originating in South Korea, K-pop draws influence and makes achievements from various genres like pop, experimental, rock, hip-hop, R&B, electronic, and dance, mostly among the younger generation. Developing to nowadays, K-POP idols wear makeups, fancy clothes and dress in a more feminism way. At first, people in Asia cannot accept idols wearing skirts, corsets or things like that which is stereotyped as a signal of the female group. As a carrier of mainstream fashion, K-pop can

reflect changes in mainstream fashion under the context of variations of gender identities or gender roles. Gradually, public definitions of masculinity and femininity have changed, renewing more diversified structures.

3 Influencing factors

3.1 The impacts of COVID-19 pandemic

During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the local government has taken many safety measures like social distancing to keep safe. In this way, it will be difficult for people to get face-to-face interaction. Members of society tend to use networks or online chat to communicate. Since people may lack contact with or support from others, social relationships will become increasingly distant. Apart from this, people experience emotional loneliness from internal aspect. The phenomenon of social isolation mentioned before will turn much more seriously, which can influence people's physical and mental health. Social isolation is a risk for depression and psychological disorders which can decrease the happiness index or even lead to self-harmed behaviors. This will turn into a cycle. Young people are unable to live a life up to their ideal standard and they may lose hope. Then, they will become more isolated and anxious which prevent them from focusing on their study and work.

3.2 Educational pressure

According to "Korean Social Trends 2015", the adult stress index rate was 24.4%, while the youth stress index rate was 37.0%; 10.3% of adults experienced feelings of depression, while 26.7% of adolescents reported the same experience [8]. In a tense learning environment, students are experiencing extensive study pressure. As students are preparing for the college entrance examination, their pressure reaches a climate. Study has shown that educational pressure is the main cause of suicide. Korea is in a tense educational environments, which means students will undergo more keen competition to enter a so-called good university [4]. Students spend much more time studying and reaching higher grades than most students in other countries. Graduating from a well-known university is one of the top priorities for Korean families since they consider it as the best way to get a job with higher salaries, and even improve social status and marriage quality. Not only a few families, but also the whole society lay high emphasis on education. But easy dropout will lead to social exclusion which will combat self-esteem. Compared with students who stay in school, adolescents who drop out tend to be at greater risk of a wide range of problems such as poor overall health and well-being, high stress, depressive symptoms, and certain health challenges [9]. Compared to those who continue to study in a university, teenagers who drop out of school early can face much more social pressure from various aspects. They are more likely to withstand physiological disorders and anxiety. Besides pressure from work, since they have entered society earlier than peers, they need to withstand criticism from society. However, the competition is cruel and not everyone can enter a university. For those who do not get that chance, it is undoubtedly that they undergo pressure.

3.3 Traditional thinking methods

Traditionally, Korean society is based on Confucian values which represent diligence, perseverance and humility. Personal worries and values come afterward. Korean families always need to maintain dignity. So, if members of the family go to see a psychological doctor, his family will become embarrassed in their social group. However, Koreans are so fond of social networks or cosmetic medicine that they become more and more anxious about this kind of social trend. Discussing emotional problems publicly is still not widely acceptable. When they are experiencing pressure or psychological disorders, they tend to endure and finally overcome those problems by themselves instead of going for a mental health professional. Also, as society develops, people focus more on material and money and they can easily lose themselves. Koreans will find more ways to release their pressure including shopping or doing sports. But these will not solve the difficulty from the root. All these factors cause more anxiety and limit them to fixed thinking patterns.

3.4 Smartphone over-dependence

Researchers from Korea did a series of researches to explore the relationship between smartphone use and the pressure on Korean youths. The participants comprised 54,948 middle and high school students. 13,775 students (25.1 %) were classified as the smartphone overdependence group. Of those who reported being overly dependent on smartphones, 2803 students (20.3 %) had generalized anxiety disorder [10]. According to the research, the rate of having a smartphone in Korea is the highest all over the world. As smartphones bring advantages and convenience to people's life, they lead to bad effects as well. The younger generations, use the Internet almost in any field. They search for study material online, watch short videos, and chat through social networks. On their way to growth, teenagers become independent from their parents in order to have a private room. Having a smartphone grants freedom and allows them to exercise control. However, it is hard for youths to manage their time on smartphones properly which can easily lead to smartphone addiction. Excessive smartphone use is associated with depression and anxiety. If people surf the internet for a long time, they may easily lose focus on their own life, as well as a waste of time. Most teenagers will become more anxious for not having enough time to do homework. However, they cannot control themselves by using smartphones. This will form a vicious cycle and cause them to become increasingly anxious. The social network can also bring anxiety. Girls will care more about their appearance or shape. They will look for the same standard of beauty. Actually, beauty is various and it cannot be defined. Under the influence of COVID-19, people need to get interact through internet. This also increases the frequency of using smartphones.

3.5 The development of Korean wave culture

With the rise of Korean wave culture, it continues to spread out in Korean people's daily life. Among the Korean wave culture, the most popular ones are Korean dramas and K-POP music. K-pop, or Korean Pop, is the internationally popular, aesthetic-driven, style-bending, trendsetting music genre of the 21st century. 'Seo Taiji and Boys' was the first K-pop male group in the conventional sense that combined Korean music with western music. Later, groups like EXO and BTS strengthened and consolidated the positions of K-pop music in the Asia market, widely spreading K-POP music to the whole world. K-POP shows a more varied beauty by the dressing type of K-POP idols. Historically, there is a rigid gender structure for most Korean people they only get interact with traditional male

and female characters. While the way of developing, the K-pop industry uses its financial and social influence to break the stereotype of masculinity. Instead of common perspectives of masculinity, individuals are subverting these norms and values in intentional forms of gender. Consequently, when males embrace these gendered garments and accessories, it serves to showcase the neutrality of genders or even a sense of asexuality. Showing that, fashion is not considered only of gender, it is more about a reflection of beauty. Korean culture has visibly been on the rise for the past few years, gaining popularity from mostly K-pop, K-beauty and Korean movies. This booming rise has influenced countries all around the world, and there is an evident impact of Korean culture in Western society as well [11]. As K-POP has a strong influence, people in Asia or even western countries are affected by this thinking method. Korean wave culture has gradually altered the masses' cognition of gender orientations and gender roles, especially on male identity.

4 Conclusion

From the analysis above, it is easy to infer the relationship between the psychological status of Korean youth and the society phenomena. Since South Korean society is traditionally influenced by Confucian values, they attach great importance to diligence, stoicism and modesty. Also, having a high degree is also necessary. However, when social resources are not rich enough, competition will always become more and more fierce. All these influencing factors lead to more pressure on the new generation of Korea. As a result, many of them will have psychological disorders. But when society shows such great attention to preserving dignity, most Korean youth will choose to resolve the stress on their own. Also, when COVID-19 broke out, the social isolation problem was exacerbated due to the limitation of diseases. As the development of society brings polarized problems, the cognition of youths is changing at the same time. Under the impacts of Korean wave culture, the cognitions of gender have been verified. Furthermore, more and more women are fighting for female rights. As younger generations, it is of great importance to pay attention to psychological status and improve oneself by learning the beneficial parts of development.

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