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**“A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents’ culture.”**

## Korean Families in International Agencies

### Interview with Elaine Lee

**Q** How can Korean families balance the cultural input for their children? It's well recognised that this is a very difficult balance, but do you have any thoughts on how to balance the Korean culture, the international one of team and the host culture of the country the family live in?

Elaine – Yes, our family was living in the US and went out to the field from the US, so our experience is a bit different to that of many Koreans coming directly from Korea. However, we do have some similar experiences as we joined an international organisation, so we are dealing with the Korean culture and relating to other Korean workers, but we are also relating to the international team and then also the host culture. This meant that our three children grew up with that cultural dynamic and are still experiencing this as they move on to university in the States, because being TCKs they like to relate to all three and feel comfortable with elements of all three, but at different times feel the pull towards one or the other.

As the Korean culture is such a collectivist group-oriented society with relationships being so important they love to do things in groups, gather together, eat together and so on the host countries you will see Korean families gathering together even if they are on different teams. It's because of this cultural dynamic that they will have get-togethers or Korean support groups. The language might be another factor, especially for those coming out directly from Korea where they won't be so fluent in English. They will feel more comfortable with other Korean families and then their children will naturally gather together, even if they're going to international schools. So when others look at that they may wonder if Koreans only want to keep to themselves and don't want to be exposed to other influences. Not necessarily! They do want to relate to the international culture and to the host culture, but there are several reasons why this may not happen so readily as in the case of other workers.

1. The first is the language factor. So many don't have a high enough level of fluency in English that they feel comfortable relating on a social level to other English speakers. They will relate, but they will feel so much more comfortable with other Korean workers, talking Korean, discussing issues and eating together, sharing their lives in a way that is familiar to them. This is not to exclude other groups, but this is the natural comfort zone. The children may well naturally fall into that as their families tend to get together a lot, forming these social networks for their children on the field. It can also happen in international schools with a significant group of Koreans. Of course they should be encouraged to relate to everyone to enlarge and broaden their perspectives.
2. Korean society is so distinctive in the sense that there is just the one dominant language and culture there in Korea itself – it is very much a monoculture with very little multicultural influence. There should be an understanding that when they gather together in their groups to socialise and eat together, the level of intensity in relating between Koreans is much higher than maybe for societies where it is more individualistic.

Our own children have experienced the pull of the different cultural influences on them. They try to get the balance right depending on the circumstances and the context.

**Q** What kind of things can English-speakers in the agencies and English-medium schools do to better help and understand the Korean children?



Elaine – First of all the staff of the schools really need to try to understand the culture and the background the children are coming from. They also need to learn about the systems of education in Korea – both the current and the historical situations. This will go a long way to help understand how the parents and the children feel and why they act in certain ways towards school and education. It's best to first of all get that deeper understanding before making a value judgement about the phenomena that they see. If the staff will do all they can to get this deeper understanding it would really help.

Q Would you suggest any books or websites, or should they just ask Koreans on staff what is happening?

Elaine – I think that several schools now have at least one Korean member of staff who can perhaps explain things and be the link between the parents and the staff. This is good; because they have a cultural understanding of some issues that Korean TCKs and Korean families go through that other staff can't understand as they don't know the political and social situation in Korea. There are now also some networks in Korea that are really trying to research and write things up on this, such as TCK Nest and others.

I also recently heard that Korean TCKs are now involved in Korean TCK networks. This is happening more and more as Korean TCKs are becoming adults through into their late twenties and bringing with them a greater awareness of what needs to be done. Recently there was Korean TCK Forum for the first time I know of. All of these networks can be a stepping stone to contact and get more information on the issues that Korean TCKs feel.

Q Your elder two children are in university in the USA. Many Korean TCKs will end up studying there – we know that. How have they found that in terms of the cultural balance of relating to other Koreans and the rest of the student body?

Elaine – I mentioned already that our situation is a bit different as our children were born in the USA and are US citizens, so they consider the USA as their home. Their grandparents are there; their home churches are there so it is a bit different from the Korean TCKs going to the USA just for education. However, when they went to university they felt really comfortable with international students. They studied in a liberal arts college and enjoyed relating to the international students there. There were also other Korean TCKs and then the Americans who had mostly lived and been educated in the USA. This meant that our children, especially in the first year, faced a dilemma as they needed to ask themselves "who should I most closely relate to and where do I best fit in?" Firstly, as I've said, they related to the international students, but then they also felt at home with the Koreans. The Korean students were happy to take them on from the beginning because they were Koreans by ethnic background and felt that our children were part of their group. They had to ask themselves and work out though how they wanted to relate to the different groups of students and to find the balance.



I think that it will be different for each Korean TCK student, some may want to be mainly with international students and others with the Koreans, but our children wanted a wider network and not just stick with any one group, because they feel that they are more international. They're real TCKs in that respect! They're still finding their way in this area, but they are working it through positively. They like to talk about it though and want to discuss it with us – which we are very happy about.

Elaine Lee is the deputy international director of an international agency. She worked in East Asia before taking up their current job based in the UK. Her husband is Young Choon and they have 3 children.

## Child Protection

This is a theme that is almost never out of the news in many countries. Even this week bookmakers are taking bets on the resignation of the Pope after the latest wave of allegations and problems within the Catholic Church, this time in his native Germany. The global reputation of the Catholics has been hugely tarnished by these scandals and the naïve attempts in past years to solve the issues within the church. Other groups have not been immune to this malaise either, only last year one large organisation released a public apology for abuse that occurred within its ranks and particularly in some of its boarding schools. Again, the allegations were not dealt with properly and naïve efforts to deal with the problems internally only aggravated the long-term issues.



In some countries the numbers of cases of child abuse have more than doubled in the last decade: why is this? Two reasons are evident

1. There is much more reporting of abuse than in previous decades. Even up to the 1980s these things were often kept under cover, children feared speaking out and the internal investigations within children's organisations often didn't go further than hearing the story before dismissing it. The awareness now is so much greater and training in this area has been made standard for workers with children and vulnerable adults along with criminal checking before appointment. This is in sharp contrast to my own teacher training which included nothing about child protection issues.
2. There has been a real growth in the number of incidents. With so many dysfunctional families, the promotion of sexual perversion through the media and internet sites and the breakdown of a clear understanding of moral right and wrong it is no surprise that this should happen. The availability of pornography, including child pornography, on tap on the internet also makes the situation worse. Even though the paedophile or sex offender is the ultimate pariah figure, they can still find solace from others with similar inclinations on the internet. This was graphically illustrated in a recent case of abuse in crèche/nursery facilities where 3 people became embroiled in an internet "folie a trois" where they encouraged each other in making this behaviour seem acceptable and normal.

### What do we mean by child abuse?

The media frenzy tends to focus heavily on sexual abuse, but physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect are also crimes. It is widely recognised that emotional abuse alone is difficult to prove conclusively. Recognised areas of emotional abuse are exploitation or corruption of children, threats, witnessing others being abused (e.g. domestic violence), isolation and prevention of participation in normal activities, communicating to a child that he or she is worthless or unloved and age inappropriate expectations such as young children being required to care for even younger siblings. Verbal abuse should also be mentioned as a destructive form of behaviour with devastating long-term consequences.

Sexual abuse does not just refer to forced sex acts, but also to voyeurism, exposure to pornography, and to crude and explicit comments. Physical abuse involves any use of force

beyond reasonable parental discipline. In most countries around the world a disciplinary slap is not a criminal act (although in a few it is), but anything more that leaves longer-term bruising or inflicts any other kind of injury most definitely is. Neglect is a failure of parental duty to provide for the basic physical needs of shelter, food, medical treatment, daily exercise and education. Neglect also applies to a child's emotional needs, although problems in this area are harder to prove. All of these are criminal acts and any occurrence within the lives of children in our care needs to be viewed with that in mind.



One often overlooked, and therefore tacitly accepted, form of abuse is child on child bullying. A few very high profile cases have led to suicides and highlight just how serious this can be. There may not be a great deal of physical injury inflicted, but the level of intimidation can make life miserable for the children concerned. Text and internet bullying are recent additions to the weapons in the bully's arsenal. We need to be clear that in our family situations, schools and boarding homes that we have no acceptance whatsoever of bullying, and that no cultural or sub-cultural values are allowed to cut across that zero-tolerance policy. While verbal abuse may not be defined as a crime, we need to see this in the light of the strong words of warning about our responsibility of care for children, that it would be better that we ourselves die than cause any of them to stumble.

### [What signs can we see in children that might indicate abuse?](#)

There is no one type of behaviour alone that definitely determines that a child has been abused, but the following can be observed.

#### *In any age of child*

- Fear or dislike of certain people or places
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene
- Hostility or aggression
- Withdrawal from family, friends, or usual activities
- Passive or overly pleasing behaviour
- Low self-esteem
- Return to younger, more babyish behaviour
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discipline problems
- Running away

#### *In older children*

- Eating disorders
- Delinquent acts
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Suicide attempts
- Drug or alcohol problems
- Sexual activity or pregnancy at an early age



These are general behaviour changes that may occur in children who have been abused, but one of these signs alone is not sufficient proof of abuse. Even if abuse hasn't taken place, they are indicators of a major problem or problems which need to be identified and support given to help overcome them.

## The dangers our children may face

As parents and workers with children, we need to be alert to the dangers of abuse without becoming hysterical. Excessive media reporting in some countries has generated real fear in many parents of the dangers posed by predatory sex offenders. We need to be aware of where the real problems are, not focusing narrowly on one area (usually the predatory stranger) and missing out on other, greater risks. Some of these areas to highlight are

1. In some parts of the world child abuse is very widespread. The local culture recognises that it is wrong, but in reality does little to deal with it, with the result that many sex offenders and bullies escape any form of real punishment. The natural fear is more for girls, but in some regions with strict segregation of the sexes, boys are at just as great a risk. If we are living in places like this, our children must be closely supervised.
2. Bullying is so widespread, that we often don't think of it in terms of child abuse – but we need to. Figures indicate that between  $\frac{1}{3}$  and  $\frac{2}{3}$ , depending on the definitions used, of all children experience bullying with the misery that this entails.
3. Child on child sexual abuse. As children grow they are naturally curious about their sexuality, but in a minority of cases there can be real problems with sexual identity. This can lead to a range of problems from accessing pornography, to voyeurism right through to sex acts.
4. The internet has opened up a whole new area of opportunity for predators to gain access to children. We need to be aware of social network site use: this is a favourite approach as these people pose as potential “friends”.

## Protection policies and practices

In any child protection policy we need to be clear that the most important purpose is to protect children, not the organisation. Protection of children's workers is an important second priority, but if we set out to protect our children this will follow anyway. This is why we have a range of measures to ensure that none of our workers have a track record or any inclination to abuse children. We realise that the criminal check is only a very small and fallible part of that, but we also recognise that if it helps protect just one child by keeping just one wrong person out of our agencies then it is well worth the time and effort. Hand in hand with this criminal record check we should follow up references thoroughly and make other enquiries that are as searching as realistically possible. In some agencies there is a long orientation programme that allows us to see our long-term staff close at hand. In such situations any problems or doubts in this area could well be evident. In agencies though where this doesn't happen, or for shorter-term volunteers we still need to be clear in our questions and training that child protection is a crucial element. This close scrutiny of applicants also needs to apply to any national workers we appoint in our host countries.

We have also introduced training, both in our orientation before beginning children's ministry and as an ongoing requirement. This should include an awareness of good practice and investigation procedures in the case of suspected child abuse or an allegation.



Good practice includes things like

- Avoid being behind closed doors with individual children
- Physical contact should be in public and age-appropriate – a supportive hug for a small child in a group context is normally OK, but the same would not be true for a teenager. It would also not be appropriate for any age group in private.

- Avoid travelling alone with a child. (However, recent cases of adults working together to abuse children have highlighted even travel in groups as a danger area.)
- Children must always be fully escorted in societies where child abuse is widespread
- In residential schools there should be clear guidelines that ensure that staff clearly respect the privacy of children and don't go into bedrooms unless there are very clear responsibilities there.
- We need to be aware of the risks and warning signs of bullying or child on child sexual abuse as teenagers find their sexual identity.

### Investigation Procedures

Every worker with children or vulnerable adults needs to know who to refer any suspicions or allegations to. Every allegation in turn must be treated seriously and outsiders brought in to investigate if appropriate.

If a worker hears about an alleged incident of abuse from a child it is important to follow the guidelines laid down in the school or other children's work child protection policy. The child needs to tell their story, but should not at any point be asked to elaborate on it, and no leading questions should be posed. There have been serious repercussions from allegations that have been subsequently proven groundless. Very large numbers of teachers and foster parents have been at the centre of allegations like this stemming from children seeking attention, desiring revenge or from other personal problems. As a result of this in some countries at least there is now a significant shortage of foster parents as capable people give up after the trauma of accusation and investigation and fewer new parents are willing to take those risks to themselves and their own children. It is good that the child knows that they will be taken seriously, but not given the impression that every word they say is automatically believed to be true.

Avoid expressions of shock, revulsion or disbelief. The details should be recorded and then passed on to those designated to investigate the incident further. The child needs to know that others will hear the story on a 'need to know' basis, given that what they say involves a possible crime.

If there is substance to the allegation, then outside bodies will need to be involved. Depending on the country this could be inter-agency staff and/or the local police and social services. Given that all cases will be different it is impossible to set out exact procedures for every eventuality, but there must never be any hint of internal investigations that look like cover up. It is vital that competent and trained staff are called in to deal with any serious allegations, not just willing volunteers.

Policies need to have clear guidelines about how to deal with different risks and what to do if allegations are proven to be true in the following situations

Child on child bullying or sexual abuse

Foreign agency worker with children

National worker with children

National children on other children under our care

Unknown national with children under our care

In some situations there will be legal cases to answer in both the host and passport countries. In others the best practice will be to mostly involve the authorities in the passport country. Each entity with children's work must have its own clear policy in accordance with the law and child protection authorities in the country they work in.

**Educare** is a free resource for third culture families that can be forwarded and shared among all concerned individuals.