

Promoting Community Service in Home Economics - A Reflection on Personal Experiences in Akita Prefecture -

**The 61st Spring Conference of the Korean Home Economics Association,
April 25, 2008, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea**

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I first started teaching at the Akita National University on April 1st, 1975. Akita University is located in the far northern part of the Honshu Island, facing Korea. I worked there for thirty one years until I retired and finished my term there on March 31st, 2006. Surprisingly though, I decided to continue to teach and accepted a new position which started the next day, April 1st, 2006, at Tokushima Bunri University, a private institute in Tokushima Prefecture on the Shikoku Island in the southern part of Japan (about 1000 km away from Akita).

While I was living in Tokushima, I unfortunately had opportunities to be involved in Community Service in my area of Home Economics. When I lived in Akita, I was enthusiastically involved in volunteer work, from which I will draw from for my presentation.

First, I would like to talk about the kinds of community services I did in Akita, then reflect on the impact of such services, and thirdly, I would like to make suggestions for ways that community services can be further promoted within the field of home economics in the future.

Overview of My Experiences in Community Services

I still remember my first activity in Community

Service, when I was asked to talk on women's roles in the family for a 'Start of the New Year' Meeting, held by the Regional Women's Club, on the outskirts of Akita City in January 1978. The theme was "Women's Roles in Family Living in the New Era – Helping to Make Daily Life Run Smoothly". My talk focused on how the family functions in daily life. I focused on the family's daily life tasks which need to be carried out in order to keep the family living healthy and comfortably. I talked about the family's tasks which are done by both women and men and proposed that it might not be necessary to always adhere to the traditional gender/sex role assignments. After my lecture, some members of the audience made comments, such as: "the most important role for women is to devote themselves to working for the family in order to provide the best living conditions possible, for each family member". The purpose of my lecture was to give tips in order to say that all family members working together, was the most important point in creating the most relaxed and comfortable environment for all family members including the female, home-maker. Then another person said, 'the realities of day-to-day living are quite different from the theories based on academic research results, because actual life is very illogical and emotional'. In a sense, I was really shocked by their comments and came to feel

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that they had almost rejected me and my lecture. After receiving such severe and harsh comments, I thought that doing this kind of community service in the future would never be possible for me again.

After I gave that first lecture, I quickly had more requests to continue in other communities and my work for the community within the field of home economics continued on the next quarter century:

For several years, I was mainly requested to give lectures and speeches or act as a coordinator for symposiums or panel discussions.

In the early 1990's, I was appointed to be a member of an advisory body for the Council to Promote Lifelong Education, under the Prefectural Governor. Later, the Akita Prefectural and Municipal Governments appointed me to be a member of other various Councils and Committees, to give attention to problems such as: the General Gender Issues Committee, Female Farmers' Issues, Work and Life Balance, Social Welfare Issues, Care Issues for the Elderly and the Handicapped, Volunteer Activities in the Community, all which were set-up to address the Issues which affect the Akita Community, an area with the lowest birth rates and highest rate of aging within Japan.

In the late 1990's I was asked to become involved in supervising and advising project teams, set up by the Prefectural and Municipal Governments in Akita, which were established in order to find the means to implement public policies regarding women and family living. These councils included: the Female Farmers Issues Team, Gender and Women's Issues Team, Work and Life Balance in Farmers' Daily Life Team, Rural Women's Empowerment Workshop, Female Leaders' Empowerment Workshop, and Municipal News Magazine on Gender Issues Editing Team.

I would like to sum up my experiences in community service as a home economist.

1. Definition of Community Service

Community service in home economics is meant to

provide people in the community with information on Family Living and to lead and educate people on ways to live a physically and spiritually fulfilling life, by helping others to improve the skills necessary for carrying out an efficient and balanced daily life.

2. Types of Community Services

- 1) Lecturer
- 2) Symposium or Panel Speaker
- 3) Advisory Body and Committee Member
- 4) Supervisor of a Project Team

3. Subject Areas

- 1) Family Relationships, such as Husband-Wife, Parent-Child, Children, In-Laws
- 2) Gender and Women's Issues
- 3) Work and Life Balance
- 4) Female Farmers' Family Living
- 5) Family Resource Management and Economization in Family Living
- 6) Aging Society and Care for the Infirm Elderly
- 7) Law Birth-Rate Society
- 8) Administrative and Managerial System in Small Groups

4. Audience Target

- 1) The General Public
Women, Senior Citizens, High School Students, Parents
- 2) Groups
Women's Clubs
Senior Citizens' Groups
Government Employee Unions,
Teachers of Elementary, Middle and High School,
Home Economics Teachers
Labor Unions
Private Sectors
Professional Groups, such as Care-Givers, Nurses,
and Social Workers

5. Methods of Outreach

- 1) Direct Talk

- 2) Newspaper
- 3) Television and Radio

6. Locations

- 1) Community Centers
 - City Hall
 - Prefectural Hall
 - Schools
 - Places for public gathering
- 2) Akita Prefecture
 - Other Prefectures in the Tohoku District
 - Tokyo,
 - Gifu
 - Saitama

Looking back on my experiences of community service, I feel I was so lucky to have had a wonderful senior professor of pedagogy at Akita University, who in 1983 recommended me to the Board of Education, to be the speaker at the Women's Club New Years' Party. Further, when I was hired by Akita University, it was really the beginning of a new era, which strongly promoted the advancement, equal rights, and the empowerment of women. There were high expectations and a strong need for female leaders who could carry out services for the community. Without my senior professor's recommendation, as well as the Movement for the Promotion of Women's Equality, I wouldn't have been able to become involved in so many community services with the backing of my field of home economics. Especially, I thank my senior professor, who even though she didn't know me well, still went on to recommend me.

When I left Akita, I recommended a new person who could take over my positions and naturally, she too is a professional Home Economist.

New Knowledge based on Research Outcomes for Home Economics

My Perspectives on Community Service in Home Economics

I think the most serious concern I have regarding community service in home economics is trying to develop fundamental and common perspectives for numerous social issues over which we must tackle. The following is my perspective on doing community services.

1. I am very proud to have been deeply involved in the areas of Family Living Studies and Home Economics Education. I feel a deep sense of fulfillment carrying out work in these fields and have had a deep motivation to share this with others, especially since it influences my personal life, so much.
2. I believe that the family in home economics should be understood as the approach to "family living", holistically. Family refers to people with special, intimate bonds, who live together, at certain times. Family members who live together form a mutual and reciprocal reliance, and usually share residence, meal times, clothing, sleeping patterns, parenting issues, and emotional bonds from joy to sorrow. I often take note at how the meaning of family is grasped, and the meaning may vary depending on the different academic field. Whether it is Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Law, Ethics, History, Anthropology, or Pedagogy, each field may have a different approach to the understanding of family living.
3. I understand that the standpoint for home economics must not be conservative, but rather innovative, and adapting to the ongoing changes of society. The conditions of family living are always being affected by the development of new goods and services, and we must accurately judge whether we use or not use these new commercial products in our daily life. Society is rapidly changing day to day. Further, we need to be very sensitive to the traditional gender/sex role assignments, which suggest the most conservative structures for our

family's daily life.

4. I try to understand daily life in actual, concrete terms. These days, it is possible to live our daily lives without developing skills such as sewing and cooking, which means that modern home economics can't be considered to be only the study of learning sewing and cooking, nor merely women's duties, any more. Today, we don't have to produce food and clothes at home from raw materials. Instead, we buy ready-made articles and finished goods and services for daily life. Therefore, we have to develop daily life skills in order to judge what products are truly essential and necessary for our home life. We have to develop new managerial abilities and skills, in order to adapt to the rapid changes occurring in our modern societies. Also, as our life-styles vary we can't limit our understanding of the meaning of daily life and family living to match a generic, generalized picture. We must offer solutions for a variety of 'types' of families, in order to be inclusive in considering the needs and styles of a wide range of individuals.

My Suggestions for Promoting Community Services Within the Field of Home Economics

It is critical for home economists to promote community services, in order to further develop the home economics community throughout the world and to prove how important, meaningful, effective and useful, Home Economics is, as an academic field. Definitely, there are some issues we still need to solve, which I address below.

1. Researchers and educators in the field of Home Economics, need to continue to identify and better define the best means to affirm home economics as an academic field.
2. We must look back on our historical profile in home economics, as previously being defined as a "Women's Academic Field", providing "Traditional

Gender/sex Role Assignments" and the "Mastery of Cooking and Sewing Skills", to find better ways to introduce our field in modern concepts.

3. We now must introduce and unify the numerous new technical terminologies in home economics, in order for all home economics researchers and educators to have a common understanding of home economics.
4. We must find ways to clearly designate the relations and interactions among all divisions within the home economics community, even if each has an independent academic status, in order to unify our understanding and knowledge, under one umbrella of home economics.

In closing, I would like to thank the Korean Home Economics Association, President Dr. Il Sun Yang, General Secretary Dr. Hai-jung Chung, and all EC Board Members for this opportunity to look back on my experiences in community service and to trace my life during my stay at Akita University. I would especially like to thank Dr. Hai-jung Chung for her generosity to wait for my manuscript after the deadline.

In addition, I would like to deeply thank IFHE President, Dr. Lilha Lee, who introduced me to KHEA.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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