Analysis of Suicide Research on Multicultural Youth in Korea

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Abstract

As multicultural population has been drastically increasing over the decade in Korea, their quality of life needs to be studied. This study focuses on multicultural youths’ suicidal issue in Korea. Suicide is one of the most obvious indicators to show the current status of mental health. Unfortunately, suicide attempt rate of multicultural youths was two-times more than that of non-multicultural youths in Korea during the past two years (2014-15). Through the literature review in Korea as well as the United States, this study explores the related variables to their suicide attempt. Research result says that multicultural youth’s suicide is related to a variety of variables, including physical, psychological, educational, socio- economical, and cultural variables. Research implications are as follows: First, these variables can be utilized as predictive or protective factors to prevent their suicide. Second, theoretical framework for comprehensively understanding their suicidal issues needs to be developed. Third, both emergent and normal suicidal interventions need to be provided for multicultural youth in Korea.

Keywords: Multicultural Youths in Korea, Suicide Ideation, Suicide Attempt, Research Trend, Factors

1. Introduction

It is known that Korea has been one of the highest countries in suicide rate among OECD countries. Noticeably, the first cause of death of Korean youths is suicide. Furthermore, a recent report says that multicultural youths in Korea have attempted suicides two times more than non-multicultural youths (Ahn et al., 2016). As Korea has been entering into the early stage of multicultural society, the issues of multicultural population may more seriously appear. Although marriage immigrant women’s mental health issues have been often introduced and emphasized, their children’s mental health issues have been relatively less mentioned in media and academic researches.

The suicidal issue of multicultural youths is necessary to be reconsidered at this point of time. This is because their population has been drastically increasing over the past 10 years in
Korea. Suicide is one of the most obvious indicators to show that they can successfully adjust themselves to Korean society and grow up as healthy adults.

This research's purpose is to provide research trend by collecting and analyzing previous literatures on multicultural youth's suicide in Korea. By providing a discourse map of multicultural youth's suicide in Korea, this research can make this issue's seriousness effectively known to the public. As well, this research can provide a helpful guideline for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. Analysis of research trend, that is to say, an integrative understanding of previous literatures can show the strength and weakness of researches, and thus is related to future agendas in research and policy on multicultural youth's suicide in Korea.

2. Research Method

Research method is literature review. Using the RISS (Research Information Sharing Service) as the largest database and search engine of academic research in Korea, this study was to find articles and reports, which were directly and indirectly related to multicultural youth's suicide. Thus, this study collected dozen of academic researches and policy reports, which have been published over 10 years in Korea. Moreover, this study searched and referred to those related articles, which has been published in international journals, through Google scholar.

The research questions of this study are as follows:
Q1. What is the current status of multicultural youth's suicide in Korea?
Q2. What are the factors which can influence their suicidal ideation and attempt?
Q3. What are strategies and suggestions for suicide prevention?

3. Research Result

3.1 Demographic Status of Multicultural Youths in Korea

It is necessary to take notice of the demographic increase of multicultural youths in Korea. According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Education, the number of multicultural youths (82,536) in 2015 is six-times more than that (14,654) in 2007. Rate of multicultural students have passed through the one percentage of total students in Korea since 2014. In the case of elementary school, two percentages of students came from multicultural families. And 120,000 of multicultural preschoolers is ready to enter into public education. However,
multicultural youths out of public education was not included in this statistics. In this sense, the total number of multicultural youths will be expected to be more than this figure.

![Fig. 1] Demographical Change of Multicultural Students over the 10 years

3.2 Suicide of Multicultural Youths in Korea

Suicide ideation rate of multicultural youth was slightly more than that of non-multicultural youth in 2015 and 2016. However, the most noticeable result is the rate of suicide attempt. The suicide attempt rate of multicultural youths was two-times more than non-multicultural youths (Ahn et al., 2016). Specifically, the suicide attempt rate of multicultural youths was 4.8%, while that of non-multicultural youths was 2.4% in 2015 (Ahn et al., 2016). Thus, it is necessary to explore what factors are related to the higher rate of suicide attempt and ideation in multicultural youths.

![Fig. 2] Comparison of Multicultural Youths and Other Youths in Suicide Ideation
3.3 Factors on Suicide of Multicultural Youths in Korea and the US

Multicultural youth’s suicide in Korea is related to a variety of variables, including physical and psychological and socio-economic variables. Table 1 shows the summary of related studies, which has been conducted over the past seven years. Suicide ideation and attempt are statistically-significantly related to the following factors: smoking and drinking behaviors, depression mood, school violence, gender, socio-economic situation, drug, happiness, stress, conflicts with family and friends, family resilience, and communication with parents. (Ahn et al., 2016; Park, 2016; Kim, 2016; Gho & Lee, 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2016; Kim & Moon, 2011). This research’s classification is helpful to show a big picture or a discourse map on multicultural youth’s mental health and suicide.

[Tab. 1] Factors on Multicultural Youth’s Suicide in Korea
This study also reviewed international researches on suicide of multicultural youths. Table 2 is the summary of those researches which have been conducted in the United States. This finding will be compared with and contrasted to that in Korea. Common ground of both countries is that suicide of immigrant youths is related to mental health (depression, anxiety, stress), addiction (substance, smoking & alcohol), socio-economic level (financial status), and support group (family, peer). Korean researches say that suicidal factors of multicultural youths is almost same with those of other youths in Korea. However, furthermore, American researches say that academic level, physical health, discrimination, cultural adaptation and racial identity can influence on their suicidal ideation and attempt. This international comparison and contrast will be helpful to the development of suicidal research and policy in Korea.

[Tab. 2] Factors on Multicultural Youth's Suicide in the United States
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Variable</th>
<th>Research subjects</th>
<th>Related Variables</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicidality</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Racial identity, experiencing discrimination, anxiety, fears or worries, depression</td>
<td>Takahashi 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal ideation</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Acculturative stress, generation difference</td>
<td>Perreira &amp; Ornelas 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Recent family, academic, financial problems</td>
<td>Wong et al. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korean int'l students</td>
<td>Life stress, living with parents, different-ethnic friend support</td>
<td>Cho &amp; Haslam 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal behavior</td>
<td>Asian, African, Caucasian, Hispanic</td>
<td>Gender, grade, depression, substance use, body image, weight control, risky sexual behavior, (not race *)</td>
<td>Kim et al. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal attempt</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Family, school, peer relationship</td>
<td>Wong &amp; Maffini 2011</td>
</tr>
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</table>

From the above analysis, this research can find the following implications: First, multicultural youth's suicide in Korea is related to a variety of variables, including physical, psychological, educatinal, socio-economical, and cultural variables. It means that suicidal issue of multicultural youths in Korea is more than merely individual problems. Thus, school, society, and government need to be interested in the suicidal issue of multicultural youths.

Second, these factors can be utilized as predictive or protective factors. If multicultural youths are regularly evaluated according to the above factors, their suicidal crisis can be more easily prevented. In this sense, pre-test for multicultural youths in suicidal crisis can be developed.

Third, holistic understanding or overarching framework is required. Chapman and Perreira (2005) suggested ecological framework of Latino immigrant youths in the US, based on their contexts, including culture, family, school, and so on. Ko and Perreira (2010) also suggested the risk and resilience model of immigrant youths, based on three stages of migration, including pre-migration, migration, post-migration. Framework for understanding and helping multicultural youths in Korea, including suicidal issues, needs to be developed.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the above analysis, this study will provide the suggestion for suicide prevention of multicultural youths in Korea as follows: First, a long-term consideration of their developmental process from preschool to high school is necessary, as their population has been
radically increasing.

Second, a comprehensive understanding of their issues, including physical and emotional, cultural, social, educational, and socio-economical difficulties, is required, as the above factor analysis says.

Third, policy for multicultural youths needs to consider the cooperation between multiple layers, including individual, peer group, parents, school, local community, and society.

Fourth, the helping of multicultural youths in suicidal crisis need to consider a two-track service: First is emergency service like hotline telephone. And second is counseling service by experts and mentors.
References


