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# The effects of abuse experience and impulsiveness on the sexual violence of middle school students: Moderated mediation effect of law consciousness

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**Abstract**--The purpose of this study was to provide basic data for sexual violence prevention policies using law consciousness by elucidating the moderated mediation effect of law consciousness in the influence of adolescents' abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence through impulsiveness. The research questions to achieve this purpose are established as follows: First, what is the correlation between abuse experience, impulsiveness, law consciousness, and sexual violence? Second, what is the moderated mediation effect of law consciousness in the relationship between abuse experiences from parents, impulsiveness, and sexual violence? For the analysis, SPSS window version 25.0 and PROCESS macro version 3.5 were used, and frequency analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, moderated mediation effect analysis and bootstrap method were

performed. As a result of the study, first, Pearson correlation analysis showed that there were significant correlations between abuse experiences from parents, law consciousness, impulsiveness, and sexual violence. Abuse experience was positively correlated with impulsiveness and sexual violence, but it was negatively correlated with law consciousness. Second, the moderated mediating effect of law consciousness on the mediating effect of impulsiveness in the link between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence was verified. In other words, the effect of abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence via impulsiveness depends on the level of law consciousness, and as the level of law consciousness increases, the effect of abuse experience on sexual violence decreases. This result will be used as a model for reducing violence using the law consciousness of the adolescents.

**Keywords**---abuse experience, sexual violence, impulsiveness, law consciousness, PROCESS macro, conditional effect, moderated meditation effect.

## **Introduction**

The family is the first social group that humans encounter when they are born, and it is the most basic and central medium in the socialization process. In addition, the family has an important meaning for human social development. Further, the relationship between parents and children in the home is very important for the growth of adolescents (Park & Lee, 2011). Adolescents who have experienced abuse experiences from parents experience emotional instability as well as impulsive and aggressive behavior, and they also show behavioral disorders such as violence in peer relationships, runaway, and kleptomania (Kim, 2008). In other words, adolescents who have experienced abuse from their parents fail to have the primary socialization process and thus form unstable attachment relationships (Bowlby et al., 1986). They have been reported to exhibit antisocial behavior, low empathy, low self-regulation, and low self-esteem, and to act in negative ways, such as rebelling against their parents and committing crimes as a form of revenge (Polanin et al., 2012; Lee & Yang, 2017).

In particular, abuse from parents has been identified several times as a factor that affects the impulsivity and sexual violence of adolescents (Kim, & Choi, 2012). Sexual violence is a broad concept that contains legal concepts such as sexual crimes including rape and coercion, as well as sociological concepts such as simple sexual deviation (Chun, 2010).

Recently, the age group of adolescents who have committed sexual violence has been lowering, and the rate of sexual violence has been increasing (Kim et al., 2010). Therefore, there is very high interest in this topic not only from academia, but also from society in general.

Regarding the previous studies examining sexual violence in adolescents, there have been many studies investigating the relationships between smartphone

addiction and exposure to harmful media on the Internet (Kim & Kwak, 2017), as well as the relationship between the experience of pornography on the Internet and self-control (Lee & Shin, 2017). There have also been studies on the causal relationship between children's abuse experiences and sexual violence (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Lee & Lee, 2016).

Impulsiveness is a predictable variable that is closely related to the relationship between adolescents' abuse experience from parents and sexual violence. Impulsiveness refers to the characteristics of emotional and behavioral problems, including risky behaviors wherein one shows difficulty in stopping or controlling the behaviors despite the associated risks or disadvantages (Yoon & Nam, 2007).

The experience of abuse from parents increases the negative impulses of adolescents, and impulsiveness affects adolescent misconduct and violence in the growing process (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Based on similar studies showing that abuse increases impulsiveness, which then results in violence from adolescents, impulsiveness is thought to mediate in the relationship between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence; as a result, impulsiveness was set as a mediating variable in the present study.

On the other hand, law consciousness is the normative consciousness or social consciousness that an individual has about the law. Adolescents with a low level of law consciousness tend to participate more in delinquent behavior by not recognizing or ignoring the boundaries of the law, such as social norms or values that are in place for their own benefit (Kim, 2008).

Based on previous studies examining the relationship between law consciousness and juvenile crime, there is a significant correlation between the level of law consciousness and criminal behavior of adolescents (Shin, 2018). Further, the law consciousness of adolescents plays a moderating role in the relationship between abuse experience from parents and sexual violence (Shin, 2018). In other words, law consciousness and juvenile delinquency and crime are not only closely related, but sexual violence from juveniles can vary depending on their level of law consciousness.

In the present study, law consciousness was also set as a moderating and a moderated mediation variable. Further, in the path of abuse experiences from parents to sexual violence via impulsiveness, law consciousness is predicted to be a new alternative to decreasing sexual violence in adolescents.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide basic data for sexual violence prevention policies using law consciousness by elucidating the moderated mediation effect of law consciousness in the influence of adolescents' abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence through impulsiveness.

The research questions to achieve this purpose are established as follows: First, what is the correlation between abuse experience, impulsiveness, law consciousness, and sexual violence? Second, what is the moderated mediation effect of law consciousness in the relationship between abuse experiences from parents, impulsiveness, and sexual violence?

## **Theoretical Background**

### *The relationship between human rights victimization and happiness*

Abuse is physical, emotional, or behavioral harassment, or the harsh treatment of another person or group (Helfer et al., 1999). Child abuse is a concept that encompasses all physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as well as neglect from adults, including guardians, which can harm the health or well-being of a child or impair normal development (Korea Child Welfare Law).

The scope of abuse varies greatly, ranging from physical abuse to emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and multiple abuse (Ministry of Health and Welfare & Central Child Protection Agency, Child Abuse & Neglect Korea, 2018-2019). Adolescents with abuse experiences from parents are unable to form positive relationships with their peers and teachers in school because they are violent, aggressive, and unable to control their anger against their peers (Song, 2018).

In addition, abuse experiences from parents in the period of childhood and adolescence has been found to affect adolescents' aggressiveness, delinquency, and risk behavior (Olweus, 1994). In particular, one report stated that having abuse experience from parents causes sexual violence by adolescents, and there is increasing academic interest in this topic (Burton, 2008). Sexual violence is any pernicious act involving sexual intercourse that is psychologically, physically, and legally done against the will of the other party, and it includes physical, verbal, and emotional violence (Gang & Kwon, 2021).

Recently, the reality and types of youth sexual violence in South Korea have become more diverse, sophisticated, and malicious. According to the National Police Agency survey, the number of sexual violence perpetrators among the 13,584 youth school violence arrestees recently reached a high of 3,060 (Korean National Police Agency, 2020).

Studies examining the causal relationship between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence have accumulated (Burton, 2008), but few studies have investigated how abuse experiences from parents affects sexual violence.

Therefore, in the present study, abuse experiences from parents was set as the independent variable while sexual violence was set as the dependent variable, and this study aims to investigate the mechanism between these two variables.

### *Mediating effect of impulsiveness*

Impulsiveness refers to showing clinical symptoms of personality traits related to violence, including non-adaptive behavior or delinquency (Gang & Kwon, 2021). In particular, impulsiveness in adolescents is characterized by low concentration or attention on their own actions; lack of ability, calmness, and self-control; and judgments or actions that are dependent on mood when making immediate choices as opposed to activities based on plans (Yoon & Nam, 2007).

Adolescents with high impulsiveness aggravate their violent behavior to exercise power as an expression of anger when they lack self-control against impulses

during adolescence, and when they cannot suppress momentary impulses (Jung, 1998). Further, high impulsiveness increases serious antisocial behavior (White et al., 1994).

Recently, scholars have shown increasing interest in impulsiveness, and there have recently been studies examining the mediating effect of impulsiveness. For example, there have been recent studies showing that impulsiveness mediates the link between parenting attitude and smartphone addiction (Lim & Kim, 2018) and that impulsiveness plays a mediating role in the relationship between childhood abuse victim experience and dating violence-perpetrating behavior (Hong & Jung, 2019).

There have also been studies that have verified the mediating effect on the relationship between adolescent abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence (Shin, 2018), but it is still insufficient. In order for the mediating effect to be verified, the independent variable must significantly affect the mediating effect, and the mediating variable must significantly affect the dependent variable. Studies have shown that abuse experiences from parents had a significant influence on impulsiveness (Jang et al., 2014) and that impulsiveness had a significant effect on sexual violence (Worling, 2001). Based on this, it is possible to predict the mediating effect of impulsiveness in the relationship between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence.

Therefore, this study sets impulsiveness as a mediating variable in the influence of abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence, and it attempts to determine whether abuse experiences from parents affects sexual violence through impulsiveness.

#### *Moderating effect of law consciousness*

Law consciousness means that members of society either understand and obey or violate the law with a certain knowledge of the law; the concept is to prevent crimes that deviate from social norms, and it is in line with crime prevention education (Kwak, 2016). In particular, adolescence is in the developmental process of socialization based on laws and norms, and it is an important period during which law consciousness and order consciousness are formed (Kwak, 2003).

Students with a high level of law consciousness show an improved attitude to law consciousness compared to other students in schools without law education (Kwak, 2007), while adolescents with low law consciousness have a positive attitude toward violence and are unfriendly to the law (Oh, 2010).

The U.S. Juvenile Flight Prevention Administration organized a research group centered on juvenile delinquency researchers to synthesize the existing research results over two years. It has been suggested that legal education can have a positive effect on risk factor that is a predictor of delinquency, a protective factor that is a deterrent to delinquency, and rehabilitation factors that refer to the possibility of avoiding future misconduct (Williamson et al., 1997).

Research on law consciousness is increasing because it is an effective tool for youths to improve their attitudes toward violence and their levels of law consciousness. It is also an effective tool because improving the level of law consciousness among adolescents prevents impulsive and accidental crimes and repetitive misconduct (Lee, 2009).

In particular, law consciousness plays a buffering role in reducing the increase in violence among adolescents with abuse experiences from parents (Sun, 2021), and law consciousness has been found to have a negative relationship with sexual violence (Woo, 2008).

Thus, although the moderating effect of law consciousness has been verified, studies on the moderating effect of law consciousness are still lacking. In the present study, in the relationship between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence, the mediating effect of impulsiveness was predicted to be moderated by law consciousness, and law consciousness was therefore set as a moderated mediating variable. It is also thought that law consciousness will serve as a buffer in the path of "abuse experiences from parents → impulsiveness → sexual violence".

## Methods

### *Research model*

Based on previous studies, a research model was established that is illustrated in Figure 1. A moderated mediating model of law consciousness in the influence of abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence through impulsiveness was established. This model was analyzed according to the procedure of model 58 of SPSS PROCESS macro proposed by Hayes (2017).

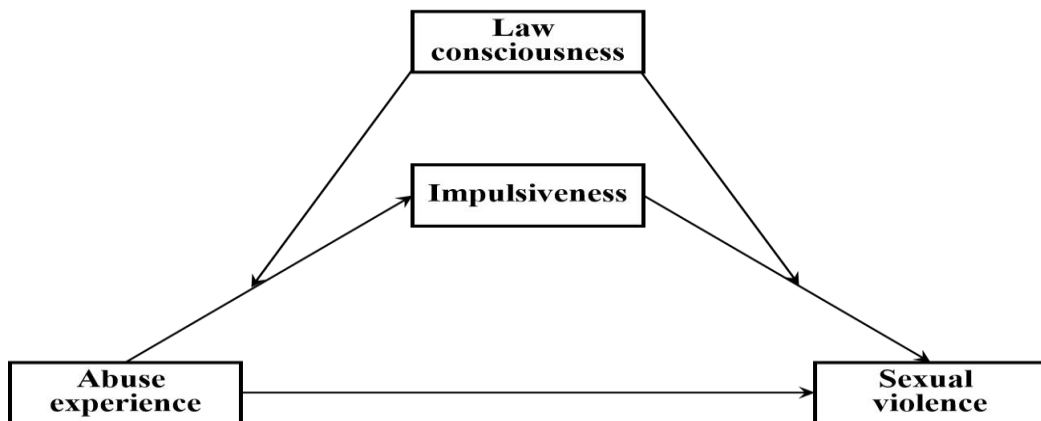


Figure 1  
Research model

## **Research subjects and data collection methods**

The subjects of the survey were selected using purposive sampling from three middle schools in Chungcheongnam-do in Korea, then all the middle school students from these selected middle schools were selected as a sample. We met with the school principal and homeroom teacher and explained the purpose of the survey. Then, the contents of the survey were reviewed, and it was confirmed that there was no personally identifiable information in the contents of the questionnaire, and that the questionnaire would be discarded immediately after analysis. Then, consent paper was sent to the students to participate in the survey and their parents, and a survey was conducted on the students who consented to the survey with parents. After the survey, a gift in return worth 4 dollars was provided. In addition, it was notified that during the survey, if the participant wanted to stop the survey, it could be stopped and the questionnaire could be discarded. The total number of subjects used in the analysis was 445.

The general characteristics of the survey subjects are as follows. Regarding gender, there were 67.4% male students and 32.6% female students, while the age ranged between 13-17 years old, with 15 years old being the most common at 52.6%. In terms of grades, 57.2% of respondents were in the second grade while 25.5% were in the first grade.

Regarding family composition, 79.2% of the respondents lived with both parents, followed by 7.6% who lived with single parents and 2.1% who lived with grandparents. In terms of the family economic situation, 83.4% of the students answered that their family was in the middle.

## **Research tools**

To measure abuse experiences from parents, five questions were selected by referring to scales such as Kim and Choi (2011) and Shin and Choi (2003). Measurements were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging 1 point for 'not at all' to 5 points for 'very much'. Higher scores mean higher abuse experiences from parents.

For the scale of sexual violence, the sexual violence scale used by Ryu (2010) was modified to suit middle school students. This scale consists of five questions regarding acts of sexual violence in the past year (① I have sent an obscene message by phone call or text message on a mobile phone. ② I have been teased with sexual content. ③ I have had intentional physical contact with someone of the opposite sex, such as bumping or touching my hand. ④ I have kissed another person without their permission. ⑤ I have hugged a person without their permission.) Measurements were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 point for 'not at all' to 5 points for 'very much'; the higher the total score, the higher the level of sexual violence.

To measure impulsiveness in this study, we selected four questions about risk seeking and four questions about impulsiveness from the scale that Grasmick et al. (1993) developed based on the concept of self-control proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschie (1990), and Ha (2004) validated the Korean version of the self-control power scale. Measurements were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 point for 'not at all' to 5 points for 'very much'. The higher the score, the

higher the impulsiveness. The reliability of this study's impulsiveness scale was Cronbach's  $\alpha=.836$ .

To measure law consciousness, we used the scale that Kwak (2007) used for law consciousness which is divided into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral areas, and which centers on delinquency prevention factors. In this study, five questions were selected and used among the questions that met the purpose of the study, and question 5, which lowered the reliability, was deleted. Measurements were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 point for 'not at all' to 5 points for 'very much', and the higher the score, the higher the law consciousness. In this study, the reliability of law consciousness had a Cronbach's  $\alpha=.619$ .

### **Data analysis**

This study was analyzed using the SPSS Window. 25 and PROCESS macro 3.5 were used, and reliability analysis, frequency analysis, correlation analysis, and adjusted mediating effect analysis were performed

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Subsection 1 Correlation and descriptive statistics between major variables**

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to analyze the correlation between the major variables, and the results are listed in Table 1. There were significant correlations between impulsiveness, law consciousness, abuse experiences from parents, and sexual violence. Abuse experience was positively correlated with impulsiveness and sexual violence, but it was negatively correlated with law consciousness. The highest correlation was found between abuse experience and sexual violence ( $r=.331$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This is consistent with research showing that law consciousness is associated with reduced abuse experiences from parents, impulsiveness, and sexual violence (Shin, 2018; Woo, 2008). Based on the descriptive statistical analysis, the mean of law consciousness ( $M=3.7550$ ) exceeded the median score of 3, but impulsiveness ( $M=2.7348$ ), abuse experience ( $M=1.6014$ ), and sexual violence ( $M=1.3151$ ) did not exceed the median score.

Table 1  
Correlation between Major Variables and Descriptive Statistics

	Abuse experience	Law consciousness	Impulsivene ss	Sexual Violence
Abuse experience	1			
Law consciousness	-.169**	1		
Impulsiveness	.138**	-.263**	1	
Sexual Violence	.331**	-.152**	.220**	1
<i>M</i>	1.6014	3.755	2.7348	1.3151
<i>SD</i>	.74168	.79011	.74877	.62347

\*\* $p<.01$

### ***Moderated mediation effect of law consciousness in abuse experiences from parents, impulsiveness, and sexual violence***

To verify the moderated mediation effect of law consciousness in the link between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence through impulsiveness in middle school students, we conducted an analysis according to the procedure PROCESS macro model 58 proposed by Hayes (2017). The confidence interval was set to 95% and the bootstrap was set to 5,000 times, and the analysis results are presented in Table 2 as well as Figures 2 and 3.

First, in mediating model, abuse experiences from parents did not have a significant effect on impulsiveness ( $= .0640, p > .05$ ), but impulsiveness had a positively significant effect on sexual violence ( $= .1307, p < .001$ ).

Second, the interaction term of abuse experiences from parents and law consciousness had a significant negative effect on impulsiveness ( $= -.1476, p < .001$ ). The result indicates that impulsiveness increases when abuse experience increases, and this increasing tendency is alleviated by increasing law consciousness; therefore, law consciousness has a buffering effect. Further, the conditional effect of the abuse experience on impulsiveness was significant at  $M-SD$  of law consciousness. The result indicates that when law consciousness is higher than  $M$ , the abuse experience did not affect impulsiveness.

Since the moderating effect of law consciousness was statistically significant, we visualized the moderating effect in Figure 2. The law consciousness was divided into high, middle, and low levels, and the slope was examined to confirm the pattern of significant interaction. In those with low law consciousness, impulsiveness increased as the abuse experience increased, whereas in those with high law consciousness, impulsiveness decreased as abuse experiences from parents increased. Therefore, the effect of abuse experience on impulsiveness differed according to the level of law consciousness among middle school students.

Third, the interaction term between impulsiveness and law consciousness negatively affected sexual violence ( $= -.1680, p < .001$ ). Sexual violence increased when impulsiveness increased, but when law consciousness increased, this increasing tendency was alleviated, showing that law consciousness had a buffering effect.

In addition, when analyzing the conditional effect of impulsiveness according to law consciousness, the conditional effect of impulsiveness on sexual violence in  $M-SD$  and  $M$  of law consciousness was significant. The conditional effect of impulsiveness on sexual violence was not significant in  $M+SD$ . The result indicates that when law consciousness is higher than  $M+SD$ , the impulsiveness did not affect sexual violence.

Table 2  
Analysis of the moderated mediating effect of law consciousness

Variables	Effect	se	t-value	p	LLCI*	ULCI**
Mediating variable model (Dependent variable: Impulsiveness)						
Constant	-.0146	.0343	-.4268	.6697	-.0820	.0527
Abuse Experiences	.0640	.0479	1.3359	.1823	-.0301	.1580
Law consciousness	-.2301	.434	-5.2959	.0000	-.3155	-.1447
Abuse experiences x law consciousness	-.1476	.0523	-2.8208	.0050	-.2505	-.0448
Conditional effects of Abuse Experiences from Parents at values of law consciousness						
Law consciousness	Effect	se	t-value	p	LLCI*	ULCI**
	<b>-.7918</b>	<b>.1808</b>	<b>.0550</b>	<b>3.2877</b>	<b>.0011</b>	<b>.0727</b>
	.0000	.0640	.0479	1.3359	.1823	-.0301
	.7918	-.0529	.0707	-.7497	.4541	-.1918
Dependent variable model (Dependent variable: Sexual violence)						
Variables	Effect	se	t-value	p	LLCI*	ULCI**
Constant	1.2899	.0278	46.4262	.0000	1.2353	1.3445
Impulsiveness	.1307	.0377	3.4633	.0006	.0565	.2049
Law consciousness	-.0356	.0359	-.9936	.3209	-.1061	.0349
Impulsiveness x law consciousness	-.1680	.0416	-4.0345	.0001	-.2499	-.0862
Conditional effects of Impulsiveness at values of law consciousness						
Law consciousness	Effect	se	t-value	p	LLCI*	ULCI**
	<b>-.7918</b>	<b>.2637</b>	<b>.0494</b>	<b>5.3438</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.1667</b>
	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.1307</b>	<b>.0377</b>	<b>3.4633</b>	<b>.0006</b>	<b>.0565</b>
	.7918	-.0023	.0509	-.0461	.9632	-.1023
Conditional direct effects of abuse experiences → sexual violence						
Law consciousness	Effect	se	t-value	p	LLCI*	ULCI**
	<b>-.7918</b>	<b>.3303</b>	<b>.0454</b>	<b>7.2715</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.2410</b>
	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.1998</b>	<b>.0378</b>	<b>5.2811</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.1254</b>
	.7918	.0693	.0559	1.2396	.2158	-.0406
Conditional indirect effects of abuse experiences → impulsiveness → sexual violence						
Law consciousness	Effect	Bootse	BootLLCI*	BootULCI**		
	<b>-.7918</b>	<b>.0477</b>	<b>.0292</b>	<b>.0013</b>	<b>.1112</b>	
	.0000	.0084	.0085	-.0032	.0296	
	.7918	.0001	.0046	-.0088	.0111	

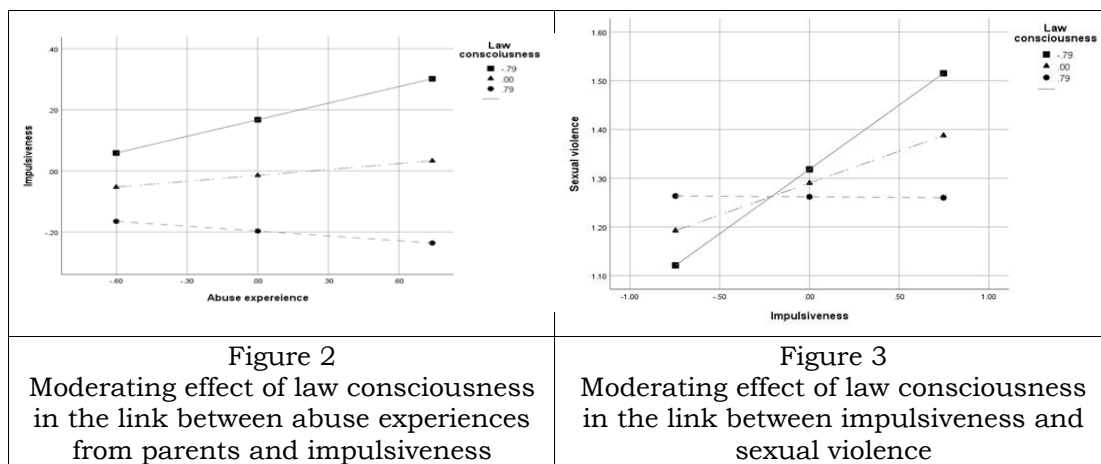
\* LLCI=Lower limit of bootstrap value within the 95% confidence interval of boot

\*\*ULCI=Upper limit of bootstrap value within the 95% confidence interval of boot

The moderating effect of law consciousness was statistically significant, and a visualization of the moderating effect of law consciousness in the link between impulsiveness and sexual violence is shown in Figure 3.

Among those with high law consciousness, there was no significant change in sexual violence even though impulsiveness increased. However, among those with low law consciousness, sexual violence increased sharply as impulsiveness increased.

Finally, the conditional indirect effect of abuse experiences from parents → impulsiveness → sexual violence according to law consciousness was significant only when law consciousness was low ( $M-1SD$ ), but the mean ( $M$ ) and high ( $M+SD$ ) of law consciousness were not significant. Therefore, the moderated mediation effect of law consciousness was verified. This result indicates that law consciousness had a buffering effect on the path of abuse experiences from parents → impulsiveness → sexual violence. These results are consistent with studies showing that law consciousness contributed to the moderated mediation effect in the link between abuse experiences from parents, impulsiveness, and sexual violence (Shin, 2018; Lee, 2020).



## Conclusions

This study was conducted to elucidate the moderated mediating effect of law on the path of abuse experiences from parents → impulsiveness → sexual violence in middle school students, and the discussion and conclusions are as follows.

First, Pearson correlation analysis showed that there were significant correlations between abuse experiences from parents, law consciousness, impulsiveness, and sexual violence. Abuse experience was positively correlated with impulsiveness and sexual violence, but it was negatively correlated with law consciousness.

Second, the moderated mediating effect of law consciousness on the mediating effect of impulsiveness in the link between abuse experiences from parents and sexual violence was verified. In other words, the effect of abuse experiences from

parents on sexual violence via impulsiveness depends on the level of law consciousness, and as the level of law consciousness increases, the effect of abuse experience on sexual violence decreases. Namely, when law consciousness is high, abuse experience has no effect on sexual violence. It was proved that increasing the legal awareness of middle school students can reduce sexual violence from abuse experiences from parents and impulsivity.

This study verified the theoretical validity of existing previous studies by analyzing the moderated mediating effect of law consciousness in the effects of abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence through impulsiveness among middle school students. This study has significance in that the variables in the present study expanded the existing discussions on the results of previous studies, and in that it derived new implications through law consciousness.

The limitations of this study and suggestions for further research are as follows. This study identified the importance of juvenile law consciousness. Therefore, to protect the safety of youth, it is necessary to educate parents and children for character education and to cultivate law consciousness. It is also necessary to develop psychological stability programs such as the Social Emotional Program (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) for students who fail to have the primary socialization process due to parental abuse. There is a need for such programs to promote a sense of responsibility for their actions as well as sociality.

Developing and validating the law consciousness scale are necessary. In this study, the reliability of the law consciousness scale was low, so one item was deleted to secure a reliability of 0.6 or higher. As law consciousness is important in this study, it is necessary to develop a law consciousness scale that can be measured for various age groups. Studies dealing with the moderated mediation of law consciousness in the effects of abuse experiences from parents on sexual violence through impulsiveness are still lacking. Therefore, research is needed to explore the variables involved in this relationship.

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