

Gender Sensitivity and Gender Equality Consciousness of Dental Hygiene Students

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Background: This study was conducted to identify the level of gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness among dental hygiene students and to confirm the necessity of gender equality programs in the curriculum.

Methods: A self-report questionnaire was conducted with some dental hygiene students using the Gender Sensitivity tool and Korean Gender Egalitarianism Scale for Adolescents (KGES-A).

Results: First, the gender equality consciousness of the students who took women's studies was high in the areas of educational life and socio-cultural life, and that of the subjects of grandparent families and Catholic was found to be high in the domestic life area. Second, the gender sensitivity of the subjects who took women's studies was found to be high in all sub-areas. In addition, the gender sensitivity of females was higher in the areas of sexual identity, non-violence, and self-reflection than that of males. That of 4-year college students was higher in the areas of sexual identity, openness to gender roles, and non-violence than that of 3-year college students. In addition, the gender sensitivity of Catholic students was high in the areas of sexual identity and openness to gender roles. Third, gender equality consciousness was found to have an effect depending on whether subjects took women's studies, family type, family type, and religion, and gender sensitivity was found to have an effect depending on whether subjects took women's studies or gender.

Conclusion: Since dental hygienist is a profession that targets humans, education that can instill equal awareness and values of humans is important. To inspire gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness in a prospective professional, it is necessary to conduct programs and education related to gender intelligence within dental hygiene curriculum.

Key Words: Gender equality, Gender sensitivity, Students

Introduction

The digital information society, which is used as a concept in contrast to the industrial, the agricultural, and the hunting society demands women's social participation and needs by emphasizing the creation of values through mental labor as one of the features of modern society. Due to changes in modern society, cooperation between men and women, rather than a fixed gender role, is emerging as the subject of the times and is acting as a key engine for social development.

In consideration of the social situation, Korean society has devised various systems aimed at gender equality to overcome structural gender discrimination, which is patriarchal and gender-specific, and has attempted to make changes. Since 2008, Korea's gender statistic indicators have been published every year, and the Basic Act on Women's Development in 2014 was revised to the Basic Act on Gender Equality and has been in effect since July 1, 2015¹⁾. In addition, to successfully implement the policy to raise gender awareness, it has conducted gender impact assessments for central administrative agencies and

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metropolitan regional governments since 2005²⁾. The target has been expanded to public officials of basic autonomous organizations and metropolitan and provincial offices of education.

In accordance with the social atmosphere in which gender consciousness and gender equality consciousness affect the way of life of members of society, it should not remain at the policy level; recently, the concepts of gender sensitivity and gender equality have emerged to improve perceptions related to gender and to promote the establishment of gender role values³⁾.

Gender sensitivity is the ability to detect gender issues and recognize the problems arising from gender discrimination and the effects of those differences³⁾, taking the existence of social, cultural, economic, and political inequalities that may exist between men and women into account, and meaning the degree to which they are sensitive. In addition, gender equality means that men and women are treated equally regardless of gender by breaking down the concept of confrontation between genders⁴⁾. In other words, equal status and opportunities should be guaranteed when participating in social activities, whether women or men, and it implies that they do not have stereotypes about gender attributes⁵⁾.

From this viewpoint, it can be said that having appropriate gender sensitivity and gender equality is important not only for individual self-realization, but also for social development⁶⁾.

However, even though students in the Department of Dental Hygiene are preliminary professionals who have to establish a cooperative relationship regardless of gender in the workplace as dental hygienists after graduation, there is concern that they may not be able to escape from the traditional gender roles and stereotypes by living with women during most of their school life. Examining previous studies⁶⁻⁹⁾, it was confirmed that studies on gender sensitivity and gender equality were limited to specific occupational groups.

Accordingly, we examine the gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness of students in the Department of Dental Hygiene as prospective professionals who will meet various targets and co-workers, and we assess the need for programs to promote such aspects among dental

hygiene students in the curriculum.

Materials and Methods

1. Participants

This study was conducted from March 20 to 30, 2021 using an in-person self-report questionnaire for dental hygiene students at three universities in Daejeon, Gangwon and Gyeonggi. The subject sample size was derived from Cohen's power analysis using G*power 3.1.9, and the minimum sample size required was 200 persons under conditions of significance level 5% (both sides), statistical power 80%, and effect size of 0.15, but an additional 200 persons were examined considering the dropout rate. The purpose of this study and the contents of confidentiality were explained, and a total of 412 subjects were finalized, excluding those that did not agree to participate and whose responses were not faithful. All Participants gave written informed consent.

This study was approved by Institutional Review Board at Daejeon Institute of Science and Technology.

2. Instrument

1) Gender sensitivity

A tool developed by Lee³⁾ was used to measure gender sensitivity. The survey consisted of 31 questions, including nine for openness to gender roles, seven for non-violence, seven for gender identity, and eight for self-reflection. A total of 19 questions (numbers 1 to 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 17 to 25, 31) were inverse questions, and the higher the score on a 5-point scale, the higher the perception of gender sensitivity. In terms of reliability the Cronbach's alpha of this study was found to be 0.959, indicating good reliability.

2) Gender equality consciousness

To measure gender equality consciousness, the Korean Gender Egalitarianism Scale for Adolescents (KGES-A)¹⁰⁾ by the Korean Women's Development Institute (2003) was used. A total of 60 questions consisted of 15 questions on family life, 15 on school life, 15 on professional life, and 15 on social and cultural life. Questions #1-6, #8-20, #22, #24-33, #35-36, #38, #42, #44-45, #47, #49-52, #55-60

are reverse questions. The higher the score on a 5-point scale, the higher the awareness of gender equality. In terms of reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was found to be 0.858.

3. Analysis

Using the IBM SPSS/WIN 20.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) program, the general characteristics of the subjects were frequency and percentage, and the difference in the subjects’ general characteristics and gender sensitivity, and gender equality consciousness t-test and ANOVA were conducted. Verification was conducted using the Scheffe test. Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the factors affecting gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness.

Results

1. General characteristics of study subjects

The results of examining the general characteristics of the study subjects are reported in Table 1. In terms of gender, 389 were female (94.4%), 330 (80.1%) were among 19 to 22 years old, and 250 (60.7%) were four-year university students. First and third graders accounted for 144 (35.0%), and the second grade was 124 (30.1%). As for family type, 241 (58.5%) were from nuclear families, 124 (30.1%) extended families, 223 (54.1%) were siblings, among these 141 were sisters (34.2%). A total of 282 (68.4%) indicated they did not follow any religion, 87 (21.1%) were Christian, and 44 (10.7%) subjects were taking women’s studies.

2. Difference of gender sensitivity according to general characteristics

The results of examining the differences in gender sensitivity according to the general characteristics of the study subjects are reported in Table 2. Females were higher in terms of gender identity, non-violence, and self-reflection ($p < 0.05$), and 4-year-college students were higher in gender identity, openness to gender roles, and non-violence than 3-year-college students ($p < 0.05$). The subjects who took women’s studies were high in all sub-variables ($p < 0.05$). As for religion, Catholic subjects was high in openness to gender identity and gender roles

($p < 0.01$).

3. Difference of gender equality consciousness according to general characteristics

The differences in gender equality consciousness according to the general characteristics of the study subjects are presented in Table 3. The subjects who took women’s studies were higher in educational life and social and cultural life ($p < 0.05$), while the family type with grandparents ($p < 0.05$) and Catholics ($p < 0.01$) were the highest.

4. Influence of general characteristics on gender equality consciousness and gender sensitivity

The results of examining the effects of the general characteristics of the study subjects on gender equality consciousness and gender sensitivity are reported in Table 4. Gender equality consciousness was found to be affected by taking women’s studies ($\beta = -2.339$, $p < 0.05$), nuclear

Table 1. General Characteristics of the Study Subjects (n=412)

	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	389 (94.4)
	Male	23 (5.6)
Age (y)	19~22	330 (80.1)
	23	82 (19.9)
School system	3-year system	162 (39.3)
	4-year system	250 (60.7)
Grade	Freshman	144 (35.0)
	Sophomore	124 (30.1)
	Junior	144 (35.0)
Family type	Extended family	124 (30.1)
	Nuclear family	241 (58.5)
	Single parent family	40 (9.7)
	Grandparent family	3 (0.7)
	Etc.	4 (1.0)
Family composition	Only daughter/son	38 (9.2)
	Siblings	223 (54.1)
	Sisters	141 (34.2)
Religion	Brother	10 (2.4)
	Catholicism	20 (4.9)
	Christian	87 (21.1)
	Buddhism	23 (5.6)
	No religion	282 (68.4)
Women’s studies course	Yes	44 (10.7)
	No	368 (89.3)

Table 2. Difference of Gender Sensitivity according to General Characteristics

Variable	n	Gender identify		Openes to gender roles		Non-violence		Self-reflection		
		Mean± standard deviation	T/F							
Gender	Female	389	25.02±5.97	2.318*	32.67±5.02	1.611	22.10±4.55	2.697**	26.15±5.32	2.377**
	Male	23	22.04±6.05		30.91±6.02		19.39±6.41		23.43±5.26	
Age (y)	19 ~ 22	330	25.08±5.95	1.577	32.58±4.91	0.115	22.08±4.67	1.117	26.22±5.21	1.659
	23	82	23.91±6.15		32.54±5.80		21.43±4.86		25.12±5.81	
School system	3-year system	162	23.53±6.45	3.640***	31.93±5.17	2.083*	21.35±5.09	-2.093*	25.64±5.09	-1.086
	4-year system	250	25.70±5.54		32.99±5.00		22.34±4.41		26.23±5.50	
Women's studies course	Yes	44	26.57±5.52	2.015*	35.05±4.38	3.451***	23.52±5.02	2.361**	28.75±5.01	3.664***
	No	368	24.64±6.03		32.28±5.09		21.76±4.64		25.67±5.30	
Family type	Extended family	124	24.15±6.09	0.666	32.63±4.92	0.709	22.38±4.33	0.605	25.52±5.44	2.201
	Nuclear family	241	25.12±6.08		32.36±5.32		21.62±4.79		25.98±5.42	
	Single parent family	40	25.43±5.63		33.48±4.41		22.43±5.24		28.05±4.20	
	Grandparent family	3	23.67±2.51		32.00±3.00		21.67±3.78		23.00±7.55	
	Etc.	4	25.50±3.69		35.25±3.30		26.75±4.31		23.50±1.29	
Family composition	Only daughter/son	38	23.58±6.78	0.712	31.95±4.97	0.915	22.24±5.15	0.174	24.95±5.10	0.945
	Siblings	223	24.85±5.97		32.33±4.96		21.88±4.85		26.25±5.08	
	Sisters	141	25.16±5.84		33.13±5.29		21.91±4.34		26.00±5.77	
	Brother	10	25.30±6.12		32.50±5.60		22.80±5.35		24.40±5.92	
	Religion	Catholicism	20	24.65±4.34	11.178***	33.20±5.15	4.513**	20.00±3.93	1.167	25.10±4.71
	Christian	87	21.69±6.39		30.89±4.91		21.16±4.93		25.00±5.26	
	Buddhism	23	25.48±6.05		31.96±5.13		21.57±4.64		26.39±4.81	
	No religion	282	25.79±5.66		33.10±5.04		22.22±4.69		26.00±5.44	

By t-test or one-way ANOVA.

Post hoc test was conducted from Scheffe test.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 by multiple regression analysis.

family ($\beta=2.218$, $p < 0.05$), and Christian ($\beta=-2.239$, $p < 0.05$), with an R-squared value of 0.065. Gender sensitivity was found to be influenced as follows: male ($\beta=-3.751$, $p < 0.001$), 4-year college program ($\beta=3.502$, $p < 0.01$), taking women's studies ($\beta=-4.196$, $p < 0.001$), and the R-squared value was 0.169.

Discussion

In modern society, various issues continue to emerge. Among them, the issue of gender has been an ongoing hot topic. Over the past few decades, Korean society has made various institutional efforts for gender equality^{1,2)}. Nevertheless, the persistent gender stereotypes of individuals still influence the perception and way of life of the entire

society. In this regard, gender sensitivity has emerged as the concept for the spread of practical gender equality. Gender sensitivity is the ability to sensitively recognize gender differences and inequalities, and the effects of those differences, and to demonstrate willingness to improve gender discrimination¹¹⁾. Gender equality consciousness refers to awareness of gender discrimination based on traditional gender roles¹²⁾.

Because dental hygienist is a job that targets humans, equal recognition of humans is necessary. From this viewpoint, this study sought to understand the gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness of dental hygiene students. In addition, the purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a need to provide a gender equality program in the curriculum by measuring

Table 3. Difference of Gender Equality Consciousness according to General Characteristics

Variable	n	Domestic life		Educational life		Occupational life		Social and cultural life		
		Mean± standard deviation	T/F	Mean± standard deviation	T/F	Mean± standard deviation	T/F	Mean± standard deviation	T/F	
Gender	Female	389	69.74±6.28	1.191	69.89±5.77	0.122	68.80±6.63	0.743	67.05±6.35	0.743
	Male	23	68.13±6.24		64.74±4.71		68.35±6.08		66.04±6.10	
Age (y)	19~22	330	69.88±6.05	1.476	64.94±5.84	0.393	68.91±6.44	0.827	67.10±6.13	0.603
	23	82	68.73±7.12		64.66±5.21		68.23±7.21		66.59±7.09	
School system	3-year system	162	69.44±6.03	-0.528	65.04±5.34	0.445	68.59±6.20	-0.453	66.43±5.95	-1.476
	4-year system	250	69.78±6.45		64.78±5.96		68.89±6.86		67.37±6.55	
Women's studies course	Yes	44	70.75±5.20	1.230	66.48±4.84	1.965*	70.34±5.51	1.672	69.89±5.31	3.237***
	No	368	69.52±6.40		64.69±5.79		68.58±6.70		66.65±6.36	
Family type	Extended family	124	68.20±7.53	2.924*	64.04±6.71	1.198	67.72±7.86	1.602	66.10±7.08	1.146
	Nuclear family	241	70.16±5.64		65.27±5.10		69.14±5.89		67.25±6.02	
	Single parent family	40	71.00±4.59		65.23±5.55		69.83±5.48		68.08±5.49	
	Grandparent family	3	73.33±2.08		66.67±1.52		72.33±1.52		69.67±2.88	
	Etc.	4	67.50±10.84		62.75±9.53		66.25±12.94		67.00±8.52	
Family composition	Only daughter/son	38	69.08±7.01	0.769	64.63±5.73	1.303	68.37±6.87	1.041	66.68±6.25	1.610
	Siblings	223	69.33±6.52		64.46±6.02		68.33±6.82		66.46±6.61	
	Sisters	141	70.24±5.82		65.49±5.23		69.50±6.26		67.94±5.92	
	Brother	10	70.50±4.06		66.70±4.90		69.90±4.88		67.00±4.83	
Religion	Catholicism	20	72.05±4.24 ^a	3.840**	66.85±5.46	1.603	70.45±5.67	2.228	68.75±5.36	1.887
	Christian	87	67.93±6.85 ^b	a>b>c	64.11±6.38		67.34±7.24		65.90±6.72	
	Buddhism	23	68.70±7.95 ^c		63.96±6.80		68.00±7.51		65.83±7.10	
	No religion	282	70.09±5.97 ^c		65.05±5.40		69.16±6.33		67.31±6.17	

By t-test or one-way ANOVA.

^{a,b,c}Post hoc test was conducted from Scheffe test.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 by multiple regression analysis.

the level of gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness of dental hygiene students as prospective professionals. The results reveal that women's gender sensitivity was higher than that of men in the areas of sexual identity, non-violence, and self-reflection. This is similar to the results of previous studies^{9,13)} showing significant differences in gender sensitivity by gender. Furthermore, in health sectors with a large number of female students, the sense of equality was reported to be higher than that of other departments¹⁴⁾. In addition, the gender sensitivity of 4-year-college students was found to be higher than that of 3-year-college students in the areas of gender identity, openness to gender roles, and non-violence. It is inferred that, in addition to their professional knowledge, 4-year-college students are

exposed to various liberal arts subjects related to personal literacy and consciousness¹⁵⁾ and have more experience than 3-year-college students, which may lead to differences in gender sensitivity depending on the school system. This is also linked to reports in previous studies that gender sensitivity changes due to the influence of various activities after entering university⁸⁾. These results suggest that there is a possibility that gender sensitivity may change sufficiently through youth, and the spread of an atmosphere of gender equality in universities and the role of educators can be important for this.

In particular, the subjects who took women's studies had higher gender sensitivity in all areas than those who did not. Gender equality consciousness was also higher in the areas of educational life and social and cultural life of

Table 4. Influence of General Characteristics on Gender Sensitivity and Gender Equality Consciousness

Variable	Gender sensitivity			Gender equality consciousness		
	B	β	t	B	β	t
(constant)	107.666		22.682	282.559		35.805
Gender (ref_female)						
Male	-11.877	-0.181	-3.751***	-5.665	-0.055	-1.076
Age (ref_19~22)						
≤23	-1.053	-0.028	-0.521	-1.320	-0.022	-0.393
School system (ref_3-year system)						
4-year system	4.424	0.144	3.052**	0.142	0.003	0.059
Women's studies course (ref_yes)						
No	-9.540	-0.196	-4.196***	-8.843	-0.116	-2.339*
Family type (ref_Extended family)						
Nuclear family	0.373	0.012	0.238	5.771	0.121	2.218*
Single parent family	3.075	0.061	1.185	7.202	0.091	1.670
Grandparent family	0.922	0.005	0.111	20.057	0.072	1.458
Etc.	3.705	0.024	0.511	-6.263	-0.026	-0.520
Family composition (ref_only daughter/son)						
Siblings	2.364	0.078	0.894	-0.185	-0.004	-0.045
Sisters	3.245	0.102	1.178	4.400	0.089	1.022
Brother	2.447	0.025	0.457	5.337	0.035	0.637
Religion (ref_Catholicism)						
Christian	-5.048	-0.137	-1.433	-13.113	-0.227	-2.239*
Buddhism	0.596	0.009	0.137	-11.606	-0.113	-1.603
No religion	3.755	0.116	1.136	-6.433	-0.127	-1.171
F(p)		5.004***			1.707*	
Adjusted R ²		0.169			0.065	

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 by multiple regression analysis.

students who participated in the women's studies course. This reaffirmed that education plays an important role in promoting gender equality¹⁶⁻¹⁸⁾. In addition, differences in gender equality consciousness according to family type and religion were also confirmed. Specifically, grandparent families and Catholics showed high gender equality consciousness in the area of domestic life. This is classified into the content of traditional gender roles in Korean society as questions related to the housework of men and women, attitudes toward the authority and relationship between parents or couples, and how to raise children. In previous studies, subjects with a nuclear family had the highest gender equality consciousness¹⁹⁾, which was different from the results of the current study. Through detailed analysis of gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness for each sub-area, follow-up research on the differences from the results of the previous studies seems to be necessary.

When the results of the current study were combined, it is particularly noteworthy that gender equality consciousness and gender sensitivity were found to be high in those who participated in gender-sensitive education, such as women's studies. This is consistent with the fact that in previous studies, students who have participated in courses related to gender roles had a significant influence on their gender equality consciousness⁶⁾. Therefore, to inspire gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness to a prospective professional, it is necessary to implement gender consciousness-related programs and gender equality education in the curriculum of dental hygiene students. In addition, it is necessary to establish a gender-equal culture within the school and to make active connections with educational programs. From the results, it was confirmed that taking women's studies, family type, and religion influence the gender equality consciousness of dental hygiene department students. Therefore, when

implementing a gender-sensitive program, the educational content should be structured by carefully considering background factors such as gender, school system, family type, and religion of the students in the Department of Dental Hygiene.

Dental hygienist is a profession that targets humans. For this reason, education that can instill equal awareness and values of human beings is important. Based on the results of this study, education on the value of gender equality should be provided.

Since this study was limited to some dental hygiene students, there is a limitation in the generalization of the research results. In the future, it is necessary to expand the survey sample to carry out follow-up research and to supplement the research results through an in-depth analysis of related factors. Despite some limitations, to the best of the author's knowledge, this study is the first in Korea to identify the gender sensitivity and gender equality consciousness of dental hygiene students, and it is significant in it served as an opportunity to newly recognize the practical necessity for gender-aware education in the dental hygiene curriculum. This suggests that it will be a useful starting point for promoting the development of the gender cognitive curriculum in the training process for dental hygienists.

Notes

Conflict of interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by the institutional review board of Daejeon Institute of Science and Technology (IRB No. 1044342-20210506-HR-009-03).

Author contributions

Conceptualization: Hee-Jung Lim, Ki-Eun Kim, and Eun-Jung NamKoong, Data acquisition: Hee-Jung Lim, Ki-Eun Kim, and Eun-Jung NamKoong. Formal analysis: Hee-Jung Lim. Funding: Hee-Jung Lim, Ki-Eun Kim, and Eun-Jung NamKoong. Supervision: Hee-Jung Lim,

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