

## Changes in Family and Social Work Practice in Korea

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### Introcuotion

In the beginning years of the 21st century, the field of social work practice in Asia has become more active as social workers are balancing the traditional values of their clients with development of the various social work approaches. In this developing stage of social work practice, Asian social workers need to cooperate each other in creating the appropriate social work approaches which would be most helpful for each culture. I hope that we have a chance to understand our respective countries' commonalities and unique traits to develop theories. This symposium offers us a meaningful opportunity to create the more effective and efficient social work practice.

At the end of the 20th century, social work was included in field of social science which emphasized cultural diversity and differences in cultural values. Many theories and researches were divided into the two categories: Western individualistic culture and Eastern collective culture(Triandis. 1989). Social science was based in the well-known psychology theories and concepts which were used in the west. Upto now Korean therapists employed the western social work practice models directly and applied them to their clients. However, we feel that we have to develop a specific Korean social work approach strategy and skill. I think that other Asian countries have similar situations.

Most of the Asian countries have their own languages and traditional cultures. Compared with western culture, Asian countries have commonalities, but also they have their own characteristics. Understanding and acquiring knowledge about the differences, diversities of culture, acceptance and respect of the different value systems are prior requirements to create a global perspective.

The more we know about cultural diversity, the easier it will be to understand human uniqueness, behavior and social relationships. Essentially the more we know the differences, the better we understand each other.

The purpose of this paper is to study on the characteries and problems of the Korean family, social welfare education and research and the realities of fields of social work, and to contemplate the futures of social work practices. Since institutional and policy aspects are also increasingly influencing the social welfare practice, it is very important to consider. However, I expect that another presenter would deal with this.

## **1. Changes and problems of the Korean family**

### **1. The characteristics of Korean families**

Korea has a 5,000 year history of it's own language, culture, and traditions. Buddhism and confucianism have played the important historical roles in the early cultural heritage of Korea. Koreans' strong commitment to their family is rooted in the concepts from buddhism and confucianism. Some people even think that the basic unit of the self among Koreans is not individual but family. Most daily activities and behaviors are based on the concepts from confucianism and buddhism. The fundamental principles governing the relationships among individuals, family, society, the world and beyond are best articulated in the five Cardinal Relations(Kim, 1991). Responsibility, wisdom and benevolence belong to the old generation, and obedience, loyalty, filial piety and respect are expected in return from the young generation. Trust and sincerity were emphasized among friends.

The communal traits of the Korean family are expressed in the family-centered values, mutual dependence among family members, filial piety, loyalty, harmony in family, mutual help, avoidance of conflicts, excessively high regard of hierarchical relationships, preference of male child and succession of familial lineage(King & Bond, 1985; Lee, 1990; Triandis, 1989). We can find little changes in these values in a recent

survey of Korean house wives(Song. 1997; 2000). The same trend is easily found in family counseling sessions.

## 2. Changing Korean families

Even though the communal traits are still overwhelming in Korean families, we can find some significant changes in family structure and roles. The Korean culture as a whole has been changing rapidly, especially during the last generation. These changes vary according to the sex, age, level of education and the economic status of the person involved(Hyun. 1995). Family structure and family rules are changing along with the rapid modernization taking place currently(Kim, et. al. 2000; Byun, et. al. 2001). We can identify the changing parts as follows:

- (1) **Family structure** : Family size is decreasing but extended family dynamics still run strong.
- (2) **Family pattern** : It is moving from male linear descendant centered families to couple centered nuclear families. Single parent families, single old person families, unmarried single families and teenage households are increasing
- (3) **Family functioning** : Welfare and emotional support functions are weakening and consumption functions are increasing.
- (4) **Family life cycle** : Marriage age is delayed, fewer children are preferred and the number of seniors is increasing due to the increased life span.
- (5) **Economic life of family**: Working married women are increasing, the expenses for food, clothing and shelter are decreasing while those for education are increasing.
- (6) **Family relationships**: Father and children centered relationships are changing to the couple relationship and the gender role of the couple is changing towards functional relationships.
- (7) **Change in the status of women**: Affection and equality are emphasized between husband and wife. Equality in decision making is being asked by wives and the female centered ways of thinking are increasing.
- (8) **Values of Family**: Intimate interaction among relatives is decreasing and the family centered values are changing to the individual centered

values.

### **3. Problems of Korean families**

In the social work practice setting, we find increasing number of cases in areas such as senior citizens, poverty, divorce, domestic violence, husband-wife conflicts, parent-child conflicts, conflicts with parent-in-laws, problems in youth, handicapped family members, and drug abuse(Yoon. 1997; Korea National Statistical Office. 2001, 2002; Song, 2002; Korean Women's Development Institute. 2001; Ministr of Unification. 2002).

The number of North Korean defectors and foreign workers in Korea is increasing. Currently we are neither able to take care of these people nor able to deal with those who are involved in shocking accidents.

The cases of family counseling have the following characteristics(Sarang- Line. 1991-2000; Seoul Central Family Counselling Center. 1971-1998; Song. 1999)

- (1). Problems in youth are used to occupy a big portion, but now, husband-wife conflicts are increasing.
- (2). Unfaithfulness between husband and wife and domestic violence are increasing.
- (3). Parent-child conflicts are also increasing.
- (4). The conflicts with husband's family, with mother-in-law and relatives continue to be important areas.
- (5). We encounter few cases of elderly who come to receive counseling compared to others.

## **II. Education and research on social work practice**

### **1. Changes in education programs**

The curricula have been revised to meet the changing needs. However, the courses on social work practice and related areas need to receive more emphasis and should be closely related to the realities of the field. The

followings are the current status of the curricula of the social welfare departments of the universities(Kim, et. al. 1997).

- (1). The proportion of theories is 66.4% and the remaining 33.4% is for practices.
- (2). The linkage among the courses is not clear. For example, courses such as social welfare institutions, social welfare administration, program development and ethics and values in social work have either little or weak relation to practices.
- (3). The current curricula do not reflect the realities of the field of social welfare.
- (4). Students are not able to link practice theories to the field realities when they are engaged in field work.

## **2. Standardization of educational programs**

In the past, the Korean academia of social welfare arrived at the conclusion that the goals for education are not very clear, the balance among the areas is not well established, and the linkage with the practice world is not adequate(Kim, Yonok et al. 1997). These problems became proportionately significant with the sharp increase of the number of social work departments in both undergraduate and graduate levels.

In 1998, the Korean Association of Social Welfare Education first made a draft of standardized curriculum and published it and recommended it to the social welfare departments to use it. Around this time the government began recruiting big number of the social work specialists. This standard curriculum and its guidelines had enormous impact. In other words, many departments adopted this new curriculum and followed the guidelines.

## **3. Qualification system**

The Ministry of Public Health and Welfare installed a qualification system for the social welfare related jobs. This is for social workers, child workers, counselors for family violence, counselors for sexual violence and mental health social workers. They are recruited to the local general civil service office or the local special civil service office. The applicants are

required to graduate either from junior college or a four year college, majoring social welfare. Those who cannot satisfy this requirement are requested to finish the minimum of 65 to 100 hours of education in the related field. For mental health welfare workers masters degree is required in addition to the minimum of three years of training at the institutions designated by the Minister of Public Health and Welfare.

In Korea, in most areas of social work, only the license of social welfare/social work is required. However, increasing number of workers wants to receive further education in specialized fields of social welfare and to acquire licenses. For example, there is a rapid increase in the number of social workers who want to receive education and training in the area of family counseling and family therapy and this number will continue to increase.

#### **4. Subjects and methods of research in studies**

The various subjects and scopes are being used in academic research. Most recently the number of researches using new measurement scales, linear models and the measurement of effectiveness of programs is increasing. One example is a study to probe the effectiveness of approaches after applying it to the Korean field works(Yoon, 1997).

Theories of families and general system theories are more frequently used(S. Kim, 1995; H. Kim, 1997; Hong. 1998). Family therapy, group therapy, task oriented model, management of cases, solution focused model, narrative therapy and empowerment model are being studied. Statistical approaches are most frequently used in the researches. Development of programs and studies of their effectiveness are increasing. However, the use of qualitative methods for the measurement of effectiveness is relatively rare.

### **III. Current trends for social workers**

#### **1. Historical background of Korean social work development**

It was after the Korean War of 1950 that modern social work was introduced to Korea. During those days main programs were for the refugees, shelters, public reliefs and temporary aids. Many social welfare agencies were established and foreign assistance was given to them until the 1960s.

In the 1960s laws such as livelihood protection laws, social security and public assistance laws and others related to the social welfare services were promulgated, but the actual operation was from the 1970s. Since the 1980s as political regimes have changed social welfare related laws were amended to extend the coverage and the scale of administration as social welfare began to expand. However, because of the economic crisis of 1997 that invited IMF assistance, mass unemployment occurred. In 1998, united donation for social welfare was introduced. After this economic crisis, many non-governmental organizations have participated in the social welfare activities and this contributed greatly to the development of this field.

Korean social work practice started to accommodate and give reliefs and gradually added the services arranged by the government according to the new policies(Kim, et. al. 2001). However, the concrete practice methods and techniques at the field work which have been imported mainly from the United States and were taught in universities and applied in the welfare agencies in the field.

## **2. A definition and goal of social work practice**

The Korean Association for Social Welfare Education has set the objectives of the education as follows and they are almost identical with the goal of the social work practice.

- (1). To enhance understanding of the various human needs, ideologies, thoughts, philosophies and policies, and thereby to also enhance the problem solving abilities,
- (2). To accelerate, recover, maintain and enhance the roles and functions of individuals, families, agencies and communities who are in need of help and let them be able to achieve tasks, prevent and reduce pains.
- (3). To plan, formalize and execute the social policies, service resources

and programs in order to meet the basic needs of human being and develop their abilities,

(4). To render authority and give social and economic legitimacy and organizational and administrative support to the groups who are under crisis situation and to let them be able to execute policies, services and programs and to engage in social and political actions.

(5). To develop and experiment the professional knowledge and techniques that are related to the above objectives.

These objectives are more or less identical with the American Social Welfare Association and the American Association for Social Welfare Education.

### **3. Social work practice at the field**

#### **1) Supply and demand of social worker force and professionalism**

There are around 50,000 licensed social workers in 2001. Since 1990s, we have an increase of this number by almost 20% every year. We currently have 62 social welfare departments in junior colleges and 103 for 4year colleges and 82 for graduate level. Universities produce around 9,000 social workers every year.

The number of public social workers in 1987 was 49. But in 2001, 5,440 workers are placed nationwide at the city, town, village and sub-district levels. In the same year, there are 2,529 workers at the 885 social service agencies and around 5,300 workers at the 556 social work residence agencies. Altogether we have roughly 15,000 workers in the field.

Because the number of workers increased sharply during such a short period--the last 15 years (Kang & Yoon. 2000)--, it was difficult to establish their legitimacy in the field in their specialization.

#### **2) Major contents of job of social workers**

The job contents of the social workers placed in the field can be categorized into direct intervention, community activities, program planning

and execution, and survey. Proportions of these tasks are as follows (Hyunsook Yoon. 1997):

- Administrative works(21.8%),
- Individual counseling(20.0%),
- Looking after cases(16.0%),
- Monetary assistance(12.4%),
- Program planning and evaluation(8.2%).

Many social workers are not satisfied with the present job and almost 33% want to leave their job. Two major reasons for this are unfavorable prospect of career(21.4%) and impossibility of using their speciality to full extent.

Areas in which workers want to be involved more are as follows:

- Linking community resources by giving information(20.4%),
- Finding cases(14.9%),
- Counseling and treating family problems(11.5%),
- Individual counseling(10.9%),
- Program planning and evaluation(9.4%).

#### **4. Evaluation system for social work practice**

In 1998, the Social Welfare Law was amended and the executive order for social welfare institutions, in its article 27, required agency evaluation every three years with respect to speciality, physical facilities and degree of satisfaction of the clients. For this purpose the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare gave the Korean Institute of Health and Social Affairs a mission to develop and use the indicators for evaluation.

This evaluation data gave the agencies the concrete criteria for their revision of functions and for establishment of the middle and long range plan for improvement of operation and program development.

## **IV. Final thoughts; Future trends and implication**

## **for social work profession**

### **Our tasks:**

Our tasks in 21st century are to explore the ways to deal with the complex and various new problems and to enhance the degree of specialization of social work practice. Exploring the ways of qualitative development of practices and implementing these new ways are the challenges we are facing now.

### **Korean social welfare way:**

The United States has some deficits in its social welfare system and is unique in the fact that its population is composed of various ethnic backgrounds. Korea has a relatively stabilized social welfare system and its population is very homogeneous. The U. S. is emphasizing the client centered professionalism. Korea has to broaden the scope of institutional studies, and family centered knowledge and techniques should be developed further in the area of practice.

### **New Chalanges:**

Since we have used western theories of social welfare practices, I think the direction we have to take in these beginning years of the 21st century is clear. It is to take into full account the Korean cultural backgrounds and derive the better and reliable approaches to improve the quality of life of people in need of help. Based on the current conditions of social work practices introduced above, I will attempt here to explore the future direction of development.

### **1. The nature of the problems and the strategy in the Korean society**

The problems of individuals, groups and communities will become more complex and will have new features. For example, the increased number of the elderly, increase of the divorce rate, separation, adolescent householders, alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence are making the problem even more complex. The conflict with mother-in law will continue to be a problem as it always has been. Social adjustment of North Korean

defectors and the post-traumatic stress disorder of those inflicted by large scale accidents are some examples of the new problems in Korea.

One may think that divorce, problems in youths, alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violences are more or less similar to the United States. However, we have to emphasize the differences in causes and the fact that cultural factors are deeply involved.

Recently, family counseling and family therapy are receiving more attention by the social workers. However, the theories used here are rooted in the western individualistic culture. Therefore, critical thinking on families and the theories thereof, concepts and techniques are necessary.

Korean families are more family relationship-centered systems, have male dominance values, and the families of parents-in-law have more influence in the family decision making process. These are the aspects which one cannot find in the western literature. Therefore, we need critical thinking about the traits of Korean families, differences in cultures, and the current knowledge on social work practice approaches, concepts and techniques so that we can raise relevancy and effectiveness of the social welfare services.

## **2. Increasing demand for broader and more specialized services**

Various and integrated client-centered services should be developed to accomodate the variety of the problems that are becoming increasingly complex. For example, the victim of domestic abuse needs an integrative service which provides psychological, emotional and mental treatment as well as physical treatment and economic and legal aids. This approach is also necessary for the elderly and the handicapped. Thus the overall and integrative programs should be developed and extend linkage with the related services in the community concerned.

Social workers in the field should develop a variety of service programs based on the integrative approach. For this, they should have overall perspective and be able to analyze, acquire and use community resources in addition to their specialized knowledge and techniques. They also should participate more actively in the process of establishing the new institutions and formulating policies to meet the needs of potential clients.

### **3. Emphasis on linking education to practice**

What social workers find important in their job includes finding community resources, information presentation and linkage, family counseling and family therapy, individual counseling, program planning and evaluation and belief. These should be directly reflected in the future curriculum and its guidelines. Individual counseling and textbooks of family counseling and therapy are, without revision, composed of theories and concepts developed in individualistic culture, and they are used in education and training without any criticism.

There is a limit in assessing the problems and applying to the Koreans when these theories developed in the individual culture are used. Therefore, in order to closely relate the education to the practice, we need more accurate knowledge of Korean families and family culture and we also need to have critical mind as to the theories and approaches to be used in education.

### **4. The functions of social workers and strengthening techniques**

Social workers claim their speciality by dealing with varieties of problems using various approaches. So far, Korean social work practices have been developed mainly with quantitative and physical services. In the future, we have to explore the directions in which we can have more balanced objectives of social work practice.

So far, the role of the social workers was to act as direct clinical practitioners and primarily to function as case manager, therapist and intake assessment and referral specialist. These roles are often combined. And the focus of the clinical interventions is on identifying specific problems, strengths and resources. Therapy is highly structured and goal oriented and every session achieves tangible objectives to move clients quickly to achieve overall treatment goals.

The most common practice skills have to involve computers and technology, include using the telephone, multimedia strategies and the internet in counseling. Specialized skills for managing particular diseases or

disorders, brief and group therapy, population-based prevention and psycho-educational skills are also needed.

### **5. Emphasis on the study of performance evaluation**

Until now, our research used quantitative methods and there were much concerns with the measurement model, practice models and program development. These days, there are more concerns with the effectiveness and efficiency of the services rendered and qualitative methods are recommended. In other words, the research on performance evaluation which take into consideration of the Korean cultural factors together with new concepts, techniques and approaches will take place in the future.

### **6. Increasing demand for continuing education program**

It is impossible to have the curricula and training which will enable workers to perform all tasks required in the field. It is especially difficult for the university curriculum to accomodate all requirements when more and more qualification systems are being introduced. Universities should possess unique features by formulating a curriculum that will integrate the objectives of the school and the needs of the community, and additional curriculum should be also developed for the students taking license examination.

There will be an increasing demand for training for extended education and for qualification for license in the area of social welfare service besides the regular curriculum of universities. Social workers have to acquire the knowledge in different areas of speciality in order to be able to handle the changing problems adequately in the field.

### **7. Report skills to clearly describe the objectives and process**

With assertion of speciality of social welfare services, there are increasing concerns with effectiveness and efficiency of the service results. For evaluation of the social welfare service practices and the approaches taken, one should be able to measure and conduct the comparative

analyses.

Most recently, approaches such as managed care, strength, empowerment-based practice and evidence-based practice are receiving increasing attention. In diagnosing problems, one is supposed to examine functional aspect rather than symptoms and causes. One is also required to set the objectives clearly and shorten the period of contacts as much as possible and use the varieties of measurement tools. The instruments of measurement of functions of individuals, families, and groups are used more frequently. Pictures, videotapes, dolls, play toys, family maps and the role playing are also increasingly used.

## **8. Conflict of identity of social workers at the field**

Recently, social workers have more opportunity to compare their jobs with those of others. They are working in more various situations because of increase of the other social work practice related jobs. Social work agencies want workers to be able to deal with the various problems with special knowledge and skills even though most of them do not require workers with a masters degree. There is a need to train social workers to let them be able to deal with these problems with individuals, families, groups and communities. On the other side, many social workers want to move to the other jobs and they are going to have confused identity as a professional social worker.

It is difficult and accompanies much stress to claim identity of the discipline and practical utility in the field where various and complex needs are waiting to be met. Workers especially complain about the fact that they are engaged more with administrative work with less opportunity to use their knowledge. Workers are more likely to quit and beginning to have less pride of being social workers.

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