Unmarried Women’s Childbirth Intention in Korea

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Abstract. This study investigated the effects of childbirth related factors on unmarried female university students’ childbirth intention. As a cross-sectional study, a survey was conducted in S university and an investigation carried out by a structured online survey of 259 female university students. The results are as follows: 12.4% of participants had no childbirth intention in the future. The childbirth intention of female university students was affected by one’s value for children (OR= 0.87, 95% CI=0.78~0.97) and one’s burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing (OR= 0.54, 95% CI=0.41~0.71). Therefore, values in favor of marriage, childbirth, and gender roles need to be delivered to the female university students, which can be accomplished through the education system.

Keywords: Childbirth intention, Value of marriage, Value for children, Number of future children

1 Introduction

The total fertility rate in Korea has been rapidly decreasing since 1983 and in 2000 it fell below 1.5; in 2013 the figure continued to drop to 1.19 which was the lowest rate among OECD countries, and Korea still has the lowest-low fertility rate [1].

There are two arguments that explain the causes for why Korea is experiencing low fertility rates; one is that people’s value have changed and the other one is that there is a lack of effort to develop policies for social-environmental changes, that is, a new economic theory for family [2]. However, it appears that low fertility rate in Korean is caused by a complexity of changes that have affected family, socio-economy, and systemic values and structure.

There are many causes of low fertility rate in Korea, especially changes in family values including marriage and childbirth. Changes in family values, including an increase of marriage age, increases in the single population, increases in divorce rates, and the weakening of societal values advocating for the necessity of having children contribute to low fertility rate [3]. Accordingly, it is very important to educate and encourage people to recognize that having a family is a worthwhile endeavor rather than living single in order to improve low fertility rates. Exploring the childbirth values of female college students who are potential childbirth population and studying the variables that affect their childbirth intention will provide helpful data to consider when preparing policies regarding low fertility rates. Developing appropriate
countermeasures after studying values of Korean female college students who are the potential childbirth population will contribute to preventing the continued low fertility rate in Korea.

Therefore, this study’s aim is to suggest basic materials to establish countermeasures which can help reduce the low fertility rate in Korea by studying childbirth related values among female college students, especially regarding what values affect their childbirth intention.

2 Method

2.1 Research procedure

This study was a descriptive correlation and cross-sectional design using a self-reported questionnaire. The purpose of this study was to describe the childbirth intention and values concerning childbirth in female university students and to identify the influencing factors of their childbirth intention.

One university which is located in J city was selected by convenience sampling, and an online survey was conducted on 259 female university students. Data was collected from August 20th to 30th 2015.

SPSS program 19.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used to analyze the data. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson’s correlation coefficient, and logistic regression analysis. A value of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

2.2 Survey instrument

2.2.1. Measuring instrument for woman’s value of marriage and woman’s value for children

The subject’s value of marriage and value for children were measured using the Family Value Checklist developed by Kim [4]. This instrument consists of 16-items for value of marriage and 12-items for value for children, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 to 5). Negative questions were calculated by converting reversely.

The lower points indicate that the subjects have more traditional for value of marriage and value for children, and the higher points indicate that the subjects have more modern for value of marriage and value for children. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the two scales were 0.79 and 0.83, respectively.
2.2.2. Measuring instrument for the burden of child rearing and education costs, the burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing, and woman’s double burden of paid employment and household responsibilities

The subject’s feelings regarding the burden of child rearing and education costs, the burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing, and woman’s double burden of paid employment and household responsibilities were measured using the Checklist developed by Jang [5].

This instrument consists of 3-items, 2-items and 6-items, respectively. The participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 point: strongly disagree, 5 points: strongly agree). Negative questions were calculated by converting reversely.

The higher score on the burden of child rearing and education costs indicates that more participants consider the burden of raising children financially, the lower score on the burden of opportunity costs means participants have traditional family values, the higher score on the burden of opportunity costs shows participants have modern family values. In addition, the higher score on double burden of paid employment and household responsibilities means participants acknowledge the bigger burden of the paid employment and household responsibilities. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the three scales were 0.83, 0.91, and 0.69, respectively.

2.2.3. Measuring instrument for perception of sex role

The subject’s the perception of their sex role was measured using the Checklist developed by Shim [6].

This instrument consists of 9-items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 to 5) with higher scores indicating more modern perception of sex role than traditional one. In this study, the internal consistency reliability using Cronbach’s alpha was 0.90.

3 Results

3.1 General characteristics of subjects

The mean age of the respondents was 21.95 (range 18 to 34). 47.1% of the respondents reported having a religious affiliation. 15.4% of the subjects were in upper household economy, 59.5% were in middle household economy, and 25.1% were in lower household economy. 12.4% of participants answered that they do not have any childbirth intention.

3.2 Childbirth related values of subjects

The participants’ mean scores for the value of marriage, value for children, burden of child rearing and education costs, burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing,
The expected number of future children of the study participants was negatively correlated with the value of marriage ($r=-0.32, p<0.001$), the value for children ($r=-0.25, p<0.001$), the burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing ($r=-0.48, p<0.001$), and the perception of their sex role ($r=-0.16, p=0.007$).

3.4 Predictors that affect subjects’ childbirth intention

To estimate the childbirth related value factors associated with childbirth intention, we performed logistic regression analysis. In the logistic regression model, the value for children and burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing were significantly related to childbirth intention.

The subjects with a modern value for children had 0.87 times less possibility of childbirth intention than those with a traditional value for children (95% CI=0.78–0.97, $p=0.019$), and subjects with a modern value for burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing had 0.54 times less possibility of childbirth intention than those with a traditional value for burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing (95% CI=0.41–0.71, $p=0.001$).

4 Conclusions

We found that values associated with children and burden of opportunity costs due to child rearing were strong indicators of childbirth intention among female university students.

These results suggest that the development of various educational programs that teach female college students to establish appropriate family values instead of modernized individualism and the creation of diverse policies suitable to social environmental changes that can support family centered values will increase the future birth rates in Korea.

References


