

Research on the Suicide Idea of the Aged Korean Immigrants in America

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Abstract. This study was carried out for Korean-American immigrant elderly to grasp the relationships among purpose in life, mental health and suicidal ideation. Samples were collected from six senior schools and 13 Korean churches in Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary and Raleigh in the North Carolina State, Louisiana in the New Orleans State and Houston in Texas State. Purpose in Life (PIL), Symptom Check List-90-Revision (SCL-90-R) and Scale for Suicide Ideation (SSI) were used as study instruments. In terms of suicidal ideation, a dependent variable focused in this study, the grade was relatively low for Korean-American immigrant elderly. In terms of meaning of life, meanwhile, their grade was significantly low compared with Korean elderly. Accordingly, nursing application is necessary for Korean-American immigrant elderly to help them seek the meaning of their life. To this end, in-depth interview looking into their psychological backgrounds with elderly residing in Korea is necessary.

Keywords: Purpose in Life, Mental health, Suicide idea, Elderly, Immigrants

1 Introduction

At present, the number of Koreans residing in the U.S. far exceeded 1 million. It is the fourth largest following China, the Philippines and Japan in terms of Asian-American (Kim & Wolfing, 2008). Unfortunately, however, there are no statistics on immigrants by each Asian country in the U.S. Census, although there are statistics on all Asians. It indicates that the study on minority race in the U.S. is insufficient.

An increase in the elderly population resulted from immigration is confusing for the elderly who have not yet prepared for being adapted to the rapidly changing society in physical, mental, social and spiritual sides. As most of immigrant elderly moved into the U.S. following their children, their social support network is relatively weak so that they feel loneliness easily. Such a phenomenon threatens mental well-being, ratcheting up the risk of suicide (Draper, 1995). Recently, several researchers have been engaging in the study on Korean-American immigrant elderly persistently. In case of analyzing such papers by topic, however, most are related to health promotion behavior, fact-finding survey on life and nutrition, leisure activity and social participation.

The U.S. government has increased the budget for welfare projects for minority race. However, it is insufficient as it has been carried out based on the conventional

way of thinking that they already knew and observed, rather than listening to their voice. As a result, responding to the change of elderly's thinking, namely spiritual progress is very necessary. Namely, it needs to look into elderly's spiritual change and suicidal ideation resulted from their changed life after immigration. Based on this, it needs to offer nursing intervention to keep and promote elderly's health and prevent disease from the holistic perspective (Paul & Wong, 1984). This study was carried out for Korean-American immigrant elderly to grasp the relationships among purpose in life, mental health and suicidal ideation.

2 Methods

2.1 Samples

The subjects to study were collected from six senior schools and 13 Korean churches in Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary and Raleigh in the North Carolina State, Louisiana in the New Orleans State and Houston in Texas State. Participants listened to necessity and purpose of this study. And the questionnaire was drawn up for those who agreed on the purpose in document among them. Considering the elimination rate of this study, a total of 250 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Of them, 192 copies were collected, posting the recovery rate of 76.8%. Of the collected questionnaires, five copies that gave no heed to the statistical treatment were removed. Finally, 187 copies were used for statistics in this study.

2.2 Measures

The PIL (Purpose in Life) test, Korean version

The perception of PIL differs from person to person depending on space, time, and individual situations, and so it has special meaning for each individual at each given moment of their life (Frankl 2006). The Korean version of the most often used instrument for assessing this parameter, the PIL tests (Crumbach 1969), was used in the present study; its reliability as well as convergent and divergent validities have been demonstrated previously (Reker 2005). This test assesses PIL using scores derived from the 7-point scale and 20-question tools from the perspective of Frankl's logotherapy (Crumbach 1969, Namkung 1980), with a higher score indicating greater the satisfaction felt in the respondent's life. The internal consistency (Cronbach's α coefficient) of this tool was 0.84.

Mental health

To check subjects' mental health, the Symptom Check List-90-Revision (Kim et. al, 1978) standardized studies by Derogatis, Covi, Lipman and Rickels (1970) in such a way as to suit for Korea's situation was used. SCL-90-R consists of 5-point scale and 90 items, which break down into 12 questions for somatization, 10 for obsessive-compulsive neurosis, nine for interpersonal sensitivity, 13 for depression, 10 for unrest, six for hostility, seven for fear and uneasiness, six for paranoia, 10 for psychosis and seven for supplementary questions. Each subdomain indicates that the higher the mark becomes, the severer the degree of mental symptoms develops; and the lower the mark becomes, the better the degree of mental symptoms shows. Reliability of this instrument showed the distribution of Cronbach' α =.69~.89(Kim et al, 1978). This study showed the analysis results as follows; somatization, Cronbach' α =.82; obsessive-compulsive neurosis, Cronbach' α =.84; interpersonal sensitivity, Cronbach' α =.84; depression, Cronbach' α =.92; unrest, Cronbach' α =.86; hostility, Cronbach' α =.85; fear and uneasiness, Cronbach' α =.86; and paranoia, Cronbach' α =.76.

Suicidal ideation

Suicidal ideation (Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979) consists of 3-point scale and 19 items. In terms of suicidal thinking, two points are given too many cases; one point to normal; nothing to zero point. It indicates that the higher the mark becomes, the more suicidal thinking becomes. The reliability of this instrument was Cronbach' α =0.87 (Shin et al, 1990) and Cronbach' α =.82 in this study.

2.3 Data analysis

The analysis of materials collected in this study was computerized by using SPSS 19.0 program. Frequency, percentage, average & standard deviation and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient have been implemented.

3 Results

3.1 General characteristics of subjects

The average age of subjects was 68.23 ± 3.09 . The number of those in their 60s was 135 (72.2%), higher than 52 (27.8%) for those in 70s. By gender, women came to 139 persons (74.3%) and men were 48 persons (25.7%). One hundred and one persons with the immigration career exceeding 30 years and less than 40 years took the biggest portion of 54%, followed by 66 persons with the career exceeding 20 years and less than 30 years with 35.3%, 12 persons with the career exceeding 40 years and eight persons with the career exceeding 10 years and less than 20 years. The average immigration period was 31.39 ± 6.29 years. By religion, Catholicism topped the list with 106 persons (56.7%), followed by irreligion with 41 persons (21.9%), Christianity with 37 persons (19.8%) and Buddhism with three persons (1.6%).

Viewing the subjective economic satisfaction degree, 96 persons (51.6%) answered, "normal," followed by 53 persons (28.3%), "satisfied," 27 persons (14.4%), "unsatisfied," and 11 persons (5.9%), "much unsatisfied."

In terms of subjective health status, 87 persons (46.5%) answered, "healthy," followed by 47 persons (25.1%), "normal," 27 persons (14.4%) "unhealthy," and 26 persons (13.9%), "very healthy."

3.2 Level of subjects' meaning of life, mental health and suicidal ideation

Viewing the level of meaning of life of participants in this study, the minimum value was 44 points, the maximum value came to 90 points, and the average stood at 71.53 ± 12.44 points, indicating that there is no meaning of life. Looking into the level of participants' mental health, the minimum value of somatization was 13 points, the maximum value came to 31 points, and the average stood at 22.70 ± 6.19 points. In terms of obsessive-compulsive neurosis, the minimum value was 10 points, the maximum value, 31 points, and the average, 22.27 ± 5.87 points. In terms of interpersonal sensitivity, the minimum value was nine points, the maximum value, 27 points, and the average, 20.46 ± 5.42 points. In terms of depression, the minimum value was 13 points, the maximum value, 40 points, and the average, 28.92 ± 8.57 points. In terms of unrest, the minimum value was 10 points, the maximum value, 30 points, and the average, 19.25 ± 5.85 points. In terms of hostility, the minimum value was six points, the maximum value, 21 points, and the average, 12.29 ± 4.53 points. In terms of fear and uneasiness, the minimum value was seven points, the maximum value, 20 points, and the average, 12.87 ± 4.63 points. In terms of paranoia, the minimum value was six points, the maximum value, 18 points, and the average, 12.41

± 3.28 points. In terms of psychosis, the minimum value was 10 points, the maximum value, 30 points, and the average, 20.23 ± 6.16 points. In terms of the level of suicidal ideation for participants in this study, the minimum value was two points, the maximum value, 19 points, and the average, 9.03 ± 5.48 points.

According to the results verifying the difference of subjects' suicidal ideation by general characteristics, the point for suicidal ideation was higher for women than men ($t=2.394$, $p=0.018$); those with no religion than those with religion ($t=-3.743$, $p=0.000$); those with no experience of thinking of their own death than those with many experiences ($t=7.594$, $p=0.001$); those with no experience of receiving education in preparation for death than those with experiences ($t=-4.633$, $p=0.000$); and those with no intention to participate in the death education than those with intention ($t=-2.045$, $p=0.042$).

4 Conclusion

This study was carried out for Korean-American immigrant elderly to grasp the relationships among purpose in life, mental health and suicidal ideation. Samples were collected from six senior schools and 13 Korean churches in Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary and Raleigh in the North Carolina State, Louisiana in the New Orleans State and Houston in Texas State. Purpose in Life (PIL), Symptom Check List-90-Revision (SCL-90-R) and Scale for Suicide Ideation (SSI) were used as study instruments. In terms of suicidal ideation, a dependent variable focused in this study, the grade was relatively low for Korean-American immigrant elderly. In terms of purpose in life, meanwhile, their grade was significantly low compared with Korean elderly. Accordingly, nursing application is necessary for Korean-American immigrant elderly to help them seek the meaning of their life. To this end, in-depth interview looking into their psychological backgrounds with elderly residing in Korea is necessary.

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