Gender Differences in Depression, Life Satisfaction, and Health in Middle-Aged Koreans

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate gender differences in health, depression, and life satisfaction among the middle aged in Korea. Also the predictors of depression by gender were identified.

Methods

The data in this cross-sectional descriptive study were derived from the "2010 Survey for Health, Life condition, and Welfare Needs of Middle Aged Koreans" conducted by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs. The health related characteristics included perceived health, alcohol drinking, nutrition, exercise, chronic disease, and climacteric syndrome. The participants were asked "Have you ever experienced sadness or helplessness affecting your life for 2 weeks or longer during the past 12 months?" to identify depression. Those who answered "yes" to the question were designated to the depressed group. Life satisfaction was measured using the 12 item Korean version (Rhee, Suh, Gho & Park, 1994) of Life Satisfaction Index A (Neugarten, Harvighurst, & Tobin, 1961). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 21.0 (SPSS, Chicago IL, USA). Chi-square tests were used to identify the differences in health related characteristics, depression, and life satisfaction by gender. T-test was used to compare life satisfaction by gender. The multiple logistic regression model was used to identify the significant predictors for depression in each gender.

Result

The proportion of male alcohol drinkers (75.1%) was higher than that of females (46.5%) (X^2 = 345.479, p= .000). 11.6% of males reported that they had experienced discomfort due to the climacteric syndrome whereas 34.5% of females reported discomfort (X^2 = 294.651, p= .000). The proportion of females with chronic disease (32.4%) was higher than that of males (28%) (X^2 = 9.186, p= .002). 9.1% of males reported their health as poor and 14.1% of females reported their health as poor (X^2 = 60.559, p= .000). 6.8% of males revealed that they experienced depressed mood whereas 13% of females reported depressed mood (X^2 = 44.303, p= .000). The level of life satisfaction (t=1.968, p=0.049) of males were higher than that of females. There were no significant differences in having a spouse, nutrition, and exercise by gender. Males who had a spouse (OR: 0.510, 95% CI = 0.313-0.830), perceived their health as good (OR: 0.376, 95% CI = 0.200-0.710), or who had higher life satisfaction (OR: 0.922, 95% CI = 0.893-0.952) were less likely to experience depression. Males who had climacteric syndrome (OR: 4.264, 95% CI = 2.779-6.542) were more likely to experience depression. Females who had higher life satisfaction (OR: 0.900, 95% CI = 0.880-0.921), perceived their health as good (OR: 0.429, 95% CI = 0.288-0.641) or fair (OR: 0.469, 95% CI = 0.326-0.675) were less likely to experience depression. Females who had chronic disease (OR: 1.660, 95% CI = 1.218-2.261) and climacteric syndrome (OR: 1.793 95%, CI = 1.349-2.383) were more likely to experience depression.

Table 1. Effects of Sociodemographic and Health-related Characteristics on Depression (N=4,050)

Variables	Categories	Depression			
		Male(n=1,995)		Female(n=2,095)	
		OR (95% CI)	p	OR (95% CI)	p
Age		.965 (.91-1.02)	.213	1.001 (.96-1.04)	.980
Education	Middle school	.798 (.45-1.42)	.444	.470 (.30-.73)	.001
	High school	.633 (.37-1.09)	.098	.537 (.35-.83)	.005
	College	1		1	
Spouse	Yes	.502 (.31-.82)	.006	.829 (.58-1.19)	.305
	No	1		1	
Income level	High	1.582 (.45-5.59)	.476	.864 (.33-2.28)	.767
	Middle	.921 (.56-1.52)	.747	.731 (.53-1.00)	.053
	Low	1		1	
Health	Very good/good	.376 (.20-.71)	.003	.429 (.29-.64)	.000
	Fair	.619 (.36-1.07)	.085	.469 (.33-.68)	.000
	Poor/very poor	1		1	
Nutrition (diet habit)	Very good/good	.862 (.46-1.61)	.643	.889 (.55-1.45)	.635
	Fair	1.513 (.77-2.96)	.226	1.101 (.64-1.90)	.731
	Poor/very poor	1		1	
Alcohol drinking	No	.679 (.42-1.10)	.113	1.054 (.79-1.41)	.724
	Yes	1		1	
Exercise	Yes	1.223 (.80-1.88)	.356	.970 (.72-1.31)	.844
	No	1		1	
Chronic disease	Yes	1.370 (.88-2.13)	.161	1.660 (1.22-2.26)	.001
	No	1		1	
Climacteric syndrome	Uncomfortable	4.264 (2.78-6.54)	.000	1.793 (1.35-2.38)	.000
	Comfortable	1		1	
Life satisfaction		.922 (.89-.95)	.000	.900 (.88-.92)	.000

Conclusion

There were gender differences in depression, life satisfaction, and health in middle aged Koreans. Females had lower levels of life satisfaction than that of males. The proportions of females with depression and poor health were higher than that of males. There were differences in predictors of depression according to gender.