



Study on the change and acculturation of dietary pattern of Southeast Asian workers living in South Korea



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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the dietary pattern of Southeast Asian workers (Vietnamese, Thais, Cambodians and Myanmar) living in South Korea in order to recognize the dietary changes after they moved to South Korea. Questionnaires were completed by 251 Southeast Asian workers living in South Korea. Using a self-administered questionnaire, we assessed the diets before and after living in the hometown and in South Korea. Significant changes observed in the Southeast Asian workers were decreased in consumption frequency of fresh fruits, cooked vegetables, rice noodles, green tea and glutinous rice, and increase in consumption of Kimchi, seaweed, milk, coffee and pizza. These changes were attributed to rapid dietary acculturation. The frequencies of eating homemade food were significantly decreased after they came to Korea except for Thais. Thais showed the highest frequencies of eating homemade food daily among others. 28.2% of respondents said their health condition had deteriorated after living in South Korea due to difficulties to adapt Korean food, increased frequencies of eating instant food, and lacking exercises. By providing understanding of the dietary patterns of Southeast Asian workers, these results can be used for preliminary data to develop a program for their Korean food adaptation.

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1. Introduction

As international exchange and cooperation grow thanks to advances in transportation and communications worldwide, global migration has been actively boosted. Korea is a homogeneous country with about 5000 years of history. However, the country's foreign population is recently increasing rapidly as international relations are briskly promoted. While foreigners are coming to Korea not only for study or tour but also for employment, the country is now swiftly transforming into an aging society with elderly people aged 65 or over accounting for 13.1% of the population (Statistics Korea, 2015). As a result, economically active population is on the decline and this problem is now being resolved by the influx of foreign workers. As of Oct. 2015, this immigration policy has increased the number of foreign residents living in Korea by 9.4%, reaching a total of 1.373 mil., and 938,000 of them are in employment (Statistics Korea 2016).

When living abroad as a foreigner, they should experience and adapt to a new environment including languages, social systems, interpersonal relations, and new food in particular, one of the easiest experiences they can have when living in a foreign country, works as the most representative cultural symbol of the country (Regev-Tobias et al., 2012). When they leave their home and are supposed to adapt to a new environment, it is necessary to grasp the cultural characteristics of the host country and at the same time, prepare for dietary changes. In addition, it is required that they should have a positive attitude to actively embrace a new culture quite different from theirs (Papadaki, Hondros, Scott, & Kapsokefalou, 2007). Dietary acculturation is one of the cultural elements into which they should assimilate first of all, while living away from home (Song & Kim, 2015).

There are several studies reporting difficulties in dietary acculturation and dietary changes in the process of acculturation according to the duration of stay of foreign students (Jeon et al. 2013; Ryu, Cho, & Han, 2014; Song & Kim, 2015). Recently, several diet-related studies have been conducted briskly including study on dietary attitude and behavior of female marriage immigrants (Cha, Bu, Kim, Kim, & Choi, 2012; Han, Shin, & Kim, 2011; Kim & Lee,

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2009; So & Han, 2012), study on dietary acculturation following migration to Korea (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2012; Lee, 2012). Several researches analyzing the diets of female marriage immigrants with various nationalities including Chinese women married to Korean men indicate that the longer they stay in Korea, the better they take control of their diets (Cha et al. 2012), and that there is a positive correlation between the extent of dietary acculturation and the duration of stay. Another research (Lee, 2012) shows that Korean food is most preferred by those who have lived in Korea one year or less and least preferred by those who have lived in Korea for 5–7 years and that intake of fish, vegetables, dairy products, fruits, meat have increased by 40%–50%. In addition, there is a report showing that female marriage immigrants living in Korea one year or less have a higher level of dietary balance in the categories of meat, fish, calcium, glucide, potatoes, compare with those who living in Korea 3 years or more (Kim & Lee, 2009). Meanwhile, studies on the correlation between cultural adaptation and dietary acculturation of migrants were conducted not only in Korea but also in other countries and several studies conducted overseas on the subject mentioned above concluded that there is a strong correlation between these two events and the process of dietary acculturation has an influence on dietary changes and health of both individuals and families (Franzen & Smith, 2009; Lesser, Gasevic, & Lear, 2014; Raberg-Kjollsdal, Holmboe-Ottesen, & Wandel, 2010; Serafica, Lane, & Ceria-Ulep, 2013; Unger et al. 2004; Van Rompay et al. 2012; Wahlqvist, 2002).

A study to analyze the causes for undesirable eating habits in the process of dietary acculturation of Greek students studying in Glasgow, Scotland reported that their intake of fresh fruits, meat, and cheese became less frequent due to rapid dietary acculturation while consumption of snack foods increased (Kremmyda, Papadaki, Hondros, Kapsokefalou, & Scott, 2008). Franzen and Smith (2009) conducted a study on how environmental changes and acculturation, etc. affect the dietary behavior and health of adult Hmongs. Hmong population who was born in Thailand/Laos and lived in the U.S. 5 years or less or spent his/her adolescence in Thailand/Laos, therefore having memories of homeland food was found overweight. Among adult Hmong population who was born in the U.S. or lived in Thailand/Laos less than 8 years and accordingly having no memories of homeland food, men were found to be obese and women overweight. It was suggested that environmental changes and cultural adaptation affected negatively the weight and health of adult Hmong population.

In a study conducted by Lv and Cason (2004) to identify changes in dietary patterns and acculturation of Chinese Americans, an increase in food intake of Chinese Americans was observed in all food groups after they had migrated to America. Particularly, intake of western food increased, whereas that of Chinese food decreased. The study concluded that the first generation immigrants should cut down on fats, sugary foods, carbonated drinks and that those who haven't yet fully adapted themselves to a new culture should maintain their previous dietary patterns, increasing intake of vegetables and fruits.

As the results of previous studies carried in abroad that adaptation of immigrants to new cultures is closely related to adaptation to new food culture (Franzen & Smith, 2009; Lesser et al., 2014; Serafica et al., 2013; So & Han, 2012). According to the study on Korean married immigrant women, adaptation to food culture is one of the main tasks in adapting to Korean society. It is important for harmonious family life, healthy child raising, building a desirable multicultural society and social integration (Lee, 2012).

It is expected that the inflow of foreign workers in Korea will continue to increase to supply labor force in aging society. For Southeast Asian workers who come to Korea with a view to making money for a certain period and then go back to their home

countries and in this context, whose purpose of coming to Korea is different from those of foreign students, female marriage immigrants, immigrants mainly surveyed in the previous studies, however, just like for these people, dietary acculturation is essential for these Southeast Asian workers to assimilate well into a new culture. Although adaptation of dietary culture in Korea is expected to enhance adaptation in a new environment, study on the dietary life of foreign workers in Korea is lack compared to the study on multicultural families.

This study aims to find out changes in dietary patterns and acculturation of foreign workers from four countries in the Indochina peninsula, which have similar geographical characteristics; Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar. We will examine food items they eat in their home countries and in Korea and identify diet-related problems they may undergo. Food items they eat in their home countries and in Korea. From the findings, we will suggest how to minimize the undesirable effects likely to happen during dietary acculturation as found in the previous studies, to help them well adapt to Korean diets by finding out how food intake, eating habits and behavior have changed since their moving to Korea.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Duration and subjects

This study was conducted for Asian workers from Indochina countries among foreign workers living in Northern region of Gyeonggi Province, South Korea, using a questionnaire translated into 4 languages (Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, and Myanmar language) for about one month from April 14, 2015 thru May 17, 2015. A total of 255 responses were collected by convenient sampling and 251 responses (response rate 98.47%) except the disqualified ones were used for analysis. Most of the participants were recruited from migrant workers visiting Uijeongbu Support Center for Foreign Workers. Sampling numbers by nationality was proportional to the numbers who live in South Korea based on the Statistics Korea 2014 (Statistics Korea 2014).

2.2. Methods

The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections including general information on the study subjects, health, dietary practices, and dietary behavior. Out of 4 sections, responses to general information, health, and dietary practices sections were used for analysis. General information section included age, gender, marital status, financial conditions, employment, possibility of cooking food. Health and dietary practices sections incorporated questions about frequency of food consumption, changes in dietary practices, health condition after moving to Korea. Health condition and changes in dietary practices after moving to Korea sections were designed by revising and complementing questions used in the previous studies (Asano, Yoon, & Ryu, 2015a, 2015b; Jo & Kim, 2014; Kremmyda et al. 2008; Lv & Cason, 2004). Frequency of food consumption check list was made for selected 34 food items and measured for analysis on a scale of 1–7 (2–3 times per day, once per day, 5–6 times per week, 2–4 times per week, once per week, 1–3 times per month, once or less per month).

The draft questionnaire went thru review by the director and the interpreters of Uijeongbu Support Center for Foreign Workers. After revision and improvement were made to some questions, it was translated into 4 languages (Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Myanmar language) and sent to the subjects with explanation. It was a self-administered questionnaire. Taking into account the demographic composition of foreign workers living in Korea and

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