

Brief Report

Mental health policies and projects of Seoul metropolitan government in relation to multi-cultural society of South Korea

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INTRODUCTION As Seoul, the capital of the South Korea, moves toward becoming an international, multi-cultural city, its government expects the number of foreign immigrants and temporary visitors will increase in the future. By the end of 2009, about 250,000 foreigners were living in Seoul City. Among those foreigners, it includes 146,358 foreign laborers (57%), 29,455 foreign brides (12%), 28,637 foreign students (11%), and 9,952 business company employees (4%).

In order to face and dealing with the people of multicultural background, it is necessary for the Seoul Metropolitan Government to concern the mental health policies to guide all the projects and to promote various nature of services to improve the life of the foreigners living in the city of Seoul.

SUPPORT FOR LIVING Seoul City's government is planning to build a visitor-friendly city, with quality visitor services in every aspect. This means Seoul City expects to be one of World's Top Ten cities regarding attractiveness to foreigners, to visit again and to live in.

To make Seoul City a good city for business, the Seoul Metropolitan Government runs four Business Support Centers in the central city, providing integrated support for foreign businesspersons visiting Seoul City. The Business Support Centers main functions are as follows: connecting with potential business partners and/or financial institutions, helping with administrative procedures for beginning and developing business, helping to find office or residential space, and facilitating needed health services.

To support foreign residents living in Seoul City, the city runs Seoul Village Zones in seven areas, including Yeoksam, Seorae Maul, and Itaewon. To promote cultural exchange, the city runs Global Culture-Exchange Zones in areas that are popular with visitors, including Myeondong, Insadong, Namdaemun Market, and Itaewon. This means that by identifying different geographic zones within the city, the government can focus its concerns, efforts, and services in the geographic areas that need more for the foreigners.

MIXED-BLOOD CHILDREN Associated with the increase of education, the well-educated young female, particularly from rural areas, seek work in the city and being reluctant to stay

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in the country side and to marry to the farmers. This creates the problems of the shortage of marriage-partners for men living in the rural areas. In order to deal with this new challenge, foreign brides are arranged and imported mostly from the Southeast Asia countries to South Korea, resulting inter-ethnic, intercultural marriage, forming multi-cultural families, and having mixed-blood children.

Most of the nowadays in Korea, foreign brides and multi-cultural families are increasing in numbers. To enhance the successful adaptation of multi-cultural families and their mixed-blood children to Korean society, the Seoul Metropolitan Government runs twenty Multi-cultural Family Support Centers, providing education in the Korean language, translation and interpretation services, bilingual education, and childcare services for children of multi-cultural families, and support for the inauguration of new businesses to be undertaken by them.

HEALTH CARE The Seoul Metropolitan Government regularly identifies medical institutions and pharmacies that are available for foreigners and provides information about them through the 24-hour multi-lingual service. In addition, it distributes such information by means of multi-language pamphlets. In addition, the Seoul Metropolitan Government is trying its best to provide quality health and medical services to foreign visitors during their stay in Seoul, through fourteen special clinics for foreigners. The Seoul Emergency Medical Information Center (call the 1339 hotline) provides 24-hour multi-language translation services (currently for English, Chinese, and Japanese) to aid foreigners seeking medical help, providing information on hospitals and pharmacies and/or interpretation for medical consultations. At times, a three-way phone language interpretation service (call 1339) is available among patients, interpreters, and doctors who are in three different locations.

For foreign laborers, foreign brides, and refugees, the government also provides financial support for medical examinations, hospitalization, and treatment (including surgery) in the special health center, called the Global Open Health Center.

To provide mental health services, Korea's first Special Clinic for Multi-cultural Mental Health opened in Seoul Metropolitan Eunpyeong Hospital in 2009, where these foreign residents can receive outpatient or inpatient mental health services. This clinic also networks with twenty-five community mental health centers in the Seoul metropolitan area.

In summary, at the administrative level, the Seoul Metropolitan Government is making its best effort to be helpful to all the foreigners, including: temporary visitors, immigrants, and intermarried couples for their adjustment in South Korea, particularly in area near Seoul. It provides various forms of services, and set the guide and policies to deal with the new challenge that we are facing.