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Round Table on Women's Issues

## Current Status of Women Librarians in the Republic of Korea

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### ■ 국 문 초 록 ■

본 연구는 한국 여성사서들의 전반적인 직업실태 및 직업관을 조사 분석함으로써 여성사서들이 향후 한국 사서직의 전문성 제고에 기여할 수 있는 방안을 모색해 봄에 그 목적을 두었다. 조사 대상은 전국의 공공, 대학, 전문도서관의 정사서자격증을 소지한 여성사서들이며 자기보고식 질문지를 통하여 자료를 수집, SPSS통계 패키지에 의해 처리하였다. 여성사서들의 인구학적 특성(연령별 분포; 결혼여부; 교육수준), 직업적 특성(관종별 분포; 직위; 재직연한; 업무지속성; 전문직적 활동), 직업에 대한 태도(결혼후의 계속근무의사; 직업계속동기; 성차별요인; 직업만족도) 등이 분석되었으며 결론을 통하여 한국사서직의 전문성제고와 발전을 위한 구체적인 방안이 제안되었다. [본 연구는 연구자의 박사학위논문(1991) 내용의 일부를 발췌한 것으로 통계수치는 기존의 연구결과에 「한국도서관통계」(한국도서관협회, 1993)상의 수치를 반영한 것임.]

### 1. Introduction

The change of industrial structure caused by rapid economic and industrial development in Korea since 1960 had greatly influenced

Korean society and also had an effect on changing the role and status of women both in family and social life. Since then, women gradually have been participated in social and economic activities as their opportunity for education expanded. Nowadays, in Korea,

women can be found in almost all occupations, and among them, librarianship is one of the popular fields into which women are entering steadily.

In the past, Korean librarianship did not show great difference in terms of numerical proportions between sexes. However, recent trend in issuing librarian certificates in the last few years have revealed that the proportion of women is 4 to 5 times higher than that of men-86% female.<sup>1)</sup> Also, the number of female newcomers entering four-year course of library & information science de-

partment are steadily increasing in recent years.

All these factors may well predict female dominance in numbers in the near future and prove librarianship to be one of the most important women's professions in Korea.

At present, the proportion of men vs. women professional librarians shows approximately 1 : 1.2. For better understanding of the overall situation of Korean librarianship, the detailed number of librarians between sexes by types of libraries as of 1995 are shown in table below :

Distribution of librarians by sex and types of libraries<sup>2)</sup>

	national(2)*	public(304)	coll. & univ.(378)	special(418)	total(1,102)
men	53	503	1,014	259	1,829
women	154	772	868	399	2,193

\*( )shows numbers of libraries

This paper aimed to investigate overall status of Korean women librarians by examining major factors relevant to their career, particularly focusing on the following viewpoints :

- 1) General characteristics of Korean women librarians
- 2) Occupational characteristics of Korean

women librarians

- 3) Korean women librarians' attitude toward their job

Since women librarians working in school libraries were excluded from this research, the result of this study might bear some limitations in generalizing overall Korean women librarians' status. Also, since there are no

1) source : Cooperation & Research Dept., National Library of Korea.

2) source : *Korean Library Statistics*. Seoul : Korean Library Association, 1996.

valid data on Korean men librarians, comparisons of various factors between sexes were impossible.

## 2. Analysis of data

### 2.1 Methodology

The subjects of investigation were all Korean full-time women librarians who were working in public, college & university, or special libraries throughout the nation, and who were possessing librarian certificate as of 1993. Total number of subjects were 2,065. Self-reported questionnaires were sent out to 587 libraries(2 national, 180 public, 213 college & university, and 192 special libraries). 1,837 questionnaires(89%) were returned, and they were used for the final analysis. For data analysis, questionnaires were coded, overall distribution was examined through frequency variables or percentage, and where necessary, they were divided by using median or distribution ratio.  $\chi^2$  and F value were used for statistical significance test. All these analysis were conducted through the SPSS(Statistical Package for the Social Science).

### 2.2 General characteristics of Korean women librarians

#### (1) Age distribution

For the age distribution of the respondents,

the group between the age of 26 to 30 showed the highest in number( $n=898$  or 48.9%). The next highest group ranged from age 31 to 35( $n=383$  or 20.9%). The group of under 25 was 15.3%( $n=281$ ), which came out that 85.1% of the total are under 35. This shows that general age level of women librarians are relatively young. In fact, until recently, Korean women have had a tendency to quit their job by the time they got married. Moreover, before 1970, mostly in private or special libraries, women were frequently advised or even forced to leave the work soon after their marriage by the employer. This might partly explain the reason why the number of older age group of women librarians are lesser than younger age group. The group of age 36 to 40 was 8.1% ( $n=149$ ), 41 to 50, 5.8%( $n=106$ ), and over 50 was 1.0%( $n=18$ ). The median age of the respondents was 30.0.

#### (2) Marital status

Whereas being married seems to have a positive effect on men's career, it seems to work negatively for women. Many people noted the difficulties a woman experiences in trying to combine marriage and family with a career. Particularly in Korean society, with the influence of Confucianism, the idea of restricting married women only within their

family responsibilities has been predominant for a long time. The marital status of the respondents was appeared as 58.5%(n=1,075) were single, 40.6% (n=746) married, and 0.9%(n=16) divorced, widowed, or separated. Among the married, 38.1% had one child and 26.5% had two. The mean number of child for married women librarians was 1.0.

(3) Educational attainment

Among the total, 79.3%(n=1,457) possessed bachelor's degrees and 7.1%(n=130) held Master's degrees as the highest degree, which came out that 86.4% of the total had minimum of college degrees(this includes both library degrees and non-library degrees). 7.6%(n=140) held two-year junior college diploma and 5.9%(n=108) had high school diploma.

2.3 Occupational characteristics of Korean women librarians

(1) Distribution by types of libraries

The distribution of women librarians by types of libraries showed that 29.9%(n=549) were in public(including 2 national libraries),

45.2%(n=830) in college & university, and 24.9%(n=458) in special libraries.

(2) Distribution by rank

The distribution by rank revealed that large proportion of the women librarians(n=1,416 or 77.1%) were at non-managerial level. There were only 1.0%(n=18) in upper managerial level, and 13.7%(n=252) were either at middle or lower managerial level.<sup>3)</sup> Since there is no valid information or data on overall positional structure by sex, it is unpredictable whether this low proportion in the managerial position is due to the sexual discrimination practices against women or actual number of managerial positions are relatively few in the library organizations by pyramidal structure. Considering the fact, however, that women's promotion is quite restricted in many other occupational fields in Korea, it is presumed that the case of librarianship would not be an exception.

(3) Length of professional library experience

Over half of the respondents(n=1,058 or 57.6%) reported that they have had profes-

3) "Upper manager" is defined as for the respondents who are holding the position of library director, associate or assistant director; "middle manager" refers to the next lower level, such as a head of a department, division, section or branch library; "lower manager" refers to an individual who supervises one or more employees and is at the lowest level of management.

sional experience for less than 5 years. This seems from the fact that overall age level of women librarians were relatively young as was shown in the above. The proportion of women librarians having professional experience of 5 to 7 years were 13.6% (n=250), 7 to 10 years, 12.5% (n=230), and 10 years or over were 16.2% (n=299).

#### (4) Work continuity

Various studies lend support to the belief that men have better records of work continuity than do women. In general, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, further education or some other family responsibility would be the major reasons for women having their career interrupted.

91.6% of the total (n=1,683) reported that they had not experienced stopping of career in their professional life. Among experienced (stopping of career) women librarians (n=154), 119 were married. Major reasons for their career interruption were pregnancy & childbirth (46.7%), and marriage (21.7%). Nearly half of them reported that the length of the period interrupted was less than 6 months.

#### (5) Professional activities

To know the degree of how much women librarians are involved in professional activities

would help to understand how actively they are at their work.

There are various professional associations or bodies where Korean librarians could join including Korean Library Association. It was appeared that only about one third of the respondents (n=665 or 36.2%) personally joined in one of these associations. Also, only about 12.0% (n=220) of the total reported they read professional literature 'frequently,' and 69.0% (n=1,268) reported 'often.' These figures reflect the fact that majority of women librarians were not actively participating in professional activities.

### 2.4 Korean women librarians' attitude toward their job

#### (1) Intention of continue working after marriage

Many people noted that women often consider their job as a temporary or just a stop-gap before marriage. Unmarried respondents were asked if they want to continue working after marriage, and 91.5% (n=984) responded 'yes, regardless of marriage.' This fact seems to imply that the majority of unmarried women librarians did not think marriage as a hindrance of their career any more but rather as a process in their lives.

#### (2) Reason for job continuation

For the reason of job continuation, there was a different viewpoint between single and married women librarians. While for the single, 'sense of achievement'(49.6%) was revealed as the most important reason, for the married, 'economic necessity(44.5%)' was indicated as the most crucial reason. It is noticeable, however, that both group responded 'social prestige'(single : 10.9%; married : 8.7%) as the least important reason for job continuation. This means that quite a lot of women librarians did not consider their job as socially prestigious.

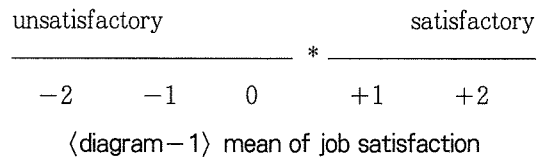
(3) Sexual discrimination against women

The issue of sexual discrimination in the work place is one of the most delicate social problems being debated constantly. Sexual discrimination usually takes place in the process of employment, work assignment, promotion, or salary scale, etc.

Women librarians were asked if they think they were being treated equally with men librarians in their work place. Nearly half of the respondents(n=896 or 48.8%) responded 'no' which implies that they have experienced sexual discrimination in some way. As an indication of major areas for discrimination, promotion was revealed as the highest(55.2%). The next highest was work assignment (20.8%), salary scale(15.1%), etc.

(4) Job satisfaction

As is shown in diagram-1 below, the respondents' degree of job satisfaction was revealed as a little bit high from the centroid, showing 0.427(mean) in the distribution from-2 to +2 in scale. This figure tells us that most women librarians were slightly satisfied with their job.



Among other variables that appeared statistically significant were age and types of libraries. By age level, those in their forties and fifties showed higher satisfaction, and respondents in their thirties showed dissatisfaction(F=2.6204, p< .05). By types of libraries, women librarians in college & university libraries showed highest satisfaction(F= 6.6678, p< .01). Common complaints among the dissatisfied were 'lack of opportunity for promotion and professional development'(30.0%), 'low social prestige'(29.0%), 'low salary'(17.8%), 'poor working conditions'(13.7%), etc.

3. Conclusions

The result of the research leads to the fol-

lowing conclusions :

- 1) Firstly, at present, the status of Korean women librarians seems to be still in rudimentary and low level in view of their positions and role assignments in the work environment. This could be presupposed by their low proportion in managerial level compared to the total number of Korean women librarians. Other factors, such as the reality of the existing sexual discrimination in the work place, comparatively low degree of their job satisfaction, or their complaint of lack opportunity for promotion, all these factors support the above conclusion. These also leads to presume that there might exist some structural inequality in Korean librarianship.
- 2) Secondly, some factors enable us to presume that the future of Korean women librarianship does have some bright and promising side, too. In the past, the majority of the unmarried women had recognized their job as a temporary stop-gap before their marriage. Now, over 90 % of unmarried Korean women librarians wished to continue working after marriage. Quite a lot of women librarians gave meaning to the 'sense of achievement' as an important reason to continue their job. Some of these factors

may help to expect their stable career life in near future, and ultimately would contribute to enhance the professionalism of Korean women librarianship.

With these views in mind, some suggestions for the improvement of Korean women librarianship can be made :

Most of all, basic and detailed analysis should be made to find out the causes of women librarians' low status and delay of promotion-whether these were basically attributable to unfavorable structural deficiencies against women or they had come from the difference of psychological attributes of men and women. With today's rapid socio-economic development, general recognition on sex role is also changing and numerous studies indicated that the idea of fixed notion on sex role is neither acceptable nor reasonable any more. Under these circumstances, restriction on employment, promotion, or salary discrimination against women, etc. should be definitely eradicated at work places, but more rational and fair personnel management based not on the 'sex,' but on the 'ability' of each human being, should be settled urgently in Korea.

On the women librarians' side, in order to acquire more satisfaction and dignity in their jobs, they should change themselves, and take up more positive and active roles. Specific-

ly, they should learn to be active in participating professional activities, reading wide range of professional literature related to their subject area, and be diligent in acquiring new knowledge and skills so that they could be

treated equally with their counterparts. Without these drastic change and self-supporting efforts in their attitudes, it would be impossible to expect noticeable development in Korean women librarianship in the 21st century.

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### End Notes

- 1) source : Cooperation & Research Dept., National Library of Korea.
- 2) source : *Korean Library Statistics*. Seoul : Korean Library Association, 1996.
- 3) "Upper manager" is defined as for the respondents who are holding the position of library director, associate or assistant director; "middle manager" refers to the next lower level, such as a head of a department, division, section or branch library; "lower manager" refers to an individual who supervises one or more employees and is at the lowest level of management.