Mental Health of School Nurses in Osaka Prefectural High School

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We examined the mental health conditions of school nurses who are working in Osaka prefectural high school. Out of 254 school nurses we have got 118 answers (47%). They complaint that their profession is not well recognized (58%) and they have difficulties to find out someone to ask their job difficulties (72%). Sixty-seven percent of them have thought at least once that they hoped to quit their work. Thirty-seven percent of the school nurses were mentally unhealthy, although 25% of general office workers were unhealthy and mental unhealthiness is more prominent in younger school nurses. These results indicate that many school nurses in Osaka prefectural high school were mentally unhealthy and we believe that these unhealthiness of school nurses is one of the obstacles for holistic cares or education of high school students. We have to make the supporting or re-educating system for school nurses.

Key Words: school nurse, mental health, Osaka prefectural high school, general office workers

I Introduction

It is well known that Japanese society is highly competitive and is sometimes defined as a school, career-oriented society. Children experience so-called 'exam hell' even when they are very young (e.g. kindergarten pupils). Furthermore, school refusals, bullying in children and suicide are also very serious problems in Japan. This characteristic of Japanese society seems to load high stress not only on children but also on teachers and school nurses. Furthermore, school nurses are expected to play the role of social trainer, to teach children to behave properly and sometimes they are expected to play as counselor, as in Japanese system school counselors are not well qualified. As almost all school nurses in Japan are public officials, the aspiration level of the school nurse's job requested by parents and other teachers is usually very high and they are obliged to do many works. Therefore, the nature of the school nurse's job in Japanese schools seems to be very complex and their responsibility is very heavy compared to school nurses in western countries.

One of their main roles is to take care of high school students from the stand point of holistic care or holistic education. However, they have many problems in their daily works. In this article we would like to present the mental conditions of school nurses
who are working in Osaka prefectural high school and investigate factors which influence their mental health.

II Materials and methods

The subjects were 254 school nurses who are working in Osaka prefectural high school. We explained to representatives the object of this study and obtained their consent. The period of this investigation was between July to September in 1994. To all these school nurses we send questionnaire sheets. The questionnaire contains personal information, their difficulties in working, their support conditions and the short version of GHQ (General Health Questionnaire). GHQ questionnaire were also send to general office workers. We send GHQ questionnaire to 200 white-collar workers. They were from 5 different companies and the majority were categorized into clerks and sales jobs. Section chiefs and executives were not included in this study. The size of the companies can be classified as small to medium sized (30-300 workers). Detailed questionnaires are presented in the followings.

Q1: Have you ever annoyed because of difficulties in your job?
Q2: With whom did you ask your job’s difficulties?
Q3: Do you think that you are supported by your colleagues?
Q4: Do you think that other teachers and colleagues are indifferent to school health job?
Q5: If there is only one school nurse in your school, how do you think of it?
Q6: Do you think that it is necessary to have at least two school nurses in your school?
Q7: Do you think that school nurses are not well recognized?
Q8: Have you ever thought once that you would like to quit your job?
Q9: Short version of GHQ (General Health Questionnaire). GHQ was developed by Goldberg (1970). It was translated into Japanese and its reliability and validity was examined by Nakagawa (1985). Munakata et al. (1986) developed a short version of GHQ which consists 30 questionnaires. The reliability and the validity of this short version of GHQ were evaluated by Munakata et al. (1986). This inventory is useful for measuring mental health conditions and 7/8 is thought to be a cut off point. Thus, a person with more than 8 points is thought to be mentally unhealthy. Statistical analyses were done using the chi squares test and analysis of variance.

III Results

Out of 254 school nurses we have got 118 answers (47%). One hundred and twenty general office workers out of 200 answered GHQ questionnaire (60%). All were female. Demographic data of them were demonstrated in Table 1.

1) Q1: Have you ever annoyed because of difficulties in your job?
   Eighty-five school nurses said yes (72%).
Table 1. Demographic data of school nurses and general office workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No of cases</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School nurses</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>female 100%</td>
<td>BA 67%</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General office workers</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>female 100%</td>
<td>BA 70%</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BA: bachelor of art

Table 2. Incidence of mentally unhealthy cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unhealthy</th>
<th>Healthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurses</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General office workers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < 0.01

2) Q2: With whom did you ask your job's difficulties?

Ninety-eight school nurses (83%) asked school nurses in other schools, 74 (63%) asked other teachers, 59 (50%) asked school masters, 18 (15%) asked their friends.

3) Q3: Do you think that you are supported by your colleagues?

They think that they were supported by school master (64%) and by other teachers (47%).

4) Q4: Do you think that other teachers and colleagues are indifferent to school health profession. Fifty-five school nurses (47%) answered yes.

5) Q5: If there is only one school nurse in your school, how do you think of it?

Seventy-eight school nurses (66%) answered that they complained that they could not have enough holidays and 58 school nurses (49%) could not ask to colleagues about their difficulties in job.

6) Q6: Do you think that it is necessary to have at least two school nurses in your school?

One hundred (85%) school nurses answered yes.

7) Q7: Do you think that school nurses are not well recognized?

They complained that their profession is not well recognized (58%) and they have difficulties to find out someone to ask their difficulties (72%).

8) Q8: Have you ever thought once that you would like to quit your job? Seventy-nine school nurses (67%) have thought at least once that they hoped to quit their work.

9) GHQ: Forty-four school nurses (37%) and 31 general office workers (25%) showed over 8 points, which indicated mentally unhealthy. School nurses were significantly high ratio of mentally unhealthiness compared with general office workers (p < 0.01) (Table 2). And there were tendencies that younger school nurses are more unhealthy compared with elderly ones (Table 3).
Table 3. GHQ points and the duration of working in school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>GHQ points (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.7(6.6)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.2(6.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.9(6.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19 years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7.6(5.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.5(2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.1(2.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.01

IV Discussion

The population of Osaka Prefecture is about 8 million and 8 hundred thousand in the end of 1995. We have 156 Osaka prefectural high schools, which have about 500 to 1500 students. In every high school there is at least one school nurse but some of schools have only one school nurse. Several authors investigated the mental health conditions of Japanese school nurses (Ogura et al. 1989, Hirakawa et al. 1989). They concluded that Japanese school nurses were mentally unhealthy but they did not compare with other professions. We compared mental health conditions of school nurses and general office workers by using short version of GHQ. In our preliminary results 37% of school nurses were mentally unhealthy, although 25% general office workers revealed the mental unhealthiness. And they complaint that their profession in not well recognized (58%) and they have difficulties to find out someone to ask their problems (72%). These results suggest that school nurses were unhealthy compared with general office workers and their supporting network is thought to be very poor. We think that these unhealthiness of school nurses is one of the obstacles for holistic cares or education of high school students. Generally speaking, mental health conditions are relatively very bad in health professions. It is only in recent years that occupational stress among health professions has began to be investigated, although so-called occupational stress has been identified as a serious problem in all human services. Many studies have been indicated that many health professions suffer job stress and are sometimes defeated by it.

The nature of the environment of school nurses depends upon the society or culture to which they belong. Therefore, it is expected that the characteristics of school nurses' stress will vary according to the type of society. Hirakawa et al. investigated the comparison of school nurses in USA and Japan in 1982. They concluded that Japanese school nurses are more unhealthy compared with those in USA. Especially the job satisfaction of school nurses in Japan is very low compared with nurses in USA. Such a gap of mental health or job satisfaction in international comparison must be done precisely in the near future and the factors for promoting mental health for
school nurses must be investigated.

As Lazarus (1966) indicated that stress can be regarded as a process involving an interaction between the individual and the environment that includes stressors, intervening variables and responses. Therefore, the environment of school nurses can be regarded as crucially important factor in their job stress. In particular, the quality of interpersonal relations with pupils, colleagues, supervisors and parents seems to be the most stressful factor in professional school nurses.

As to the length of experience, the longer the experience was, the less the incidence of mental unhealthiness was. Munakata et al. (1985) presume that the young subgroup of the health profession tends to be mentally unhealthy because of reality shock. The similar phenomenon were observed in nurses and teachers in mental retarded. (Shiiya et al. 1990, 1991, Iida et al. 1991) Regarding this phenomenon, we suppose that the subjects can fill the gap between ideal and reality by themselves, with progression of technique and ability over time.

There may be several reasons why the school nurses are mentally unhealthy in Japan. First, their jobs are too hard because they have to care over 1000 students by only one school nurse. They are requested to do many roles in schools. They do not have classes but they have to do miscellaneous works. Further, in Japan the school refusal and bullying is a one of the biggest social problems. As we have only three qualified clinical psychologists or school counselors in Osaka prefecture in 1995, school nurses are also obliged to do counseling to students.

Second reason is that the educational system of school nurses are very complicated in Japan. In Osaka prefecture almost half of school nurses are trained or educated as nurses. Other half of the school nurses were trained and educated as teachers of health education. Both training or qualified systems are found in Japanese school nurse education. From this point school nurses in Japan can be trained not only in schools for nurses but also in schools for teachers of health science. Furthermore, nurses' educational system are not systematized. That is, there are at least several educational systems for nurses. Mainly we have 6 year elementary school and 3 year junior high school. These period is obligating educating period in Japan. After that we go to high school. There are special high school for nurses. If they graduate from special high school for nurses, they are qualified as Junkangofu (semi-authorized nurses). Normally they can be qualified as registered nurses, if they graduate from 3 year course of nurse school after graduating from high school. Furthermore, these several years we have founded colleges for nurses which need 4 year education for registered nurses. We hope the educating system for nurses must be simplified in the near future.

Japanese private companies have begun to spend huge amount of money to develop stress check systems and to device effective coping strategies for job stress. However, no survey concerning job stress in school nurses has been administered in Japan. Therefore, at present, no coping plan has been proposed by either the teachers union or the Board of Education. We have to make the supporting or re-educating system for school nurses urgently.
As the present survey was on rather a small scale. It is essential to conduct more large-scale surveys about the stress conditions of school nurses and to prepare effective coping strategies.

V References


