A Study on the Relationships of Gender Equity and Healthy Family in Korea

Young Ju Yoo, Ph. D.
Professor of Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Korea

INTRODUCTION

A modern Korean family is facing various changes in its structural, functional, and relational aspects due to rapid economic development and urbanization. Structurally, many changes have happened to a Korean family, such as the increase of the number of households, the diversification of family types, the increase of double-income earning families, the increase of the aged families and divorce rate, and the decrease of the family members. Functionally, the importance of production of means of living has diminished while that of consumption has increased. In addition, the function of child rearing, emotional bonding and leisures are given more weight than ever in the past. In a relational aspects, the traditional family relations are giving away to the equalization of the husbands and the wives, the democratization between the parents and the children, and the weakening of the kinship relations.

As a result, a Korean family nowadays confronts various problems such as divorces, family violence, suicides of the aged, which could not be imagined in the past. As these problems are no longer problems of individual families, but serious social problems, family scientists have conducted research focusing on the positive aspects of a family life from a preventive perspective (Yoo et al. 1995). In other words, the studies from a Family Strength Perspective have been actively conducted in an effort to discover the strengths of a family which lead to a successful family life (i.e., the traits of a Healthy Family). Korea was not an exception, and last year, "the Korean Healthy Family Movement" was established in October 1995.

The issue of gender equity has been a research theme for socio-psychologists in the past, but recently, their interest has been extended to more intimate relationships such as between friends or husbands and wives. The concept of equity is defined as a fair distribution of rewards (compliments, acquisition of a status, or a monetary compensation and the like) based on the input factors such as experiences, contributions, and credentials, i.e., a norm formed in the course of distribution of rewards (Chafetz 1990). Thus, it is different from the concept of equality upon which rewards are distributed in equal shares regardless of input factors. According to the recent studies on this subject, scholars have preferred the concept of "equity" to the concept of "equality" as a mode of distribution.

In this study, I would like to examine the current situation of a today's family through observing the changes of a Korean family since 1960s, and to discuss the healthiness of a Korean family and the gender equity within a family through the usage of empirical data. In this regard, I think that the efforts to find out (1) whether there is a difference in the perception of gender equity between a man and a woman, and between different generations, and (2) how that is related to a Healthy Family, these are very
meaningful in restoring the healthiness of a Korean family through gender equity.

THE CHANGES OF A MODERN KOREAN FAMILY

The changes of family structure
1. The increase of the number of households and the decrease of the number of family members
   According to ‘Population and Housing Census Report’ of the National Statistical Office (Table 1), the number of households shows as the 12.96 million in 1995. This is a 295% increase in comparison to 4.38 million in 1960. On the contrary, the number of family members has steadily decreased from over 5 persons in 1960s and 1970s to 4.62 persons in 1980s and 3.44 persons in 1995. In other words, only in 30 years has the number of family members been reduced by 22 persons.

2. Changes of a household type
   Since 1960s, the rate of one generation household has increased from 7.5% to 10.7% in 1990, and three and four generation family has gradually decreased. On the contrary, a two generation household consisting of parents and children as a typical household type has been 70% in 1960, 68.6% in 1980, and 66.35% in 1990, being an average household type. In addition, the most big change is the increase of the single households from 4.8% in 1980 to 9.0% in 1990 out of all household types. This seems to have been caused by the increase of late marriages and the increase of households of the aged couples, of which trend is expected to continue in Korea.

3. Increasing the divorce rate
   The divorce rate is increasing since 1980s. Looking into the early divorce rate as one of indications of family stability, we can see that the ratio has increased three times from 0.41 between 1971 and 1975 to 1.30 between 1991 and 1994 within 20 years. Nevertheless, the fact that Korean families have maintained relatively better structural stability than other countries seems to be attributable to the traditional values on a family and the lack of legal and economic conditions supporting women’s actual independence.

Table 1. The changes of the number of households and family members in Korea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population (unit: 1,000)</th>
<th>No. of household (unit: 1,000)</th>
<th>No. of family members (unit: persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>2,499</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3,144</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3,741</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4,341</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4,460</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2. Number of households and percentage distribution of each household type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of household (unit: 1,000)</th>
<th>Percentage of the household type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One gen.</td>
<td>Two gen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>4,371</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5,576</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7,969</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>11,357</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3. The growth of divorce cases and divorce rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cases of divorce (^a)</th>
<th>Crude divorce rate (^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971-1975</td>
<td>14,007</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1980</td>
<td>20,348</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1985</td>
<td>32,447</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1990</td>
<td>44,909</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1994</td>
<td>49,926</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The increase of double-income earning families
The ratio of women's participations in the economic activities for those over 15 years old has increased from 38.5% in 1975 to 41.64% in 1980, but it has gone down to 39.5% in 1985, which seems to have been attributable to the slowdown of economic growth with more women than men becoming the target of layoffs. In relation to the changes of a family life, the employment of married women is worthy of notice since the number of employed married women is bigger than that of the unmarried women. Especially, the ratio of employment of married women is 62.3%, which can be attributable to the changes of women's view of occupation and the higher level of expectation on the quality of life.

5. The increase of the population of the elderly
The population of the aged over 65 years old has increased from 0.99 million in 1970 to 2.54 million in 1995. The current ratio of the aged population over the entire population has become 5.7% as of 1995 in Korea, it seems that the proportion of the population of the aged out of the total population will increase more and more down the road. Therefore, it is expected that the Korean society will start to indicate some typical features of the aged society in around 2000.

The changes of family functions
Although it seems that the family functions performed by a traditional family have weakened and decreased in its kinds, the functions of a family as a unit of nuclear household have strengthened in quality such as socio-psychological and economic consumption functions, seen as follows: the strengthening of sexual and affectional functions between a husband and a wife; the changes of child rearing and socialization functions; strengthening of emotional bonding and leisure functions; strengthening of consumption functions; and weakening of the function of maintaining the kinship relationships, but still it is continuing functions of Korean family, even though they are living in the separate residence.

The changes of family relationship
The family relationships are becoming more equal and democratic due to the equalization of the relationship of a husband and a wife, the democratization of parents and children, and weakening relationship of relatives as a result of the changes of the traditional patriarchal consciousness and the sex discriminational consciousness. Therefore, a family may easily be dissolved when the above loses its balance, i.e., the weakening of the family stability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender equity
The notion of fairness in personal relations has mainly been the subject of studies by socio-psychologists (Kahn and Gaeddert 1990). After the mid-twentieth century, the notions that a person can
obtain the rewards or the outcome in proportion to
the input, and the more they have contribution,
career, skill, the more they can have wages, respect,
status were advanced. Homans (1961, 1974) called
such proportionality as “the distributive justice,” and
Adams called it “equity.”

While the equity, as one of social norms, gives an
individual a sense of satisfaction and lifts up the level
of performance, the inequity leads to the unhappiness
and the dissatisfaction. Moreover, if an individual's
proportion of the outcome over the input is more than
that of others, he feels the sense of guilt. On the
contrary, if his proportion of the outcome over the
input is less than that of others, he feels inequitable.
Especially, the notion of equity weighs more to
anyone who is interested in maximizing his own
outcome or tries to do better than others (Kahn and

The theory explaining equity is based on the theory
of cognitive dissonance and the exchange theory.
That is, the theory of cognitive dissonance explains
that when an individual receives an unfair treatment
in comparison with the input factors, a tension
develops, and he or she is motivated to get rid of
them. The exchange theory explains that because the
human beings are selfish beings who pursue the
maximizing interests by a minimum costs, they try to
get the rewards corresponding to his contribution.
Accordingly, the theory of equity starts from the
Adams' hypothesis that the human social relationship
is formed and maintained under the condition of each
other's giving and taking (Franklin 1982).

**Healthy family**

The concept of a ‘Healthy Family’ is called ‘family
strength’ (Otto 1962), ‘optimal family’ (Beavers 1977),
‘strong family’ (Stinnett 1979), ‘balanced family’
(Olson and McCubbin 1989), ‘functional family’
(Bloom 1985), ‘healthy family’ (Fisher and Sprenkle
1978; Barnhill 1979; Curan 1983; Hennon 1988). Here,
in order to examine the concept of a Healthy Family
as a compound word consisting of health and family,
it is necessary for us to look over the meaning of
health.

The concept of health in the dictionary means the
state at which one has no illness and has a sound
mind. WHO (World Health Organization) defines the
health’ as the state of physical and spiritual well-
being. ‘Physical health’ means the state of which one
is able to do anything properly and ‘spiritual health’
means the state of which one can possesses the
happy, hopeful and enthusiastic feelings in everyday
life (Yoo 1994).

The study of a Healthy Family has been started by
Otto (1962) at first. He stated that family strength is
an interacting force which is composed of a series of
changing elements and is diversely developed by
family life cycle. Furthermore, he defines Family
Strength as a force which provides the family
members with rich experience and suggests that each
member in family have the ability and the strength for
pursuing the family's well-being and existence.

In the “Family Strength Research Project,” Stinnett
and his colleagues (1979) defined ‘strong family.’ The
strong family is a kind of relation pattern and forms a
positive self-identity and enhances the satisfactory
interactions among family members and is a social
and psychological feature which can promote each
member's potentials.

Eo’s studies (1996) showed how the housewives
living in a Korean urban area perceive the attributes
of a Healthy Family: a family with good communica-
tion with each other, a family with a harmonious
family life, a family loving each other with deep
affection, a family spending much time with other
members, a family with mutual understanding solving
problems, a family respecting each other's privacy, a
family whose members fulfill his or her familial duties,
a family with sound and positive way of thinking, a
family having a clear sense of values.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Data and sample**

The subjects for this study were the married
couples in Seoul. They are randomly selected. In
addition, a shorter self-administered questionnaire
was given to them. The actual number of responses
were 364.

**Measure**

One of the measures of this analysis, each partner's
perception of gender equity, was measured by two
questions: “In giving and taking (emotional and
material aspects) between husband and wife, which
one is more feel inequitable than the other?” and
“Compare with your friends, which one is more feel
inequitable than the other?” Separate individual
scores were maintained for sex and for generation.

The other was Family Strength Inventory (Stinnett
and Sauer 1977) measured to the healthiness of the
family by 14 questions. This measure was assessed by
asking each respondent to check his/her level of
agreement or disagreement with several items using a
five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree
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Data analysis

The analytic methods of this study are frequency, percentage, average, and one-way ANOVA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here, I will discuss what the Korean married couples feel about the equity between them in their marriage lives. According to my survey with a sample of urban couples of 364 persons, 32% of the subjects responded that they cause feel inequitable to each other almost equally to the question, "In giving and taking (emotional and material aspects) between husband and wife, which one is more feel inequitable than the other?" And it shows that the wives are treated less fairly than the husbands. This result is in accord with the result of Cho's research (Cho 1995). Accordingly, it shows that Korean married couples overall maintain equitable relations in their marriage lives, but more wives consider conjugal relationships as unfair than that of most husbands do.

According to this study, it shows that the younger generations of the thirties or the forties consider conjugal relationship as more fair than the fifties or the sixties do, the younger generations keep to the principles of equity between a husband and a wife more than that of the older generations.

Then, what are the scores of the healthiness of a Korean urban couple? A group of husbands scored 75.3 while a group of wives scored 76.5. Consequently, the scores of the healthiness of a family were tested high, and there was no statistical significance to the difference of the scored by these two groups.

In addition, in case of the scores of the healthiness of a family categorized by different generations, there was a statistical significance to the difference between the thirties or the forties and the fifties or the sixties. The younger generations such as the thirties and the forties scored 78.8, but the older generations such as the fifties and the sixties scored 70.6.

I examined how the perceptions on gender equity between husbands and wives in family life is related to the healthiness of a family based on categorization by a sex or generation. As a result, it turned out that both the husbands and wives scored high in the health of a family when they maintain a fair relationship. That is, when husbands and wives feel that they are giving and taking fairly in family life whether it is material or spiritual, they are able to maintain a Healthy Family. Consequently, Korean urban couples think that they have a Healthy Family when they maintain an equitable relationship in marriage.

However, considering the relation between the perception on gender equity and a Healthy Family by generations, it was shown that both of the groups have a statistically significant correlation. In other words, both the younger and the older generations scored high when they think of a marital relationship as a fair one. However, while the younger generations showed the highest marks when they think of their marital relationship as fair one, the older generations showed the highest marks when their marital relationships are in a little unfair state. It can be inferred that the younger generations more likely to be influenced by gender equity than the older generations are.

Table 8. The degree of the healthiness in Korean family by sex and generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husbands</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30, 40's</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50, 60's</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Perception of gender equity by sex and generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equitable</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Inequitable</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>61.96</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>38.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>65.73</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30, 40's</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>68.75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50, 60's</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>53.17</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>46.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < 0.05 \), *** \( p < 0.001 \)
CONCLUSION

Though Korean women's unequal status in family relations has not fundamentally changed in contrast to the past, their status is supposed to improve in the future considering that the younger generations try to follow the norm of equity. Above all, it is demanded that the men's way of thought be shifted in order to recover the health of family through gender equity.

Especially, since the purpose of family science is to improve the quality of life and maintain the relationship of a Healthy Family, such purpose will not be achieved if not backed by self-accomplishment and/or autonomy enhancement. In order to form and maintain a Healthy Family, though its environment plays an important part, it is more important and necessary to form a fair relationship between husbands and wives and to avoid a vertical hierarchy.

However, although a Korean family is confronting many problems such as the confusion of values in the middle of transition from a traditional society to a modern society, unlike the West, the traditional consciousness to maintain a family has strongly existed so far. Therefore, if family members have only to respect individual personality, improve self-accomplishment, and form fair conjugal relationship on the basis of above-mentioned traditional consciousness of family bonds, desirable family relationships can be achieved. In this aspect, it is estimated that Korean family has an great potential to adjust itself to the today's society.

To improve the healthiness of a Korean family, I think that our society must undergo the changes not only at the micro levels of units such as the male, the female, and the married couple, but also at the macro levels in order to get over a patriarchal ideology and provide family with various social support systems. Therefore, for Korean to live a fair and healthy family life, what has to be done are as follows:

First, each individuals must keep a mature attitude in order to develop his own ability and to form self-respect that to develop self-esteem.

Second, each family members must respect each other's personality and establish desirable family relationships through harmonious communication with each other.

Third, all kinds of social groups must create a social atmosphere to vitalize the consulting programs which will help solve the problems within a family and the education programs which will help make a fair conjugal relationship.

Fourth, the government must provide financial and institutional support in order to back up all sorts of activities.

Our society will be much more developed through the solutions of these present problems and our people's quality of life will be able to improve.

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韓国におけるジェンダー・エクイティと健全な家族との関係に関する研究

本稿の目的は、1）韓国における1960年以降の家族の変化を概観することによって、今日の家族の現状を把握すること、および2）経験的データを用いてジェンダー・エクイティと家族の健全さについて論ずることである。後者については、男女間と異世代間でジェンダー・エクイティの認知に差があるかどうか、またその認知と健全な家族はどのような関連があるのかを明らかにしたい。

結果として以下の諸点が指摘される。

1）家族は構造的にも機能的にも変化し、関係の上でも平等で民主的になっている。2）妻は、夫以上に、夫婦関係を不公平と考えている。3）3、40代の若年世代の方が、5、60代の高年世代よりも夫婦関係を公平とみなしている。4）夫と妻の家族に対する健全度得点は高く、両者間に有意差はないが、世代間については、若年世代の方が、高年世代よりも健全度得点が高い。5）夫婦関係を公平な関係とみなしているとき、夫と妻および両世代とも、健全度得点が高い。