

Clinical Cultural Report: South Koreans

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Description of the culture

Korean culture is one of the oldest continuous cultures in the world (Jane, 2022). Korean culture is shaped by its different dynasties, wars, changes in religious beliefs, and many other customs and traditions passed on between generations (Jane, 2022). Korean culture also consists of its food, holidays, national sports, societal norms, and popular culture in the form of music, movies, drama, and fashion. In this paper, we will discuss South Korea, which is a country in East Asia. We will discuss South Korean culture, religion, healing beliefs and practices, family life, communication, and diet of Korean individuals.

Religion

South Korea has approximately 51.78 million people (Worldometer, 2023). South Korean religion is diverse; Christianity and Buddhism are the most common religious groups. There are also many Koreans who do not practice a religion. South Koreans support religious freedom, but many believe in the ancestral spirit and Confucian rituals. Confucianism is a political and social philosophy that pervades Korean culture. Many believe their illness's root is spiritual instead of physiological or mental (Jane, 2022). So, instead of being seen in a hospital and receiving medical advice from doctors, they will see an “earth doctor.” Many believe in the power of prayer or the need to fulfill spiritual obligations for treatment, and that failure to do so causes them to become ill (Jane, 2022). South Koreans also seek herbal remedies from a ‘Hanui’, a traditional herbal doctor (Jane, 2022). They believe that there must be a balance between yin and yang and that any imbalance leads to illness. The Hanui will prescribe herbs and roots to balance the Yin and Yang to restore the body to health (Jane, 2022).

Healing beliefs and practices

South Koreans use herbs for various diseases and ailments, believing they help improve health. Koreans also believe that food and medicine fulfill the same function, so eating healthy foods is the best way to stay healthy. They believe medical treatment should only be used if food cannot cure the disease. Saunas are another tool Koreans use often; they believe that saunas improve metabolism and help detoxify the body (Jane, 2022). In Korea, pain is viewed as expected, and many endure pain because the culture teaches that endurance is a virtue. There are usually side effects because they use traditional methods, foods, and unverified products due to insufficient knowledge about pain. During childbirth, it is customary and expected that women do not make much noise. This shows discipline and allows the mother to focus on her life force (TOTA, 2019). To help the mother channel her energy, ropes hung from the ceiling to grab during labor (TOTA, 2019). Sanhujori is the Korean system of postpartum care (The Korean Times, 2013). It consists of eating healthy foods, minimal exercise, and keeping the body warm after baby delivery. Korean mothers keep their bodies warm by avoiding cold temperatures and eating cold foods like ice cream and cold water. They also do postnatal sitz baths, which encourage rapid healing of wounds through a reduction of pain, relief of hemorrhoids from childbirth, prevention of infection, and promotion of blood circulation (The Korean Times, 2013).

Family Life

Traditionally, most married households contain two parents, two children, and grandparents. The father takes on the dominant role, the mother's job is to take care of the home and the children, and the grandparents also play an essential role in helping raise the children (Asia Society, 2023). South Koreans are very family-oriented and loyal to each other.

Communication

South Korean communication relies on the speaker's posture, expressions, and tone of voice, not so much on the spoken words (Evason, 2023). They are big on politeness, and even when they disagree with you, they will not come right out and say it. Focusing on hints of hesitation is a good idea when communicating with Korean individuals. Listen to what they say, but pay attention to what they imply. Their communication style is indirect, but they speak firmly without gestures and facial expressions (Evason, 2023). Silence is also essential in their communication, reflecting politeness and respect. Some non-verbal norms include eye contact; when in conversation, making direct eye contact is considered rude, especially if you are being scolded or rebuked by your seniors or elders (Evason, 2023). Personal space is not a factor; they expect to encounter strangers on the busy streets and are not bothered by it. Some gestures are considered rude when communicating with South Koreans, including making a fist or sneezing. If you must sneeze, you should excuse yourself from the room before doing so. South Korean women have the same rights as men and can speak for themselves; their husbands do not speak for them.

Diet

Some foods Korean women eat during pregnancy include mixed grain rice, which is low in sugars and higher in fiber and helps to provide energy (Asiaone, 2020). Sweet potatoes are another food eaten and are a good source of healthy carbs. Seaweed is high in iodine and helps with breast milk production and digestion. Korean women also drink a lot of milk, an excellent calcium source. This is good since the baby takes calcium away from the mother. They also eat plenty of other fresh fruits and vegetables. The main thing Korean women eat after the birth of their children is large bowls of seaweed soup three times a day (Asiaone, 2020). They say that

seaweed cleanses blood, detoxifies the body, helps the womb contract, and increases breast milk (Asiaone, 2020).

Core values

These core values are part of Korean health care and the birthing experience. It is essential to understand the different traditions and be able to cater to your patients and their personal needs. Some tips when working with Korean patients include understanding norms about touch, eye contact, and body language. Koreans may not fully understand Western medications, so our nurses' job is to explain the medication and why the patient is taking it. Lastly, always show respect and politeness to your patients. Koreans are very big on this, but this applies to all the patients you will encounter.

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