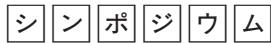


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The Significance of the Increase in Women Psychiatrists in Korea

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The number of female doctors has increased in Korea ; 18.9% (13,083) of the total medical doctors registered (69,097) were women in 2006, compared to 13.6% (2,216) in 1975. The proportion of female doctors will jump up by 2010 considering that nearly 40% of the medical students are women as of today. This trend has had strong influence on the field of psychiatry ; the percentage of women psychiatrists rose from 1.6 (6)% to 18% (453), from 1975 to 2006 and now women residents comprise 39% (206) of all.

This is not only a reflection of a social phenomenon of the increase in professional women but also attributed to some specific characteristics of the psychiatry. Psychiatric practice may come more natural to women.

While clinical activities of women psychiatrists are expanding, there are few women leaders and much less women are involving in academic activities in this field as yet. Though there is less sexual discrimination in the field of psychiatry, women psychiatrists are still having a lot of difficulties in balancing work and family matters. Many women psychiatrists also report they've ever felt an implied discrimination in their careers.

In this study, we are to identify the characteristics of women psychiatrists and to explore the significance of the increase in women psychiatrists in Korea and the situation in which they are.

The number of women doctors is rapidly increasing around the world^{1~3)}. The situation in Korea is not exceptional. In 1975, 13.6% (2,216) of the total medical doctors were women, but now, in 2006, 18.9% (13,083) are women in Korea⁷⁾. The percentage of women psychiatrists rose from 1.6% (6) in 1975 to 18% (453) in 2006. Since women comprise 39% (206) of all psychiatric residents and also nearly 40% of the medical students are women as of today, we can expect the proportion of women psychiatrists will jump up in the immediate future⁶⁾.

However, there have been few studies about how this will affect the medical society and Korean society in general. To address this issue, we conducted a preliminary survey about differences in characteristics of men and women psychiatrists in Korea.

The purpose of this study is to identify characteristics of women psychiatrists by comparing men and women who are active in psychiatry with regard to academic activities, clinical practices and personal lives. And then we are to assess the changing situation.

Method

Subjects were psychiatrists who were registered in Korean Neuropsychiatric Associations (KNPA) and got the psychiatric specialist certifications after 1992. Total number of subjects were 1,292; men, 1,009 (78%), women, 283 (22%). We sent questionnaires by e-mail to 1,137 psychiatrists whose e-mail addresses are on the list.

Out of the 1,137 potential respondents, 122 completed and returned their questionnaires; men, 77 (63%), women, 45 (37%).

We used the questionnaire made by Japanese Young Psychiatrists Organization (JYPO) which included 40 questions about demographic characteristic, work setting, academic achievement, career goal, future expectation and clinical practice and added one new section, 'the opinion of psychiatrists' gender differences'.

We used SAS program to analyze the results. Categorical variables were analyzed by chi square method and Student's t-test was used for the continuous variables. If 25-50% of cell has expectation frequency lower than 5, we used Fisher's exact test. If the data doesn't show normal distribution, we used Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Results

In demographics data, there were no significant differences between men and women, except the marital status; more men psychiatrists (90%) were married than women (75%). Mean age of the subjects were 38.3 and 36.7 in men and women respectively and mean duration of psychiatrists was 6.7 years in both sexes.

With regard to work setting, both sexes showed quite similar distribution. The majority of the participants (men, 44%, women, 36%) were working at university hospitals.

In the opinion of academic activity, 60% of men psychiatrists answered they want to do because of their interests, but 55% of women psychiatrists answered that they do it mainly to pursue scholarly achievements.

With regard to career goal and future expectation, nearly half of both sexes (men, 50%, women, 49%) desired to be involved in research and 77% of both sexes wished to get a PhD degree or took it already.

In both men and women psychiatrists, clinical practice accounts for a greater part of their profession (54% and 68%, respectively), but men responded that they spent more time in research than women (mean 27% and 17% of their work hours, respectively).

The motivation of becoming a psychiatrist was interest in mind in over 75% of both sexes. Career satisfaction was pretty high in both sexes; 95% and 96% of men and women respectively answered that they were very or usually satisfied with their career.

A remarkable thing was that more women psychiatrists were interested in child-adolescent psychiatry than men (56% vs. 21%). This is a consistent finding with other studies of a couple of western countries^{3,4}.

When one feels unstable, more men psychiatrists tended to resolve by themselves than women (52% vs. 32%), and more women psychiatrists had a tendency to consult with friends or family than

men (17% vs. 5%).

In the opinion of increment of women psychiatrists, the majority of both men and women psychiatrists thought it's desirable in terms of quality improvement of psychiatric treatment (87%, 63%, respectively). However, only 15% of women thought it's desirable for the academic development. We asked the participants the reason why women psychiatrists are increasing as an open question. The most common answer was the increase of women medical students (35%), and the second was the grown preference of psychiatry from women doctors (17%) and the reflection of social phenomenon was the third most common answer (16%). Some of the other answers included the lower physical burden, the sufficient personal time, the growth of academic interest in women, and the decrease of apply of men psychiatrists.

Both sexes thought they had advantage of their gender as psychiatrists, when it came to treating patients. However, more women thought they had a disadvantage than men (58% vs. 30%), and around half of women participants answered that they were at a disadvantage in getting a position of workplace or making career decision.

In the problem between family life and professional life, while more men had disturbance in the relationship with partner, more women had disturbances in the relationship with children, parents and parents-in-law.

Limitations

Our study has some limitations. First one is the low response rate. We have just 10.7% response rate. So we can't expect that these respondents represent total active psychiatrists in Korea. Secondly, the data were self reported. We can anticipate the bias due to self-reporting. Finally, more active psychiatrists might have participated in the survey, which can make a selection bias.

Discussion and Conclusion

To sum up, among young psychiatrists with mean duration of psychiatrists of 6.7 years, almost half of both men and women participants were working at university hospitals and desired to keep involved in academic activities. Women psychiatrists were doing academic activities mainly to pursue scholarly achievements, while men were doing it because of their interests. Men spent more time in research than women and only 15% of women participants thought the increment of women psychiatrists was desirable for the academic development. On the other hand, over half of women thought they had a disadvantage, especially in getting a position of workplace or making career decision. And more women had disturbances in the relationship with children, parents and parents-in-law than men.

There are two inconsistent aspects in some important areas of women psychiatrists' lives. While they were quite motivated towards academic achievement, they spent less time in research than men. More women were single and women had more problems in relationship with their families. It seems that they have some difficulty in balancing work and personal lives such as marriage, parenting, and the role of daughter or daughter in law. And they seem ambivalent about their ability. They felt somewhat disadvantaged and thought they had less opportunity in career.

At the same time, they had less confidence in themselves when it came to academic activity.

The increase of women in professional job has become general trend in Korea, especially, in a profession which can be acquired by a test without any sexual discrimination, such as legal or medical profession. And evidence suggests that female physicians offer more emotional support, encouragement, and reassurance to their patients and engage in more psychosocial discussion than male physicians^{9,10}. That is to say, psychiatric practice may come more natural to women. The increment of women psychiatrists might have been influenced by those factors. Besides, around half of the successful applicants for the internship of the major hospitals with superior training environment were women this year, since these hospitals have been selecting doctors based on the grades regardless of their sex or alma mater lately. Recently, women are dominating the top spots among medical students. However, there are still few women leaders in medical profession. Among the teaching staffs of university hospitals, only around 7.7-13.7% are women⁸.

What's happening to those women with superior grades? Many doctors think it's mainly because women could not devote themselves to their work due to housework including childbirth and rearing. According to recent survey by Korean intern resident association, although 81% of all training hospitals were allowing 3 months of legal maternity leave, 71.7% of pregnant doctors in training couldn't take full advantage of legal maternity leave, worrying about burdening their colleagues and failing courses⁵. And it's an unwritten rule that a woman must not get married or have a child during her early years' of training. Recognition of such difficulties faced by female doctors will be the first step to lead more productive workforce in this changing medical environment.

Now that around 40% of entering medical students are women in Korea, an institute that fails to develop the potential of the increasing women doctors might fall behind. We should take the current situation as an opportunity to alter medical society in a constructive way. To do so, more evidence-based research and information on the reasons for inequalities in career and barriers in academic lives of women psychiatrists are needed.

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