Women’s Role in Development of Primary Health Care in Kumamoto, Japan

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Objectives

This historical case study provides description of the Reverence for Life Movement (RLM) and women’s role in the development of a community-based comprehensive Primary Health Care (PHC) movement in Japan, which originated in 1962.

Methods

Synthesis of historical documents and oral histories collected from individuals who had participated in the movement. Data were synthesized based on the thematic categories:

1) Overview of the development of RLM from 1962 - 1980; 2) Role of Participants; and 3) Meanings and outcomes of RLM

Results

The RLM was a social movement aimed to improve the health of citizens and the healthcare provision in Kumamoto, Japan. In the RLM, women played significant roles by initiating the movement; moving the agendas forward; In the 1960s, adult women in rural farming villages in Kumamoto were severely disadvantaged. However, through the RLM and rural farming women’s participation in the movement, long-ignored women’s health issues were brought to the forefront of healthcare issues in Kumamoto. The health status of women in rural communities has improved dramatically because Kumamoto has established annual health screening programs, community health services by public health nurses, a population that is aware and participates in health improvement, and socio-cultural changes over the three decades.

Socio-cultural Context

Health of Kumamoto Citizens

Kumamoto citizens were struggling for health

Perinatal Mortality 33.1 per 1,000 (1967)

Prevalence of TB was 290.4 per 100,000 (1968)

Mortality by stroke was 219.2 per 100,000 (1968)

Shortage of nurses and physicians

2,673 Registered Nurses (1965)

248 Registered Public Health Nurses (1965)

2,157 Physicians (1965)

160 rural communities had no physicians in residence

23 municipalities had no public health nurses (1969)

Ethical Consideration

The University of Illinois at Chicago, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects reviewed the application for “Determination of whether an activity represents human subject research: protocol number 2010-4099. The study was determined that the research did not meet the definition of human subject research. The study was considered as a verbal history project; there was no intention to produce generalizable knowledge.

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