Abstract

A recent series of shocking child abuse and murder cases has inspired the society to shed new light onto children’s issues and welfare. After it was revealed that most of the perpetrators in those cases were the biological parents and stepparents of children, the society went into shock. Post-abuse murder cases of children are clearly distinguished from other murder cases in terms of motives and forms and have tremendous influences on the society.

Therefore, in the wake of recent cases of parents abusing and then killing their children, this study set out to analyze the causes and characteristics of major post-abuse murder cases of children in 2016 and search for preventive measures.

The causes of post-abuse murder cases of children were as follows: First, the study considered the causes of post-abuse murder cases of children with a focus on the characteristics of parents from a psychological perspective. The emotional, psychological, and personality characteristics of abusive parents are part of the major causes. Secondly, the causes come from the economic hardship of families from the perspective of social environment. The unstable economic situations of families cause conflicts among the family members and even lead to murder cases.

The case analysis results were as follows: first, many of abused children were seven years old or younger. When younger children were subjected to ongoing serious physical abuse, they might be killed, not enduring it. Secondly, most perpetrators of child abuse and murder cases were their biological parents. Finally, the causes of post-abuse murder of children include psychological issues such as depression, lack of parenting abilities, conflicts with their spouses, and economic difficulties. Some parents were addicted to games and abused and neglected their children.

Based on the case analysis results, the study proposed the followings to prevent child abuse and murder: first, there is a need to develop effective programs to separate children from their parents when child abuse is suspected, provide perpetrators with education, and treat victim children. It is also needed to secure professionals for such programs. Secondly, it is critical to offer low-income parents supports and aids and also education and training about parenting methods. Finally, it is the most important to establish a social atmosphere of respecting and loving children so that various measures can achieve their effectiveness.

[Keywords] Domestic Crime, Domestic Violence, Parent’s Child Abuse, Child Abuse, Killing

1. Introduction

The South Korean society has taken a lot of interest in crimes committed by children and adolescents, but its concern with crimes committed to children and adolescents has been relatively insufficient. Most child and adolescent abuse cases involve their parents as the perpetrators. Since there is a widespread perception that abusive acts are part of child discipline, it has been difficult to approach those abuse cases.
A recent series of shocking child abuse and murder cases has inspired the society to shed new light onto children's issues and welfare. The society is trying to reestablish the essential roles of family and parents and put an emphasis on their importance after the child abuse and murder cases by their parents. When the parents abuse and even kill their children in the name of discipline, their families can no longer offer a warm nest to the abused children. After it was revealed that most of the perpetrators in those cases were the biological parents and stepparents of children, the society went into shock. It seems that abuse cases take place at home and can be manipulated or covered up as much as the perpetrators want, which explains why such cases have not been reported fully.

Filicide refers to a case of a parent killing his or her own child[1]. There are several types of family homicide, and the type of children becoming the victims raises an even more serious issue since the victims have excessively limited abilities or none at all. Previous studies that analyzed the current state of filicide reported that 60% of perpetrators were the parents in the murder cases of young children under five[2]. According to the Scientific Crime Analysis System (SCAS) of National Police Agency, a majority of child murder victims aged 15 or younger were killed by their parents[3]. Even though filicide cases hold a considerable percentage in the entire murder cases, the previous studies on family homicide paid no attention to them, which explains why the issue is emerging now of no practical and proper measures and protective plans for children being abused.

Secondly, the causes come from the economic hardship of families from the perspective of social environment. The unstable economic situations of families cause conflicts among the family members and even lead to murder cases. Given that most of abusive parents were in their thirties or forties, it seems that the breadwinners in that range of age, who are supposed to engage in active economic activities, suffer difficulties due to employment or business failure, lose desire for life, have conflicts with their spouses, and, at the same time, abuse and even kill their own children. When the characteristics of family environment are considered, the childhood experiences with abuse and abnormal growing experiences of abusive parents can be causes of post-abuse

2. Analysis of Causes and Characteristics of Post-Abuse Murder Cases of Children

2.1. Causes of post-abuse murder cases of children

First, the study considered the causes of post-abuse murder cases of children with a focus on the characteristics of parents from a psychological perspective. The emotional, psychological, and personality characteristics of abusive parents are part of the major causes. Parents' aggression, stress, and depression can also be the causes. Parents, especially mothers, have aggressive affect toward their children and express it in the form of crime[4]. Mothers have aggressive affect toward their children and further an urge to kill them as their revenge on their husbands. The next motive of killing their own children comes from the psychological stress from raising them. When mothers get pregnant and give birth to a child against their wish at a young age, they feel shameful and guilty about parenting and have poor skills and difficulties with raising their children, which can cause them to kill their own children. In a related investigation, the mental disorders of parents turned out to be important motives of killing their children with over a majority of them displaying the symptoms of depression. For mothers, mental disorders were the biggest risk factor[5][6].

Secondly, the causes come from the economic hardship of families from the perspective of social environment. The unstable economic situations of families cause conflicts among the family members and even lead to murder cases. Given that most of abusive parents were in their thirties or forties, it seems that the breadwinners in that range of age, who are supposed to engage in active economic activities, suffer difficulties due to employment or business failure, lose desire for life, have conflicts with their spouses, and, at the same time, abuse and even kill their own children. When the characteristics of family environment are considered, the childhood experiences with abuse and abnormal growing experiences of abusive parents can be causes of post-abuse
murder cases of children. If such problems are passed down to their children, they may be perpetrators of child abuse themselves in the future and thus perpetuate the vicious cycle. Finally, such social and culture characteristics as the social atmosphere of tolerating corporal punishment and the culture of regarding children as the possession of parents can cause filicide.

It is critical to understand that child abuse issues and crimes occur by the complex operation of those factors above and that there is the integrated work of individual, family and social. cultural aspects behind child abuse.

2.2. Characteristics of post-abuse murder of children

Table 1 shows the causes and characteristics of major post-abuse murder cases of children in 2016. The general characteristics are as follows: first, children that were abused and killed were seven years old or younger in many of the cases, which indicates that the age of the children is younger than that of children with common abuse experiences[7]. The children were still young and had to live in the same space as their parents, who were the perpetrators. The parents regarded their children as their possession rather than independent beings, which explains why it is difficult to detect child abuse cases[6]. The issue grows even bigger as it is difficult to make a social approach to it. Young children lack the strength to avoid and respond to abuse and are more vulnerable to violence and negligence. When they are subjected to ongoing serious physical abuse, it is more likely that they will endure it no more and end up getting killed. Those discoveries point to the enormous importance of institutional improvement to detect child abuse early and prevent it[8]. In addition, most of victim children that were abused and killed did not have problems in certain areas, which indicates that they provided no elements to cause abuse and murder cases.

Secondly, the relations between victim children and their abusers become clear when it is considered that the most child abuse cases take place at home. Biological parents and stepparents inflict serious and problematic abusive acts on their young children, who can get killed by their severe abuse. When children live with adults that have no biological relations with them, the possibility of them being abused and killed rises[9][10]. Unlike the report of overseas research, however, most perpetrators of child abuse and murder cases were biological parents in 2016, which sent shock waves to the society. In many filicide cases, mothers were the perpetrators and ended up killing themselves, as well. Considering that the main caregivers of children are mothers, it seems that they suffer the burden and responsibility of child rearing and may thus commit filicide[11].

When the characteristics of post-abuse murder cases of children in 2016 are put together, it is apparent that what led the children to death was not momentary acts of abuse but long, consistent, and repetitive abuse at a serious level. One of the common features among the perpetrators was that they were in a situation of social isolation that made it difficult for them to lead a social life. People in social isolation may make an extreme decision when their personal and collective circumstances grow even worse[6].

As for the causes of post-abuse murder cases of children, it was first found that the perpetrators were young parents in their twenties or thirties. They were unwed single mothers or were not prepared to be a parent, thus being in huge shortage of parenting skills. That is, they abused their children for not obeying them, crying loudly, and telling a lie because they lacked the parenting skills. Mothers killed their children because of their status as unwed single mothers, postpartum depression, hardships of life, or negative relationships with their husbands[11]. Secondly, there were cases in which the parents suffered severe depression, continued their abusive acts in a psychologically unstable state, and ended up killing their children. They had such psychological issues caused by the stress of conflicts with spouses and economic difficulties and tried to relieve their stress by abusing...
their vulnerable children. Poverty and unemployment were common causes among those who killed their children as well as those who abused their children[12]. Finally, there were a few cases in which the parents were addicted to games, found no time and mental leisure for parenting, and ended up neglecting and abusing their children. Even though parents play games that are not much violent, they will develop an aggressive and impulsive tendency after long hours of game play and be more likely to abuse their children with low defensive power[13]. In addition, the number of child abuse cases is on the rise every year, which indicates a serious phenomenon of family collapse. Complex motives work behind biological parents abusing and killing their children including the personal characteristics of perpetrators such as the inheritance of violence and behavioral disorders, the discipline issues, the trend of nuclear families, and practical issues of poverty and burden of parenting[14].

Table 1. Causes and characteristics of post-abuse murder cases of children in 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Causes of death</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A four-year-old girl, being abused in the bathroom and buried in secret in Cheongju in March</td>
<td>- The girl died in the middle of torture in the bathtub filled with water for not being pot-trained. - It was disclosed five years after her death.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A seven-year-old boy named Shin Won-yeong, being buried in secret in Pyeongtaek in March</td>
<td>- The investigator began after the stepmother stated that she discarded the boy in the street, classifying the case as a missing child case. - The body of the boy was damaged and buried in secret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A elementary school boy, being dismembered and killed in Bucheon in January</td>
<td>- The boy was abused, neglected, and killed by his biological father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A ten-month-old baby, being killed in Hongseong in January</td>
<td>- The baby was hit by a toy thrown by its biological mother and killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The skeleton of a middle school girl, being found in Bucheon in February</td>
<td>- The girl was abused and killed by her biological parents. - Her body was neglected for approximately 11 months after her death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A two-month-old girl, being abused, neglected, and killed in Bucheon in March</td>
<td>- The biological father dropped his daughter on the floor intentionally and neglected her for ten hours till her death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A three-year-old nephew, being killed by an aunt in March</td>
<td>- The aunt (who turned out to be his biological mother) kicked him in the stomach, saw him vomit, and kicked him three more times till he died.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Conclusion: Preventive Measures for Child Abuse

The recent post-abuse murder cases of children raise a suspicion about the safety net of society. The secret burial cases in Cheongju and Anyang had been kept in secret for over five years, which is just shocking. People are voicing their opinions about measures to eliminate child abuse only after such cases took place in sequence. A total inspection began for infants and young children, pre-school children, and students of long absence around the nation. The authorities are busy coming up with late measures to prevent child abuse including parent education and strict investigations.

The current systems are, however, insufficient to protect children in the process of preventing, detecting, and handling child abuse cases. There was no guard net for the victim children in those major cases of 2016. The concerned agencies and schools did not monitor the cases of long absence right, and the resulting long-term negligence led to horrible murder of children.

The present study is significant in that it identified the predicting factors of post-abuse murder cases of children and provided basic data for preventive measures. Based on the analysis results, the study made the following proposals to prevent child abuse and murder: first, there is a need to prepare...
effective programs to separate children from their parents that are suspected to abuse their children, provide education to the perpetrators, and offer treatments to the victim children. It is also needed to bring up and deploy professionals to implement such programs[15]. Secondly, the analysis results of post-abuse murder cases of children indicate that most of abusive families were in the low income bracket. It is required to make regular visits to low-income families and provide them with supports after providing education on parenting skills to the parents. The low economic level has influences on the stress and parenting behavior of mothers and especially mothers, which promotes the importance of education and training about parenting skills for low-income parents and families as well as supports and aids for them[16]. Finally, it is the most important to establish a social atmosphere of respecting and loving children so that various measures can achieve effectiveness. Child abuse is clearly a crime. There should be a firm social determination or warning that anyone that abuses children will be subjected to severe punishment. It is also required to take legislative, administrative, social and educational actions to protect children.

4. References

4.1. Journal articles


4.2. Thesis degree


4.3. Books


4.4. Additional references


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