ABSTRACT

Background: Many studies on sexual attitudes and behavior have been performed to improve sexual health.

Aim: To evaluate changing trends in Korean female sexual life and attitudes in an internet-based survey at 10-year intervals.

Methods: The survey was targeted toward 20- to 59-year-old women who were asked to complete the questionnaire only if they were sexually active. The survey contained 110 questions about demographic statistics, sexual life, and attitudes that were crafted based on the 2004 study.

Outcomes: Results of the 2004 study vs those of the 2014 study.

Results: In total, 516 women participated in the study; the questionnaire response rate was 16.0%. The mean frequency of intercourse (FOI) per month was $3.46 \pm 2.56$ in 2014 vs $5.34 \pm 3.84$ in 2004. Women in their 20s and 30s in 2014 reported a lower mean FOI than those in 2004. There was no significant difference in the mean FOI in 2004 vs 2014 for women who in their 40s. Risk factors for lower FOI were being older, being single, and having dyspareunia. Most Korean women had positive attitudes toward sex ($3.2 \pm 0.6$ of 5) and considered it as important ($3.3 \pm 0.7$ of 5) as those surveyed in 2004. However, women 20 to 39 years old had less positive attitudes toward sex than in the past decade. Women in their 40s were more active and had more conversations with their partners. Of women using contraceptives, 63.8% were found to use less effective methods, such as intercourse withdrawal and the fertility awareness method.

Clinical Implications: Assessment of changing trends in Korean female sexual life, attitudes, and contraceptive methods could help to establish proper national sexual education programs and campaigns.

Strengths and Limitations: This study was not a cohort study, because subjects in the 2014 were not identical to those in the 2004 study. Nevertheless, we applied the same inclusion and exclusion criteria for this internet survey, a suitable tool to evaluate the sex life of women, which is often considered a sensitive and private issue in Asian culture.


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Key Words: Internet-Based Survey; Female Sexual Life; Female Sexual Attitude; Contraception

INTRODUCTION

Many studies on sexual attitudes and behavior have been performed to improve sexual health. In Britain, nationwide surveys about attitudes toward sex and lifestyles have been conducted at 10-year intervals. Studies conducted in Western countries have shown that people have become more permissive in their attitudes toward premarital sex and homosexuality in recent decades, as is the case worldwide. In contrast, the reported frequency of intercourse (FOI) has remained the same or decreased, depending
on the type of sex. These results provide important data for public health. The sexual awareness of a society affects individuals’ sexual health and the enforcement of existing laws. Also, the FOI is directly related to sexual difficulties, dysfunction, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

In Asian countries, similar studies on sexual attitudes and frequency have been conducted; however, these were simply cross-sectional studies and mainly targeted young people regarding HIV- and AIDS-related subjects. In Korea, few researchers have conducted investigations at regular intervals regarding attitudes toward sex. For the purpose of improving sex education, preceding studies focused on contraceptive usage and the sexual debut of young students.

In these circumstances, we carried out an internet survey about the sexual life and attitudes of women in 2004. The internet survey was a suitable tool to evaluate the sex life of women, which is often considered a sensitive and private issue in Asian culture. In the 2004 study, basic data regarding the sex lives of women 20 to 40 years old were collected. The survey showed that Korean women had mainly positive attitudes toward sex.

METHODS

From July to August 2014, we sent e-mails to 50,000 women in their 20s to 50s who were registered with an internet survey company. The research panel represented a national population-based sample of women who agreed to take part in internet surveys. The women who had engaged in sex at least once a month in the past 6 months were allowed to participate in the study. Sexual activity was defined as vaginal sex between men and women; the participants’ sexual orientation was not considered. The participants were asked to fill out all the anonymous, self-administered questionnaires about their demographics and sexual life. Of the respondents, women who were sexually inactive in the past 6 months or who did not complete all the questions were excluded. In addition, we excluded the results from short response times (<20% of average response time) and suspicious results that could not be deemed reliable by telephone confirmation.

The study was approved by the international review board of the Seoul Metropolitan Government at the Seoul National University Boramae Medical Center (Seoul, Korea). The survey contained questions about demographic statistics, sexual life, and attitudes toward sex that were crafted based on the 2004 study. Categories about sexual life queried FOI, age at menarche, number of sexual partners in their lifetimes, and their masturbation rate; the number of times of sexual intercourse or masturbation referred to the past 1 month. The attitude items consisted of four questions asking about their thoughts (perceptions, values) and sexual behaviors (conversation, activeness). For perception, the question was, “What is your general perception of sexual intercourse?” For value, the question was, “How important is it to have sex or be satisfied by it in your life?” For conversation, the question was, “How often do you talk to your partner about your sex life?” For activeness, the question was, “How actively do you participate in sexual intercourse?”

Starting with the original version (from 2004), we added questions from the Korean versions of the Overactive Bladder Symptom Score (OABSS) questionnaire and the Beck Depressive Inventory—II (BDI-II). Women in their 50s were added to the group of participants to enable an understanding of changes across broad age groups. Because of relatively small numbers of older people using the internet, there was a lack of data from women in their 50s in 2004.

Statistical Analysis

The results of the 2004 study were reanalyzed for comparison with the results of the 2014 study. We used the Student t-tests or Mann-Whitney test for continuous variables according to normality assumption. The χ² test or Fisher exact test was conducted for categorical variables. Univariable and multivariable Poisson regression analyses were applied to examine the association between FOI and independent variables in the 2004 and 2014 results. Multivariable analyses were conducted using significant variables in univariable analyses, and backward elimination was applied to avoid multicollinearity problems. Statistical significance was considered a P value less than .05, and the final significant factors are presented in the tables with P values and rate ratios. All continuous variables that could be processed are presented as average ± SD. For statistical analysis, SPSS 23.0 (SPSS, Inc, Chicago, IL, USA) and R 3.4.0 (http://www.r-project.org) were used.

RESULTS

General Characteristics

E-mails were sent to 50,000 women and 3,215 of the e-mail recipients actually opened the given questionnaire. Of those who read the e-mails, 1,831 unqualified candidates were excluded. Another 819 participants who failed to finish answering the questionnaires were excluded. Eighty-five were excluded because their response times were too short (average response time < 20%) or their responses turned out to be unreliable through leading questions. Five hundred sixteen women were retained in the study; thus, the response rate was 16.0%.

Participants consisted of 131 women in their 20s, 141 women in their 30s, 144 women in their 40s, and 100 women in their 50s (Table 1). The number of unmarried women was 135 (26.2%), and the number of married women was 368 (71.3%). Of the unmarried women, 48.9% had jobs, and office worker was the most frequent job (49 respondents [36.3%]). Most married women were housewives (303 respondents [82.3%]), and office work was the most frequently reported profession of married working women (36 respondents [12.0%]).
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