

Cross Cultural Newsletter

“A Case of Contagion: Can Psychological Maladjustment of First Generation Korean Migrants be transmitted to Successive Generations?” by Ms Jungim Cho

27th November 2014



Sung Tan Chuk Ha!!
(Merry Christmas in Korean).

Dear Members,

Time flies. We have come to the last session of the year.

The speakers were **Ms Jungim Cho** (key speaker), **Ms Hyunsook Rhee**, **Dr Aram Kim** and **Ms Julia (Minkyong) Kwon**. We had no less than 40 attendees for this end-of- year session.

Ms Cho first provided **introductory remarks and vignettes**. **Dr Kim** then expounded on some common issues for the older generation viz **PTSD and its impact** on the victims and their off spring; with **Ms Rhee** presenting her **research findings** about the issues encountered by 1.5 and second generation Koreans undermining their relationships ; and **Ms Kwon** providing information about Korean migrant women’s depression. **Finally**, using 2 case vignettes, Ms **Cho concluded** the presentation by **emphasizing the importance in individual and family counseling to go beneath the surface to address the deeper psychological issues including delayed war trauma reactions**. She ended the session by giving Tips on how **best to approach and engage Korean clients**.

Ms Cho started the presentation by highlighting how in the counseling of individuals, and families, often the superficial presentation might cover up some deeper relationship issues between two generations affecting the outcome of the counseling process. She **used an iceberg to illustrate her point that discovering the sunken part of the iceberg is more important**. In her experience, an issue often forgotten by counselors of Korean clients is **the impact of war trauma on the older generation and how this would subtly affect the relationship with the second generations**. She used 2 vignettes to illustrate how relationship difficulties between generations have to do with the parent’s previous trauma experienced during the war-torn periods in Korea. She further emphasized that the importance of uncovering this could often enhance the development of empathy between generations and improves the relationship, especially in situations where dealing with the superficial conflicts do not help.

On war trauma, Ms Cho gave a **historical time line of the war torn years lived through by Koreans from 1909 to 1953 (the Korean War)**. The latter conflict caused much loss and emotional trauma to Koreans. **Dr Kim** further provided evidences on how war trauma could have a lingering effect and an enduring malign emotional legacy passed on to the second generation. After describing the psychiatric disorder called **PTSD**, a known outcome from traumatic events, Dr Kim remarked that the **PTSD** does not often end with the symptom complexes. **Many suffered from enduring personality and attitudinal changes (hostility and mistrust) affecting relationships and feeling of estrangement and emotional distancing**. It is these changes that would **affect the relationship and sometimes even pass onto the second generation by modeling without both parties being aware of the hidden problems**. Dr Kim remarked how such lingering issues would be further exaggerated by social, cultural and migration problems. The post war society with its emphasis on rebuilding and financial issues shadowed the individual’s need for emotional restitution. Likewise, the Korean cultural emphasis on emotional restraints, and shame issues forbidding the discussion of



emotions which is deemed a weakness have contributed to unresolved and the hiding of PTSD symptoms. The impact of stresses from migration has similarly distracted and hindered an individual's efforts to change. Dr Kim reckoned that these hidden issues often create hostility and tensions between the two generations. Tension and hostility, appearing as surface issues, would shroud the presentation, preventing a resolution of hidden agendas.

First generation issues aside, hidden issues with second generation abound to **affect the relationships**. Ms Rhee presented the result of her **research among senior Korean secondary** school students in New Zealand. In her research, she found that sources of stress originated from several arenas, viz : uncertainty about the future; stresses of school performance, conflict between academic duties and leisure time resulting in deprivation of the latter; cultural issues such as cultural difference and conflicts with peers and teachers, language barrier, interaction with homestay providers; and the experience of discrimination are some of the stresses. These all contributed to the hidden individual issues affecting relationships. Worse, international students fair worse than domestic pupils in New Zealand. 98 of those surveyed could identify no source of support. Following along the above theme on hidden individual issues, Ms Kwon discussed **depression among Korean migrant women. She said that psychological maladjustment is common among Korean woman varying from transitional issues, through relationship ones, to major illnesses such as depression**. The main cause for the latter is reckoned to be related to " gender " issues in which women are seen as unequal to their male counterparts and thus disempowered . Collective identification also takes away the individual esteem. The consequent emotional reactions from these are mixed feelings of sorrow, sadness, depression and vengefulness ("Han"). Then **Ms Cho used further examples to illustrate** how relationship issues between 2 generations could be affected by the senior's earlier problems such a war trauma , and how exploration of these issues leading to understanding could resolve the intergeneration conflicts.



Basing on the above revelations, **Ms Cho emphasized** on the importance to **going beneath the apparent and superficial issues (tip of the iceberg) to explore and reveal the underlying psychodynamic , cultural and trauma problems in order to inculcate insight and understanding between generations , thus leading to ultimate resolution of the conflicts**.



Finally, using her experience, Ms Cho **gave some tips on how best to approach and engage Korean clients** , viz : making mother the first contact person, finding good times and places to talk (e.g. over food and etc); acknowledging the importance of husband's role; teaching dialogue skills; and using other techniques such as "de-centering " by the remark that " it's not your fault " to reduce shame; teaching relaxation, and emotional regulation skills and more importantly, the emphasis that each individual member is equally important and responsible in the endeavor to resolve relationship problems.

There was much talk and discussion after the presentation. There was also **much interest generated on the issue of "shame" and psychotherapeutic implications in collective societies**.

For those interested, a DVD would be available soon. Please put your request through Diane. **HIGHLIGHT FOR NEXT YEAR:** We do not have any topics yet, however, we are negotiating with a clinical psychologist to talk **on infant psychology in the collective society**. This would likely be to be presented around May next year. We are also contemplating a presentation on **"Shame and its therapeutic implications in the collective society"**.



Finally, as we come to the closure of another year let me thank you on behalf of the **Cross Cultural Interest Group** for your incessant support throughout this year and wish you a **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!**

As ILS has all the rooms booked for every Tuesday next year, we may have to convene our meeting on Wednesdays or Thursdays. Please watch for announcements in our flyers.

I look forward to seeing you in 2015

S Wong
For
Cross Culture
Interest Group



For a more accurate rendition of the presentation, **please request the DVD** from Diane Evans at dianee@adhb.govt.nz (please send \$2 stamps to help cover costs)

For ADHB staff, previous newsletters and flyers can be viewed on the Intranet –

click on this link:

http://adhb.intranet/Mental_Health/Resources/CrossCulture.htm