The Coddling of the Korean Mind?

An ongoing open-source literature review posted and curated by Jonathan Haidt (NYU-Stern), Zach Rausch, and Amy Rhee.

The Questions: Are the trends documented in *The Coddling of the American Mind* (COTAM) present in Korea? Overprotected kids, rising anxiety/depression, callout-culture on campus, political polarization… or are Korean universities, and Korean Gen Z, different from their American counterparts? (For parallel documents about other countries, see here.)

We will soon open it up for input by Korean people, or those who do research on Korea. Because of the ubiquity and power of confirmation biases and motivated reasoning, we particularly welcome input from critics who can find evidence that the trends are NOT present in Korea. Please add your comments to the text, or by highlighting text and then clicking the "add comment" button that appears in the right-hand margin. Add your name if you want us to credit you as a source. Links to empirical research or high quality journalism would be most appreciated.

Notes:

- See our companion reviews:
  - Adolescent mood disorders since 2010: A collaborative review [with Jean Twenge]
  - Social Media and Mental Health: A Collaborative Review [with Jean Twenge]
  - See also additional Google docs laying out evidence for trends in mental health and social media use in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and other countries.
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1) MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS?

The Question: Is there a rise in rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide, beginning just after the majority of Korean teens become active daily users of social media? See here for evidence of such a rise in the US and UK.

1.1 JOURNALISM ABOUT SUCH A RISE

[We bear in mind that such articles may reflect “moral panic” and are not decisive evidence of a rise]

1.1.1

[What are we missing?]

1.2 JOURNALISM SKEPTICAL OF SUCH A RISE

[none found yet]

[What are we missing?]

1.3 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF SUCH A RISE

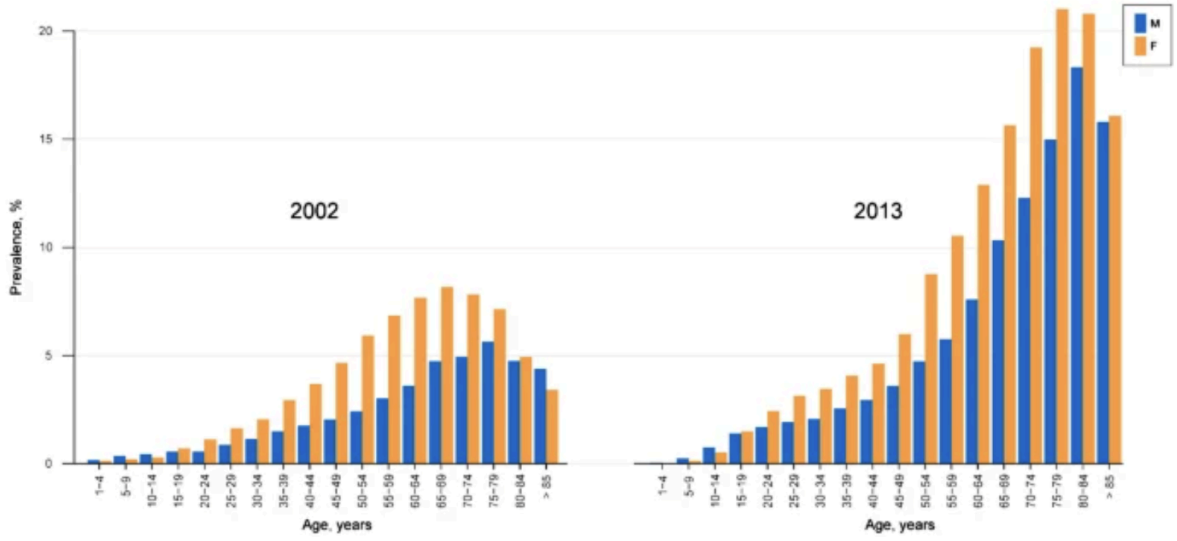
1.3.1 Kim, Jo, & Shin (2020). Increased prevalence of depression in South Korea from 2002 to 2013. *Scientific Reports*. [This study look at the time period right before the “great rewiring”.].

ABSTRACT: South Korea has one of the highest suicide rates among countries. However, the prevalence of depression in South Korea has been reported to be much lower than in other countries. The current study aims to estimate the prevalence of major depressive disorder using a large representative sample of the South Korean population. **The prevalence of depression in a sampled population of one million individuals increased from 2.8% in 2002 to 5.3% in 2013; it was found to increase with the age of the population, and was higher in females than in males for most age groups**. A Cox’s proportional hazard model showed that suicide risk was significantly higher in people with depression (hazard ratio [HR] 3.79, 95% CI 3.14–4.58) than those without depression. It was also significantly higher in older people (HR 1.52, 95% CI 1.36–1.70) than in younger people, and in males (HR 2.45, 95% CI 2.02–2.96)

than in females. Furthermore, higher income groups were at lower suicide risk as compared to lower income groups (HR 0.88, 95% CI 0.80–0.95). This study using the large representative sample data provided evidence that increased prevalence of depression contributed to the increased risk of suicide in South Korea during the recent decade.

FIGURE:

Figure 2



Prevalence of depression based on sex and age in 2002 and 2013.

[What are we missing?]

1.4 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE THAT DOES NOT SHOW SUCH A RISE

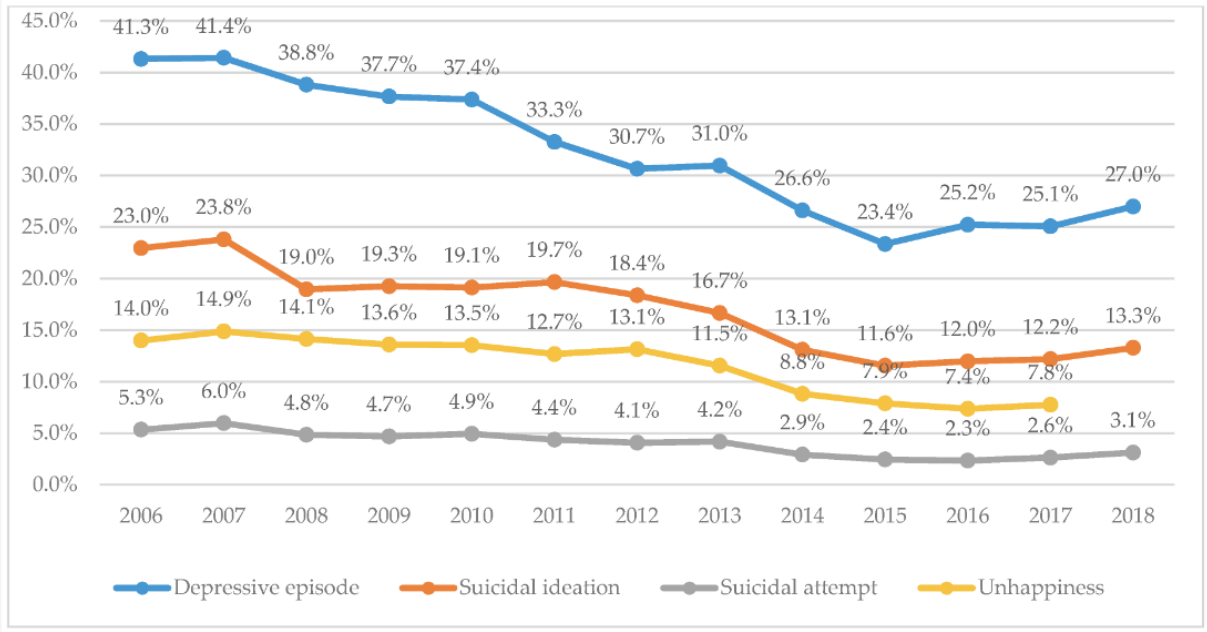
1.4.1 Kim, Kim, & Chung (2020). Investigation of the Trend in Adolescent Mental Health and its Related Social Factors: A Multi-Year Cross-Sectional Study For 13 Years. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

ABSTRACT: We aimed to investigate the mental health change and associated social correlates in adolescents in terms of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal attempt. In total, 978,079 students (12–18 years old, 7th–12th grade) participated in the survey for 13 years (2006–2018) by a multiple-year cross-sectional design (not a repeat

measure for smaller group). Mental health outcome variables were assessed using self-report surveys with the independent variables of sex, age, economic status, school achievement, and parental educational level. Korean social indices of income inequality (Gini index, higher scores representing greater economic inequity with score range of 0–1), education (national proportion of tertiary education attainment), and actual suicides were investigated together as related social factors. **The prevalence of depressive episodes, suicidal ideation, and suicidal attempt markedly dropped by 34.6%, 42.2%, and 48.3%, respectively. Moreover, the Gini index (from 0.314 in 2008 to 0.295 in 2015) and proportion of tertiary education (from 82.1% in 2006 to 69.7% in 2018) showed a decreasing tendency.** These indices and adolescent mental health outcomes highly correlated with each other (Pearson's r between Gini index and depressive episode = 0.789, suicidal ideation = 0.724, and suicidal attempt = 0.740; Pearson's r between proportion of tertiary education and depressive episode = 0.930, suicidal ideation = 0.809, and suicidal attempt = 0.851). Adolescent mental health has improved in the last 13 years in Korea, and improvements in social inequality (decreased Gini index) and lessened burden of academic competition (decreased national proportion of tertiary education) were significantly associated with the improvement of adolescent's mental health. However, the impact of parental educational level on children's mental health was relatively minimal, compared with the impact of economic inequality and academic burden. Further studies are needed to reveal the underlying mechanism for the association between adolescent mental health and sociodemographic factors to save adolescents from psychological distress.

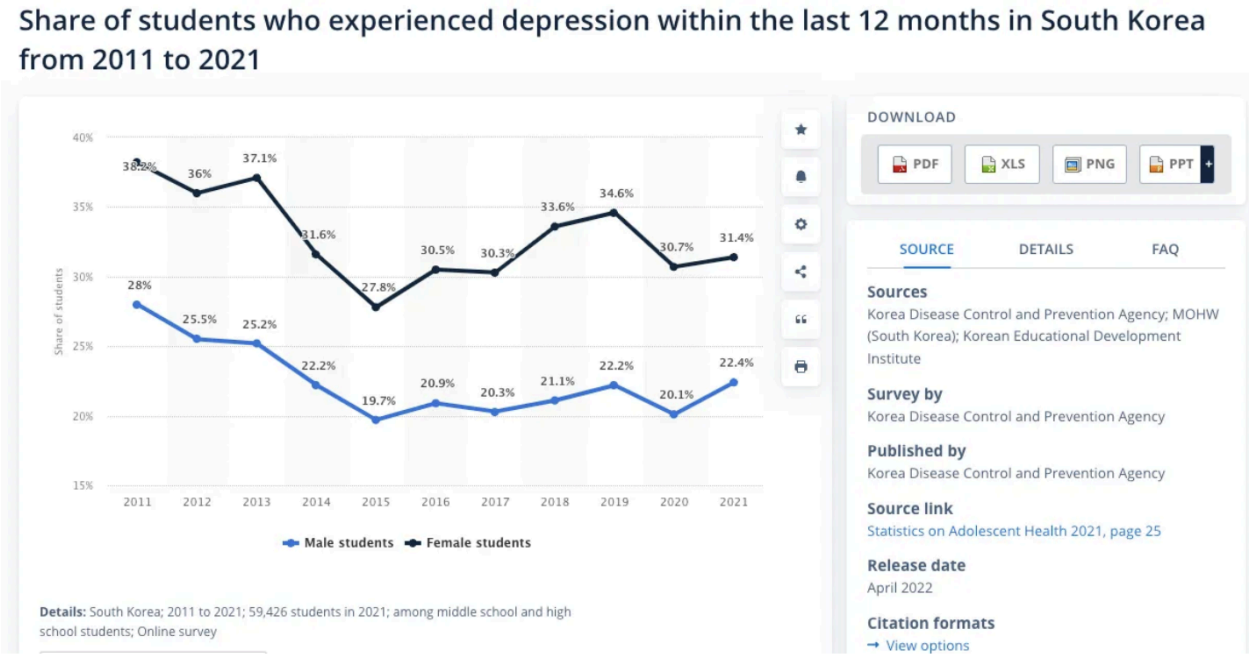
FIGURE:

Figure 1. Changes of prevalence in adolescents' mental health.



1.4.2 "Share of students who experienced depression within the last 12 months in South Korea from 2011 to 2021" (2022). *Statista.*

EXCERPT: According to a survey conducted in South Korea in 2021, over 31 percent of female students and 22 percent of male students stated that they had experienced depression within the last 12 months. While figures continue to fluctuate, reports of depression have generally decreased since the beginning of the previous decade. Additionally, female students consistently report higher rates of depression than male students.



1.4.3 Park, Lee, Jung, & Hong (2019). Four-year trajectory of Korean youth mental health and impacts of school environment and school counselling: A observational study using national schools database. *BMJ Open.*

ABSTRACT: OBJECTIVES: This study aimed to investigate changes in the mental health status of South Korean adolescents at a school level and identify school-related factors affecting these changes.
DESIGN: A retrospective data analysis, population study.
SETTING: South Korean high schools from 2013 to 2016.
PARTICIPANTS: Randomly sampled 827 schools (316 834 boys and 299 304 girls)
OUTCOME MEASURES: Mean scores of the Adolescent Mental Health and Problem Behavior Questionnaire-II (AMPQ-II), a school-based mental health screening test, were used to explore changes in youth mental health. Data regarding the school environment and school counselling were gathered from the ‘School info’ website. A multilevel growth model was used to determine relationships between students’ mental health and school-related factors.
RESULTS: **Students’ mental health statuses in South Korea gradually improved over time (coefficient=−1.46 to −1.70, p<0.001).** School mobility rates (coefficient=0.93 to 1.00, p<0.05), school dropout rates (coefficient=0.38 to 0.40, p<0.001), school budgets per student (coefficient=−0.05 to −0.06, p<0.01) and number of school counselling sessions (coefficient=0.14, p<0.01) were significantly associated

with baseline AMPQ-II scores. The rate of change in AMPQ-II score increased when the number of school counselling sessions was higher (coefficient=−0.03, $p<0.05$) or the school budget was lower (coefficient=0.02, $p<0.001$). **School environment explained 21.6% of the AMPQ-II baseline score variance and 9.3% of the rate of change variance.** School counselling further explained 2.0% of the variance in baseline AMPQ-II scores and 2.3% of the rate of change variance.
CONCLUSIONS: This study suggests that school environment stability and active provision of school-based mental health services have a positive impact on youth mental health.

[What are we missing?]

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2) SOCIAL MEDIA USE

The Question: Are Korean teens using social media in high numbers, at an early age (before 13), and are the Korean talking about the link between social media and mental health?

2.1 JOURNALISM ABOUT TEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE (AND DEVICE USE MORE GENERALLY)

2.1.1

[What are we missing?]

2.2 EMPIRICAL DATA ABOUT TEEN SOCIAL MEDIA (AND DEVICE USE MORE GENERALLY)

2.2.1 Lim (2022). Relationship between Korean adolescents' dependence on smartphones, peer relationships, and life satisfaction. *Child & Youth Care Forum*.

ABSTRACT: BACKGROUND: In recent years, the penetration rate of smartphones among Korean teenagers has increased, making it critical to clarify the influence of these devices on adolescents' lives.
OBJECTIVE: This study investigated the effects of smartphone dependence on peer relationships and life satisfaction among Korean adolescents.
METHODS: Using the middle school panel of the Korean Children and Youth Panel Survey (KCYPS), longitudinal data of 2,250 participants (53.4% boys) at Grade 1 (Mage = 14.01, SD = 0.03) in 2018, Grade 2 in 2019, and Grade 3 in 2020 were analyzed to examine the causal relationships between smartphone dependence, peer relationships, and life satisfaction.
RESULTS: **This study found that smartphone dependence had a longitudinal effect on negative peer relationships. Negative peer relationships had a longitudinal negative effect on early adolescents' life satisfaction.** Finally, negative peer relationships in early adolescents longitudinally mediated the relationship between smartphone dependence and life satisfaction.
CONCLUSIONS: This study showed that early adolescents' dependence on smartphones negatively affects their social relationships and, in turn, negative relationships with peers hindered life satisfaction, suggesting that adolescents' smartphone use should be guided and, when necessary, receive assistance to develop control of their smartphone use.

[What are we missing?]

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3) PARENTAL OVERPROTECTION

The Question: Are Korean parents becoming more overprotecting their kids, despite their reputation for letting kids run errands at very early ages? Are they beginning to convey a sense of paranoia to them, like American parents?

3.1 JOURNALISM ABOUT SUCH A RISE, OR ABOUT CHANGES IN KOREAN PARENTING IN LINE WITH COTAM

3.1.1

[What are we missing?]

3.2 JOURNALISM QUESTIONING WHETHER THE RISE IS REAL, OR ASSERTING THAT KOREAN KIDS ARE DOING FINE

[none found yet]

[What are we missing?]

3.3 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE SHOWING INCREASES IN OVERPROTECTION OR DECREASES IN FREE PLAY AND INDEPENDENCE

[None found yet]

[What are we missing?]

3.4 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE DISPUTING CLAIMS OF INCREASES IN OVERPROTECTION OR DECREASES IN FREE PLAY AND INDEPENDENCE

[What are we missing?]

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4) “SAFETYISM” IN K-12 (PRIMARY AND SECONDARY) EDUCATION

The Question: Are Korean schools overprotecting kids, emphasizing “safety” including “emotional safety,” and otherwise denying kids the chance to develop their antifragility?

4.1 JOURNALISM ABOUT SAFETYISM AND OVERPROTECTION IN K-12

4.1.1

[What are we missing?]

4.2 JOURNALISM QUESTIONING OR DISPUTING A RISE OF SAFETYISM IN K-12

4.2.1

[What are we missing?]

4.4 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE DISPUTING AN INCREASE IN OVERPROTECTION

[none found yet]

[What are we missing?]

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5) “SAFETYISM” IN UNIVERSITIES

The Question: Are Korean universities showing signs of “safetyism,” callout culture, and other trends that have interfered with open inquiry at American universities? Are some students calling for trigger warnings, safe spaces, microaggression training? Are they shouting down speakers and disinviting speakers? Are there distinctively Korean forms?

5.1 JOURNALISM ABOUT SAFETYISM IN UNIVERSITIES

[Note: This section is only about events on university campuses or in the academic world; it is not an attempt to chronicle events in the broader society. We examine intimidation from the right and from the left--anything that may be causing a rise of fearfulness among Gen Z students, or among professors and administrators]

5.1.1

[What are we missing?]

5.2 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ABOUT SAFETYISM IN UNIVERSITIES

[not found yet]

[What are we missing?]

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6) POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN KOREA

The question: Is the political culture in Korea growing more nasty and bitter, more polarized (among elites and among the voters), as it is in the USA? Are the trends covered in Ch. 6 of The Coddling happening in Korea too?

6.1 JOURNALISM ON POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN KOREA

6.1.1

[What are we missing?]

6.2 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN KOREA

6.2.1

[What are we missing?]

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7) COMMENTS FROM KOREAN STUDENTS

If you are a student at a Korean university, what do YOU think the situation is at your university, or in Korean society? Please add your own observations and analysis. Keep it brief and academic in tone. You may remain anonymous, but please identify your university.

7.1.

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8) COMMENTS FROM KOREAN PROFESSORS/ADMINS

If you are a professor or administrator at a Korean university, what do YOU think the situation is at your university, or in Korean society? Please add your own observations and analysis. Keep it brief and academic in tone. You may remain anonymous, but please identify your university.

8.1

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9) CONCLUSION

[The curator will try to summarize what can be concluded, once we get a lot more input from Korean experts]

Taiwan Study:

X.1 Chang, Y.-H., Lin, C.-Y., Liao, S.-C., Chen, Y.-Y., Shaw, F. F.-T., Hsu, C.-Y., Gunnell, D., & Chang, S.-S. (2023). Societal factors and psychological distress indicators associated with the recent rise in youth suicide in Taiwan: A time trend analysis. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *57*(4), 537–549. https://doi.org/10.1177/00048674221108640

OBJECTIVE: We investigated recent trends in youth suicide and their associations with societal and psychological factors in Taiwan.
METHODS: Suicide data (1971–2019) for 10–24 year olds were extracted from Taiwan's national cause-of-death data files. We investigated changes in trends in youth suicide rates, societal factors (gross domestic product per capita, Gini index, overall and youth unemployment rates, divorce rates in people aged 40–59 years [i.e. the age of most 15–24 year olds' parents] and Internet use rates) and psychological distress indicators (youth self-harm rates and the prevalence of worry-related insomnia, and suicide ideation, plan and attempt) using joinpoint regression and graphic examinations. The associations of these factors with youth suicide rates were examined using Prais–Winsten regression.
RSULTS: Suicide rates in Taiwan's 10–24 year olds changed from a downward trend (2005–2014) **to an upward trend in 2014 and increased 11.5% (95% confidence interval = [5.2%, 18.1%]) annually between 2014 and 2019. There was also an upturn in divorce rates among females aged 40–59 years in 2014 and self-harm rates among 15- to 24-year-old youth in 2013. The prevalence of self-reported insomnia and suicide ideation, plan and attempt in youth started to increase from 2013 to 2016.** In the regression analysis, Internet use, female divorce rates and youth self-harm rates were positively associated with youth suicide rates.
CONCLUSION: Suicide rates and the prevalence of suicidal behaviors began to increase in Taiwanese youth in the 2010s. These increases may be associated with concurrent rises in parental divorce rates, Internet use and poor sleep. Further research is needed to examine the mechanisms underlying recent increases in youth suicide risk.

X.2 https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0929664623001183