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Feelings about sexuality of South Korean international student couples in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: South Korean international students are the fourth largest number of international students in Japan. Japan and Korea have similar sexuality-related issues, such as declining birthrates, increasing ages of marriage and childbirth. The purpose of this study is to clarify the feelings of Korean international student couples living in Japan about topics such as marriage, family planning, work-life balance, and sexual concerns in Japan and South Korea. Based on our study, we consider future supports for these students' sexuality. **Materials and Methods:** The study targeted four unmarried South Korean couples (eight people) aged 20–35 and conducted a qualitative descriptive study using semi-structured interviews. **Results:** Participants' average age was 23.5 years for women and 25.5 years for men. The participants thought about when they want to get married; reasons why they want to get married; anxiety about marriage; hopes to be mother or father, timing of having children; thoughts on child-rearing; and hopes about having children. They considered feelings toward work-life balance and sexual concerns; hopes to continue working after marriage and childbirth; the need for coordination between ideal scenarios and reality; reasons for the declining birth rate and increasing age of marriage; good quality of life; feelings of double-standard about pregnancy as a reason for early marriage; and reasons for their negative feelings. **Discussion:** This study demonstrated that South Korean international student couples in Japan have hopes for marriage and family planning. However, economic uncertainty is a large obstacle, so they think that it was important to build an economic foundation first. Two-income family is common in South Korea. Participants thought [Hope to continue working], but they consider the [Possibility to stop working for a period after marriage and childbirth]. It was clear that there was a

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[Feeling of a double-standard about working]. For that reason, role sharing and work-life balance will continue to be important for supporting people's sexuality. Further, the participants did not want pregnancy before marriage, they thought of marriage as a family issue, and expressed a need for family planning supports to enjoy their sexuality.

Key words: Sexuality, South Korean international students in Japan, Family planning

Introduction

The number of registered foreign residents in Japan has continued to increase. In particular, the number of people working and studying abroad in Japan is increasing. According to the Japan Survey Support Organization (JASSO), the total number of international students in Japan in May 2016 was 239 287, with 15,457 of those students coming from South Korea¹. Korean international students make up more than 7% of all international students; this is the fourth largest group of international students in Japan¹. Foreigners who wish to study and work in Japan would continue to live in Japan. Thus, it is predicted that the number of foreigners who marry and give birth in Japan will also increase. Japan and Korea have experienced similar issues related to sexuality in recent years, such as declining birthrates², increasing ages of marriage and childbirth³, increases in divorce rates⁴, and pregnancy before marriage⁵.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to clarify the feelings of Korean international student couples living in Japan on topics such as

marriage, family planning, work-life balance, and sexual concerns in Japan and South Korea. Based on our study, we consider future supports for these students' sexuality.

Materials and Methods

Subjects

The study targeted four unmarried South Korean couples (eight people), aged from 20 to

35, residing in the Kinki region of western Japan. First, one couple was introduced to researchers by a person belonging to an international students' organization and enrolled in this study. The three other couples were recruited using a snowball sampling method. Informed consent was acquired from all participants before the study began.

Materials and Methods

Interview

A qualitative descriptive study was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The following interview guide was used.

The interviews were conducted individually between July 2015 and Jun 2016. The mean interview duration was 17 min 12 sec, with interview durations ranging from 10 min 39 sec to 23 min 52 sec. All interviews were recorded using an electronic recorder with the respondents' permission and were later transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Japanese or Korean as per students' requests.

Data analysis

Transcriptions were coded to identify elements of each participant's feelings about sexuality. All codes were examined and compared for similarities or differences. Codes were then sorted into subcategories and categories using the KJ method. Data analysis was performed and discussed by the first and second authors. Confirmability was assured through discussions held between the authors.

Table 1. Interview Guide

1.Characteristics
• age • educational institution • relationship period
2. Feelings toward marriage
• Do you want to get married?
• When do you want to get married?
• Why do you want to get married?
• Do you have any concerns about marriage?
3. Feelings toward family planning
• Do you want to have a child?
• When do you want to have a child?
• Why do you want to have a child?
• How many children do you want to have?
• Children of which sex do you wish to have?
4. Feelings toward work–life balance
• Do you want to continue working after marriage? [female]
• How do you feel about your wife continuing work after marriage? [male]
5. Feelings toward sexual concerns on Japan and South Korea
• How do you feel about marriage because of pregnancy?
• How do you feel about marriage at a later age and the declining birthrate?

Table2. Characteristics

	Men		Women		
	Age	Educational institution	Age	Educational institution	Relationship period
1	22	Exchange student	21	University student	5 months
2	23	University student	22	University student	2 years and 6 months
3	34	graduate student	29	graduate student	6 years
4	23	University student	22	University student	1 years

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Osaka Prefecture University Graduate School of Nursing. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation in the study.

Couples' feelings about sexuality

Seven hundred and two contexts of feelings about sexuality among South Korean international student couples were gleaned through transcription. Thirteen categories, 30

Results

Participants' characteristics

The average participant age was 23.5 years for women and 25.5 years for men. The average length of relationship for the couples was 27.8 months.

subcategories and 79 codes were extracted from the 702 contexts. Feelings about sexuality were analyzed using the following four viewpoints: marriage, family planning, work–life balance, and sexual concerns.

Table 3. Feelings about sexuality

	Category	Subcategory
Feelings toward marriage	When they want to get married	Suitable timing for marriage
		Necessity of economic stability
	Reasons why they want to get married	To gain a sense of stability
		To have an ideal married life
	Anxiety about marriage	Economic concerns
		Anxiety about my living environment
No worries about marriage		
Feelings toward family planning	Hopes to be mother or father	Having a child is good
		There is a reason why I want a child
	Timing of having children	The time to have children cannot be predicted
		There is a time at which I want to have children
	Thoughts on child-rearing	Child-rearing seems to be tough
		Cannot imagine raising children
		I have some ideas about child-rearing
	Hopes about having children	I want a certain number of children
I have thought about the sex of my future children		
Feelings toward work-life balance	Hopes to continue working after marriage and childbirth	Hopes to continue working
		The value of the continuation of work
	The need for coordination between ideal scenarios and reality	Feelings of a double-standard about working
		Possibility to stop working for a period after marriage and childbirth
		Needs for the sharing of roles in the family
Feelings toward sexual concerns in Japan and South Korea	Reasons for the declining birth rate and increasing age of marriage	Influences of modern society
		Influences of a lack of support
	Good quality of life	Having reproductive health and rights
		Advantage of a declining birth rate and increase age of marriage
	Feelings of a double-standard about pregnancy as a reason for early marriage	Getting married because of pregnancy can be challenging
		They only think negatively
	Reasons for their negative feelings	Lack of preparation
		We learn negatively
We have a critical image		

Hereafter, we describe category, subcategory, code, and person's narrative as **category**, [subcategory], <code>, and "person's Narrative."

Feelings toward marriage

Three categories were highlighted from the seven subcategories identified. The participants thought about **when they want to get married**; **reasons why they want to get married**; and

anxiety about marriage.

When they want to get married

This category was composed of two subcategories: [Suitable timing for marriage], and [Necessity of economic stability]. The participants said, "*I want to marry until 30 years old.*" (Man2). However the participants also thought, "*The economic foundation seems to be important.*" (Woman3).

Reasons why they want to get married

This category was composed of two subcategories: [To gain a sense of stability] and [To have an ideal married life]. Participants said, *“Marriage is likely to make one unit.”* (Man1) and *“I think wonderful family can be made only with beloved partner.”* (Woman3).

Anxiety about marriage

This category was composed of three subcategories: [Economic concerns], [Anxiety about my living environment], and [No worries about marriage]. [Economic concerns] was composed of two codes <Want to buy my favorite things when I wish> and <Want children to receive an education>. A woman said, *“I am worried about education expenses for children.”* (Woman1). A man commented, *“Culturally, Korean men must prepare own house before marriage”* (Man3).

Feelings toward family planning

Four categories were highlighted from the nine subcategories identified. These categories are **hopes to be mother or father, timing of having children, thoughts on child-rearing,** and **hopes about having children.**

Hopes to be mother or father

This category was composed of two subcategories: [Having a child is good] and [There is a reason why I want a child]. A man said, *“Of course I spend time with my wife is good, but with children it is better.”* (Man2). *“Rearing children is good motivation for a married couple.”* (Woman3). They stated <Strengthen cohesion between married couple> and <Be rewarding in life> as reasons they hope to become a mother or father.

Timing of having children

This category was composed of two subcategories: [The time to have children cannot be predicted] and [There is a time at which I want to have children]. A woman said, *“I have never think about having children, because of student.”* (Woman2). However,

another woman commented, *“I heard that a mother who is over 30 would have a hard time giving birth”* (Woman1). The participants connected their own situations and their knowledge, and they <Want to give birth before reaching my 30s>.

Thoughts on child-rearing

This category was composed of three subcategories: [Child-rearing seems to be tough], [Cannot imagine raising children], and [I have some ideas about child-rearing]. A man noted that, *“We have to make a sacrifice of our life for children.”* (Man1).

Hopes about having children

This category was composed of two subcategories: [I want a certain number of children], and [I have thought about the sex of my future children]. All participants wanted to have more than two children. They thought <Want a girl and a boy> and especially < Want a girl>.

Feelings toward work-life balance

Two categories were highlighted from five subcategories classified. They thought **about hopes to continue working after marriage and childbirth;** and **the need for coordination between ideal scenarios and reality.**

Hopes to continue working after marriage and childbirth

This category was composed of two subcategories: [Hope to continue working], and [The value of the continuation of work]. A woman said, *“I hope to continue working after marriage and giving birth.”* (Woman2). Another woman said, *“Not only the life of mother but also a woman’s one are important.”* (Woman4).

The need for coordination between ideal scenarios and reality

This category was composed of three subcategories: [Feelings of a double-standard about working], [Possibility to stop working for a period after marriage and childbirth], and [Needs for the sharing of roles in the family]. A

woman said that “*Women need carrier as much as man.*” (Woman2). Yet, there were also other opinions like “*I want to quit a job when my child is young.*” (Woman1) and “*I think it is better for children that mother in home.*” (Man1).

Feelings toward sexual concerns in Japan and South Korea

Four categories were highlighted from nine subcategories classified. Participants thought about **reasons for the declining birth rate and increasing age of marriage, good quality of life, feelings of a double-standard about pregnancy as a reason for early marriage, and reasons for their negative feelings.**

Reasons for the declining birth rate and increasing age of marriage

This category was composed of two subcategories: [Influences of modern society], and [Influences of a lack of support]. A man said, “*We get late time of employment and marriage because of economic problem in Korea.*” (Man1).

Good quality of life

This category was composed of two subcategories: [Having reproductive health and rights] and [Advantages of a declining birth rate and increase age of marriage]. A man expressed, “*Nowadays contraceptive methods are much better than before*” (Man4).

Feelings of a double-standard about pregnancy as a reason for early marriage

This category was composed of two subcategories: [Getting married because of pregnancy can be challenging] and [They only think negatively]. A woman said, “*Getting pregnancy should be blessed by everyone, but pregnancy as a reason for early marriage is not so.*” (Woman1).

Reasons for their negative feelings

This category was composed of three subcategories: [Lack of preparation], [We learn negatively], and [We have a critical image]. A woman said, “*I do not want to disappoint my*

parents.” (Woman2). “*Everybody said, are you quite sure?*” (Man1).

Discussion

This study demonstrated that South Korean international student couples in Japan have hopes for marriage and family planning. However, economic uncertainty is a large obstacle, so they think that it was important to build an economic foundation first. On the one hand, they [Hope to continue working], but they consider the [Possibility to stop working for a period after marriage and childbirth]. It was clear that there was a [Feeling of a double-standard about working].

Kim⁶ described the situation of youth employment in Korea as a “harsh present, uncertain future.” In South Korea, many young people have recently been reluctant to marry and to have a family; however, all participants of this study had hopes for marriage and family planning and thought that there was a suitable time for them. Participants considered their current state as a preparatory period and prioritized social conditions such as academic achievement and employment. They hoped to have a family once they obtained economic stability. In South Korea, there is a cultural belief that marriage leads to a sense of responsibility to become a patriarch and preparing for the costs of marriage is necessary. Korean men consider these economic conditions to be more importance than Japanese men⁷. In this study men also strongly thought that [Necessity of economic stability].

In South Korea, there is a strong inheritance of Confucianism and the value of “HYO,” which means cherishes the family, is also upheld. For this reason, more than half the participants voiced positive opinions on “Family connection should be given priority over the parties on marriage.”⁸ There are Korean Confucian ideas that “Men should work outside and women should be in the home”. Thus, women especially said that [Child-rearing seems to be

tough]. It was clear that even among young people, gender roles about childcare and housework still persist. In this way, although they **hopes to continue working after marriage and childbirth**, it is assumed that this will not come true. So, students' feelings were exposed as [Feelings of a double-standard about working] and [Possibility to stop working for a period after marriage and childbirth].

According to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family⁹, the ideal number of children for Korean citizens is 2.26; however, the total special fertility rate for 2015 in Korea was 1.24¹⁰. This was one of the lowest birth rates in the world². All participants wanted to have more than two children, but they also wanted to get married and give birth after obtaining a degree and a job. There is thus a possibility that giving birth to the ideal number of children cannot be achieved because of their age. Participants thought [Influences of modern society] and [Influences of a lack of support] were causes of the declining birthrate. It was thought that there was a necessity of creating an appropriate environment and facilitating the ease of giving birth and raising a child.

Yet, participants also thought that the declining birth rate and the later age of marriage could be taken positively such as [Having reproductive health and rights] and [Advantages of a declining birth rate and increase age of marriage]. Even though Korea has strong family values, participants thought that a <Two-income family is common in Korea> because of the country's economic problems. Women, who predicted taking on major housework and childcare burdens, especially thought about enjoying their reproductive health, rights, and quality of life.

All participants wanted to marry and undertake

family planning; however, it is expected that the timing of marriage and childbirth would be after acquiring a degree and employment, so their age of marriage would possibly be later than the average age of first marriage in Japan and South Korea. Even in South Korea, with its strong Confucian spirit and family-oriented principles, a two-income family has recently become common because of the country's economic problems. For that reason, role sharing and work–life balance will continue to be important for supporting people's sexuality. In addition, the participants did not want pregnancy before marriage, and thought of marriage as family problem, so that there was also a need for family planning supports to enjoy their own sexuality. Sexuality is important for human life but an extremely private issue. Therefore, health professionals who speak patients' native languages and know about their home country's culture and current situation might be able to better support international students.

Conclusion

South Korean international student couples in Japan hoped to have families with their partners; however, they were anxious about economic conditions and future situations. It was suggested that health professionals should support South Korean international student couples' positive feelings about marriage, family planning, and work–life balance. Moreover, family planning supports are necessary for the couple to enjoy their reproductive health.

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