

A Study of the Experiences of Korean International Students' Self-care in America

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative research conducted to understand the health management experience and to grasp the essence of the experience of international students who are increasing with globalization trend. The study method was phenomenological study, and the participants were 6 Korean students residing in America. They voluntarily agreed with participation for depth interview. The data collected from September to November 2017 and were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological methodology. It derived 7 theme clusters, 19 themes and 63 formulated meaning. The experience of Korean international students residing in America is based on the following criteria: 'Focusing more on dietary life', 'Maintaining habits good for health', 'Trying to prepare for any possible events', 'Taking a rest mind and body', 'Maintaining helpful relationships with people', 'To strive for the better future', 'Taking care of myself on my own'. A systematic health education program and for them needs to be provided for the academic achievement of international students and a healthy life in studying abroad.

Keywords: *Korean, International, Student, Self-care, Experience, Phenomenological, Study*

1. Introduction

The changes resulted from the trends of globalization are also distinctly found in the field of education. In fact, the number of students heading for different countries for academic reasons is increasing gradually. In the US, the country that most of the Korean students chose to study, there are 58,663 Korean international students presently in 2017. The next are China and India in order [1]. More and more international students chose to study in advanced countries, and it can be regarded as an index for the improvement of a country's educational or economic level. Although this can contribute to developing a country with the cultivation of competent persons equipped with global competitiveness, in terms of individual aspects, they get to experience a lot of difficulties, for example, culture shock in a strange environment, language-related communicative or academic problems, stress resulted from that, depression, racial discrimination, or social isolation [2].

International students have negative experiences diversely in physical, mental, and socio-cultural aspects, and this threatens each individual's health in general. Also, when they get to have any health problem, they find it even harder to use institutional devices to solve it. Due to the lack of health-related knowledge and information, socio-cultural difference, and lack of

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related knowledge and information, they face even more difficult situations to solve the health problem [3][4]. Korean undergraduates living in the US often get to feel lonely being away from their family. But they cannot make friends easily due to their language-related communicative problems. Their relationship with people around them gets changed, and their physical condition gets even worse day after day, which makes them feel exhausted both mentally and physically. They also get confused for feeling superior while studying abroad and also feeling inferior to the locals. But to solve their health problem, they try to use medical facilities, but it is hard for them. In fact, they gradually get to feel their limitations in adapting to it [5]. Most of the international students are in the early stage of adulthood. In this period, they should build up their own identity, form intimate relationship with people around, and become independent preparing for their occupation and marriage [6]. Many of the international students are making a lot of efforts in a strange socio-cultural environment in order to achieve their own developmental tasks and adapt to it. Humans are whole-rounded beings that can control themselves for their own health and behave prudently for the goal of health. In order to maintain their own physical, mental, and social well-being, they regulate themselves about the surrounding environment and perform activities correspondingly to it [7]. Negative experiences accompanying that process work as factors threatening each individual's health. Although the number of students heading for different countries to study is increasing day after day, our society has hardly paid attention to their health. Therefore, it is needed to conduct research on how international students manage their health and maintain their academic and everyday lives. This study is intended to investigate the adulthood experiences of Korean international students residing in America in terms of how they take care of themselves to be in good health.

2. Study method

2.1. Study design

This is a phenomenological study on what experiences Korean international students residing in the US get to have while taking care of themselves.

2.2. The selection of subjects & ethical consideration

The subjects of this study are Korean international students studying in the universities located in N City and C City in the east of the US who agreed to participate in this research. They are 2 undergraduates and 7 masters and doctors. 4 are female, and 5 are male. Their age ranges from 25 to 36. They have studied in America for 1.5 to 8 years. For ethical consideration over the participants, this researcher provided them with a written agreement dealing with the purpose and method of this study, procedure of participation and process, guaranteeing of anonymity and confidentiality, right to quit participating in it, and the disuse of research material, and it was explained orally as well. Only those who understood the contents fully and agreed to participate voluntarily were asked to fill out the written agreement.

2.3. Data collection

The data of this study were collected from September up to November, 2017. Thanks to the introduction of international students or this author's acquaintances, the subjects were collected, and appointments were made on the phone in advance. As a place for interviews,

this researcher’s lab or house was chosen as a quiet place no with interferences with the interviews. Questions used were basically the ones structuralized, and according to how the interviews were going, additional questions were asked, too. To get rid of any awkwardness in the first gathering, we talked about ordinary things in the beginning. The interview began with a question of ‘Regarding your health while you are studying abroad, what have you experienced, and how have you been taking care of health?’ The interview was done once for every participant. The interview lasted for about 50 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and after interviews immediately transcribed by researcher. This author compared what were recorded and transcribed repeatedly to enhance accuracy.

2.4. Data analysis

This is a phenomenological study applying Colaizzi’s methodology [8]. After reading the transcripts repeatedly, this author sorted out the statements related to the research topic and drew meanings from them with her own words. The meanings derived subthemes and themes, and they were again combined to draw theme clusters. According to the themes drawn in this way, this author described the essential structure of those participants’ experiences.

3. Result

According to the results of this study, the self-caring experiences of Korean international students residing in the US can be categorized into 63 meanings, 19 themes, and 7 theme clusters [Table 1]. 7 theme clusters drawn through 19 themes are found to be ‘focusing more on dietary life’, ‘trying to maintain habits good for health’, ‘trying to prepare for any possible events’, ‘taking a rest mentally and physically’, ‘maintaining desirable interpersonal relationships’, ‘struggling for the better future’, and ‘taking care of myself on my own’.

Table 1. The theme clusters of Korean international student’s self-care experience

Formulated Meaning	Theme	Theme Cluster
I eat cooked rice as the main food I eat Korean food when I am sick I go to the Korean food store regularly	I eat mostly Korean food	Focusing more on dietary life
I seriously consider how to cook I look for information for cooking I try not to eat out	I cook by myself	
I buy organic food I buy water to drink	I try to eat good quality food	
I try to eat vegetables and fruits more I try to eat salt, sugar, or fat less I consider calories to choose food I try to avoid processed goods	I consider the nutritional value of food	
I walk as much as possible I am in a sport club I exercise regularly I have a habit of doing simple exercise indoors	I always try to exercise	Maintaining habits good for health
I am sensitive about health information I have found my wrong eating habits	I have keep interest in health	

I have quit smoking I have reduced the amount and frequency of drinking	I have quit harmful habits	
I take a health examination regularly I eat health supplement food I take medicine even for a small symptom	I try not to catch any disease	Trying to prepare for health problem that might happen
I have someone that I can contact when I am sick I talk with my family in Korea everyday I use IT technology I have plenty of household medicine I go to the dispensary whenever I feel sick	I find ways to cope with my sickness	
I try to breath in clean air I enjoy my life in America with ease I enjoy the sunlight and air as much as I want	I enjoy the environment good for health	Taking a rest mind and body
I watch Korean TV programs I have hobbies and specialties I go for a walk I enjoy meditation	I try to have some free time	
I go to sleep when I have time I don't do anything I try to sleep regularly	I take a rest by sleeping	
I intend to get married for security I am with my spouse I lead a religious life	I try to seek composure in mind	
I try not to meet Koreans I try to protect my privacy I am cautious about meeting people I maintain some distance from others	I try not to waste my feelings unnecessarily	Maitaining helpful relationships with people
I get along with Korean international students International students and I console each other	I gain power from people	
I go to the church for the locals I join in the club for American students I try to look into the place where I live I let people know of me aggressively	I try to go into the natives	To strive for the better future
I am focused on studying solely I do my best for my duties I plan a busy day I urge myself not to be loosened I suppress other needs	I try to reach my goal	
I go to the health care center I get a check-up at the clinic I take medicine I buy at the drugstore	I seek specialized help	Taking care of myself on my own
I try to keep myself warm I drink warm water I take a rest at home I eat nutritiously	I use the knowledge of health I already known	

The first theme cluster of focusing more on dietary life consists of the followings: I eat mostly Korean food, I cook myself, I consider nutrients, and I try to eat quality food. The

second theme cluster of 'trying to maintain habits good for health' is composed of the followings: I try to exercise, I have keen interest in health, and I have quit drinking and smoking. The third theme cluster of 'trying to prepare for any possible events' consists of the followings: I try not to catch any disease and I find ways to cope with my sickness. The fourth theme cluster of 'taking a rest mentally and physically' is composed of the followings: I enjoy the environment good for health, I try to have some free time, I take a rest by sleeping, and I try to seek composure in mind. The fifth theme cluster of 'maintaining desirable interpersonal relationships' consists of the followings: I try not to consume my feelings unnecessarily and I gain power from people. The sixth theme cluster of 'striving for the better future' is composed of the followings: I try to go into the US society and I struggle for the goal. Lastly, the seventh theme cluster of 'taking care of myself on my own' consists of the followings: I seek specialized aid and I use the knowledge of health I already know.

4. Conclusion

Korean international students residing in America are aware that health is important to attain their goal, and to maintain health, they should try not to catch any disease. They feel it is important to lead a good dietary habit which they could not realize before. Also, they try to have habits good for health, for instance, exercising or quitting drinking and smoking. They have become more interested in health and more sensitive about related information although they did not pay attention to it that much before. To cope with any situation that they are sick, they prepare for household medicine. They try to eat health supplement food eagerly as well. Despite their busy schedule for studying, they try to take a rest to gain physical as well as mental comfort. When they have free time, they enjoy their hobbies and specialties, too. In order not to consume their emotion in the narrow world of international students unnecessarily, they try to have distance from other Korean international students. But getting along with people, they relieve their stress and get power as well. To get over the language barriers and cultural differences and attain their own goals, they try to exchange with the locals positively. They also strive recalling what they had in their mind in the beginning. In the process, if they get to have any health problem, they try to seek specialized aid or take care of themselves based on the rules of health they know.

In the process, it was shown that the thoughts and efforts to maintain their health. In particular, most of them thought that they could prevent disease in health care, maintain their diet in the culture they grew up in, and promote their health through regular and steady exercise. In this study it was possible for Korean international students to understand how they are doing their self-care. However, there is no systematic and concrete knowledge on this, and accurate information about the medical system is also lacking. Therefore, a systematic health education program and for them needs to be provided for the academic achievement of international students and a healthy life in studying abroad.

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