

Health Issues in *Family Life*

Chiho Oyabu and Kana Oyabu*

Gifu University, *Kanazawa University, Japan

I. Introduction

In modern society, there are various information devices such as TV, radio, newspaper, computer, mobile phone and so on. However, abundance of information from these devices does not always guarantee adequate information reaching people who need it. This is particularly true with medical and health-related information. As many people wish to avoid illness and aging, health-related information generates high consumer interests. This, in turn, attracts suppliers of health-related services and products to utilize various information devices to advertise themselves. Furthermore, in this age of Social Networking Sites, everyone---professionals and ordinary lay persons alike---can transmit their knowledge and experience on health easily. Thus, there have been cases of people manipulated or affected by so-called “health” -related information, rushing to buy certain products that haven't been scientifically proven to be effective, or practicing unusual and even dangerous treatments disseminated through various information devices. Even though thousands of information on health appears in cyber space and mass media every day, it is hard to identify which information is reliable and which is false, which information is genuinely useful and which information is just there to make money.

Amish people also suffer from illnesses and aging. Therefore, Amish people may also be interested in health-related issues and information. However, compared to the overflow of information in modern society, Amish society has limited information devices. Furthermore, Amish people have a very different outlook of life and health, as they regard these matters to be ultimately in the hands of God. Such difference can mean different kind of health-related information sent and received within Amish society. There have been various studies on Amish society focusing, for example, on their religious practices, foods, and education. However, there has not been much research on how Amish people regard health issues and information. Therefore, it is worth investigating the attitude of Amish people on health, and how health-related information is circulated within Amish community.

Past studies on health-related issues of Amish people focus on their physical condition and susceptibility to certain diseases. There have been medical reports and papers on immune systems and genetic disorders distinct to Amish people. They suggest that limited genetic pool of Amish people causes certain diseases, such as dwarfism, deafness, and glutaric aciduria. They also suggest that Amish people are protected from certain hereditary diseases such as cystic fibrosis¹⁾. Concerning the viewpoint of Amish people on health-related issues, there is a study on their interests in healthy foods and massaging. However, we do not know their knowledge level on health, nor do we know much about their daily health life and how they cope with diseases, accidents and injuries.

In this paper we analyzed the type of medical and health-related information in *Family Life*--one of their few information sources-- in order to clarify their attitude towards everyday health-related issues. *Family Life* has started its publication in 1968 and most of Amish and other Anabaptists people read this journal. There are many items in the journal, for example, pages about religious principle, poem, recipes, children's corner, letters to the editor, German corner, quiz, as well as health corner. We have already analyzed Amish lifestyle from various aspects in order to clarify their value and way of thinking^{2)~12)}. This paper analyzes health information in the health corner in order to clarify how Amish and other Anabaptists people think about health and its treatment. It is true that their basic view on health is to obey divine providence. However articles in *Family Life* health corner suggest that Amish people have interests in everyday health information, and even if their information device is limited, they do utilize available device, namely the journal, to obtain such information.

Family Life has had health-related pages for more than 40 years since 1970, two years after the publication of the magazine. The title of health corner has changed several times: It started as "Home Remedies and Suggestions" (1970-1976), then changed to "Your Health" (1976-1984), and "Learning About Your Health" (1985-present). "Home Remedies and Suggestions" mostly carried questions on health-related matters by readers, and answers and suggestions by other readers often in the form of home remedies. "Your Health" and "Learning About Your Health" also carry questions from readers, but they are often answered by doctors. Apart from answers to questions, the latter two health corners carry information on health matters such as an explanation of Vitamins. *Family Life* is not a journal exclusively read by Amish people. However, it is read by a majority of Amish families. As Amish people do not generally transmit information to non-Amish people, health corner in *Family Life* is one of the few information devices the outsiders can observe health-related interests of Amish people and the type of information they receive.

II. Analysis

This paper analyzes three different aspects of health corner articles. First of all, it analyzes the change in number of health corner articles published every year between 1970 and 2009. It also analyzes the content of each article according to its function, namely Questions, Answers, and Explanations. Questions are the articles in which readers ask questions or advices. Answers can be divided into two, according to who answers the question, namely, answers by other readers who comment on questions and introduce their experiences or knowledge, and answers by the doctor who gives a professional advice. Explanations are the articles in which the doctor introduces specialized information from a professional point of view even though there is no question from a reader regarding the topic. Finally, the paper analyses detailed contents of each article between 1970 and 1980. Here, we have classified articles by "types of disease", "methods of treatment", and "contents dealt in each article".

In the detailed analysis of articles between 1970 and 1980, we have used "The Merck Manual of Medical Information"¹³⁾, the standard reference book on medicine, in order to classify the "types of diseases." They are divided into 25 groups: "fundamentals," "drugs,"

“heart and blood vessel disorders,” “lung and airway disorders,” “bone, joint, and muscle disorders,” “brain, spinal cord, and nerve disorders,” “mental health disorders,” “mouth and dental disorders,” “digestive disorders,” “liver and gallbladder disorders,” “kidney and urinary tract disorders,” “disorders of nutrition and metabolism,” “hormonal disorders,” “blood disorders,” “cancer,” “immune disorders,” “infections,” “skin disorders,” “ears, nose, and throat disorders,” “eye disorders,” “men's health issues,” “women's health issues,” “children's health issues,” “accidents and injuries,” and “special subjects”. In “special subjects,” there are “medical decision making,” “surgery,” “complementary and alternative medicine,” “travel and health,” “amyloidosis,” “familial Mediterranean fever,” and “diseases of unknown cause” in “The Merck Manual of Medical Information.” Adding to this, we created a separate category for the articles that cannot be read because of mal-print and articles related to Bible, circumcision and other matters related to religious which cannot be classified by Merck Manual categories.

Articles are also classified into four categories of “method of treatment,” namely, “folk remedies,” “Western medicine,” “both” (“folk remedies” and “Western medicine”), and “unknown.” Articles making suggestions are classified into eight categories by the type of suggestions made. They are “factor,” “situation,” “solution,” “factor and situation,” “factor and solution,” “situation and solution,” “factor, situation, and solution,” and “others”.

After looking at each categories, we have used cross analysis methods to clarify the relationship between different categories.

III. Results

1. Trend in article numbers between 1970 to 2009

There are 2,041 articles from 1970 to 2009 in the health corner. Fig.1 shows the trend of article numbers during the period. From this, we can see that the highest number of articles was 111 in 1979, and the lowest number of articles was 9 in 1970. The year of 1970 is the year when health corner has been started. There are big changes in article numbers between 1976 and 1988. In 1976, Dr Amstutz started answering the questions from readers. However, he died in 1983, and the drastic decrease of article numbers between 1983 and 1985 reflects this incident: After his death, there was a period when there was no doctor to answer questions, and no health corner in the journal. In 1985, a new doctor, Dr. Hesse, has started answering the questions from readers. After 1988, the number of articles becomes more stable at an average of 45 articles per year.

There is no concrete evidence to determine if the fluctuating numbers of article is due to an editorial policy or a change in reader interests. However, two occasions of sudden increase in article numbers follow the arrival of Dr. Amstutz and Dr Hesse. In 1980, Dr. Amstutz explained the aims of health corner in “Your Health”. According to him, the aims of the corner are raising people's interests on health, and providing information for them. Looking at the number of articles, his aims seem to have been accomplished. Even after the article numbers stabilized around 45 a year, one can say that there is a steady flow of information provided by the journal, and received (and contributed) by readers. This stable flow of information is a proof that health issues are an important part of information Amish people wish to share and exchange through this information device.

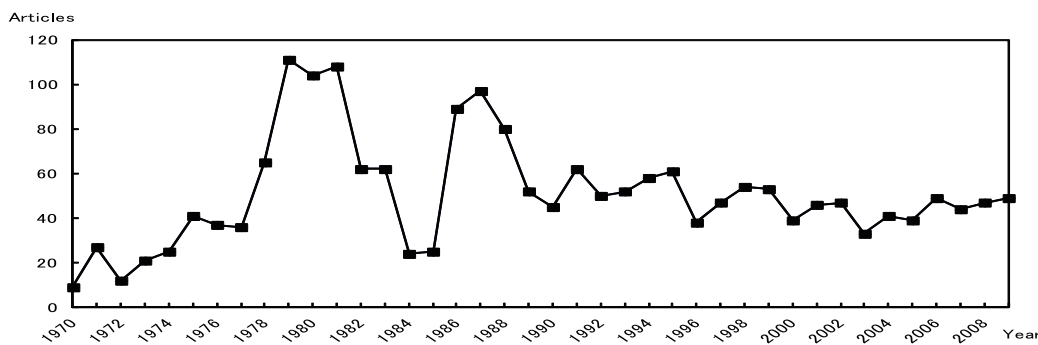


Fig.1 The Trend of Numbers of Articles from 1970 to 2009

2. The content of articles by function between 1970 and 2009

We count each articles as follows. One article usually contains question, answer or explanation. If an article contains one question and one answer, this will be counted as one Article, one Question and one Answer. From 1970 to 2009, there are 2,041 Articles, in which there are 1,766 Questions, 1,898 Answers, and 98 Explanations. As the doctors reserve medical explanations to the issues where there are not so many questions to answer, the numbers of Questions and Answers are more than Explanations. All the questions are asked by readers, and until the arrival of Dr. Amustutz, most of the Answers are answered by readers, too. Therefore, it can be said that the health corner then (“Home Remedies and Suggestions”) had a function similar to present SNS, where ordinary people exchange information based on their experiences regardless of their positions or qualifications. Readers continue to play an important role in “Your Health” and “Learning About Your Health” as Questions are contributed by readers with some Answers still provided by readers. However, increased question and answer articles after the arrival of doctors do suggest increased interests by readers (and editorial staff who confessed to greater number of letters received by the doctors rather than themselves) in professional contribution. This may mean a changing nature of the corner to that of open surgery or public announcement. As people who pursue education need to leave Amish society, Amish community does not have medical professionals. Nevertheless, articles in the health corner of *Family Life* suggest that Amish people are interested in health-related information supplied from professional point of view, and utilize such information in their daily life.

3. The analysis of articles between 1970 and 1980 in detail

There are 734 Articles between 1970 and 1980. They are divided into 258 Questions, 437 Answers, and 37 Explanations. In this period, the proportion of answers is higher than that of the 1970-2009 period. This reflects active contributions from multiple readers per question in “Home Remedies and Suggestions”. The lower numbers of Explanations compared to Questions and Answers are the same as the overall trend between 1970 and 2009.

(1) The analysis of the “section of diseases”

Among the diseases, articles on “disorders of nutrition and metabolism” have the highest share (15.4%) at 113 Articles (Table 1). The articles on “skin disorders” (79: 10.8%), “Special Subjects” (73: 9.9%), and “children's health issues” (64: 8.7%) follow. The least in numbers are “hormonal disorders” (0) and “men's health issues” (0).

Table 1. “Section of Diseases”

Sections	Articles(%)
Disorders of Nutrition and Metabolism	113(15.4)
Skin Disorders	79(10.8)
Special Subjects	73(9.9)
Children's Health Issues	64(8.7)
Bone, Joint, and Muscle Disorders	62(8.4)
Ears, Nose, and Throat Disorders	47(6.4)
Fundamentals	34(4.6)
Drugs	34(4.6)
Digestive Disorders	32(4.4)
Eye Disorders	31(4.2)
Infections	30(4.1)
Brain, Spinal Cord, and Nerve Disorders	29(4.0)
Mouth and Dental Disorders	25(3.4)
Heart and Blood Vessel Disorders	17(2.3)
Women's Health Issues	15(2.0)
Accidents and Injuries	14(1.9)
Cancer	12(1.6)
Blood Disorders	9(1.2)
Kidney and Urinary Tract Disorders	8(1.1)
Immune Disorders	7(1.0)
Lung and Airway Disorders	4(0.5)
Liver and Gallbladder Disorders	3(0.4)
Mental Health Disorders	1(0.1)
Hormonal Disorders	0(0.0)
Men's Health Issues	0(0.0)
Total	734(100.0)

Amish people learn basic theory of nutrition and metabolism in Health study at Amish school for eight years. However, the high article numbers on “disorders of nutrition and metabolism” shows that they are interested in and need more information on foods, eating habits and their effects on physical health. The second highest category, the articles on “skin disorders,” suggests the readers' interests in diseases that are easily detected. In comparison, there are few articles on cancer, the major disease in modern society. Westman and others has explained that the rate of cancer is low within Amish society because of their lifestyle.¹⁴⁾ They do not smoke nor drink, and they have limited sexual interaction, and they have special gene which prevent them from getting cancer. One can say that the low number of cancer-related articles in the health corner reflects their low interests in these diseases. In the fourth category, the articles on “children's health issues,” many readers ask questions about child care. Although Amish family generally have higher number of children per family, and the storage of childcare experiences are greater within an Amish community, they have strong interests in childcare matters, and willing to add scientific and medical information to their experiences in rearing offspring. Especially after the arrival of Dr. Amstutzs, a typical question in health corner consists of stating an experience of a reader, asking correctness of the information gained from the experience, and/or asking more medical information on the matter.

In general Amish people refuse outside assistance such as social security and try to solve problems by themselves as much as possible. Their close-knit society may have a rich accumulation of knowledge to solve health problems, too. However, from the analysis of health corner articles, one can say that they are interested in health-related information in addition to their own experiences and practices that form the basis of solving health problems. They are willing to assure their health knowledge as well as question information circulated within the community by asking questions to the health corner, especially on “nutrition and metabolism”, “skin disorder” and “children's health issues” .

(2) The analysis of the “method of treatment”

The articles are classified into four categories by the “method of treatment” such as “folk remedies”, “Western medicine”, “both” (“folk remedies” and “Western medicine”), and “unknown”. The category of “unknown” does not specify the method of treatment. The

result show that the category of “folk remedies” has the highest shares (348: 47.4%), and “Western medicine” (115: 15.7%) comes next. 222 cases (30.2%) belong to “unknown”. 49 cases (3.7%) are on “both” category. It is obvious that the first choice of treatment for Amish people is “folk remedies.” However, the result shows that they do accept “Western medicine” as well.

(3) The analysis of the “suggestions of articles”

The articles are classified into eight groups by its suggestions, such as “factor”, “situation”, “solution”, “factor and situation”, “factor and solution”, “situation and solution”, “factor, situation, and solution”, and “others” (Table 2). The articles which comment on “solution” has the highest share (263: 35.8%), and the articles on “situation” (162: 22.1%) and “situation and solution” (75: 10.2%) follow. The numbers of articles which comment on “factor” and “factor and situation” (31: 4.2%) is small. The result shows that readers are interested in practical information such as “solution” and “situation” rather than general information such as “factor” and fundamental of diseases.

Table 2. “Suggestions of Articles”

Content Categories	Articles(%)
Solution	263(35.8)
Situation	162(22.1)
Situation & Solution	75(10.2)
Factor & Solution	67(9.1)
Others	56(7.6)
Factor & Situation & Solution	49(6.7)
Factor	31(4.2)
Factor & Situation	31(4.2)
Total	734(100.0)

3. Cross section analysis of health corner from 1970 to 1980

In this section, we analyzed the relation between Questions, Answers, Explanations, and “section of diseases”, “method of treatment”, “suggestions of articles”.

(1) The relation between Questions, Answers, Explanations and the “section of diseases”

Concerning the relation between Questions and the “section of diseases”, “disorders of nutrition and metabolism” (37: 14.3%), “skin disorders” (32: 12.4%), “bone, joint, and muscle disorders” (25: 9.7%) are closely related. This tendency is the same for the relation between Answers and the “section of diseases”. However, relation between Explanations and “section of diseases” differ. In the Explanations, “fundamental” (8: 21.6%) has the highest shares, followed by “children's health issues” (7: 18.9%) and “disorders of nutrition and metabolism” (6: 16.2%). This may suggest the doctor's efforts to introduce more fundamental medical information to the readers.

(2) The relation between Questions, Answers, Explanations and the “method of treatment”

As seen in Table 3, strong significant differences can be observed in Questions, Answers, Explanations with “folk remedies” and “unknown”. Questions and Answers show significant differences with “both” treatment. 56.9% of Answers indicate the use of “folk remedies” and 35.3% of Questions are related to the use of “folk remedies”. There is no significant difference with “Western medicine,” as the number of articles is small. From this result, it is obvious that “folk remedies” is very important for the readers of *Family Life*.

Table 3. The Relation Between “Questions”, “Answers”, “Explanations” and the “Method of Treatment”
Articles (%)

	Categories of the Method of Treatment				Total
	Folk Remedies	Western Medicine	Both	Unknown	
Questions	91(35.3) ***	35(13.6)	8(3.1) **	124(48.1) ***	258(100.0)
Answers	250(56.9) ***	76(17.3)	40(9.1) **	73(16.6) ***	439(100.0)
Explanations	7(18.9) **	4(10.8)	1(2.7)	25(67.6) ***	37(100.0)
Total	348(47.4)	115(15.7)	49(6.7)	222(30.2)	734(100.0)

χ^2 *: $p < 0.05$ **: $p < 0.01$ ***: $p < 0.001$

(3) The relation between Questions, Answers, Explanations and the “suggestions of articles”

As seen in Table 4, strong significant differences can be observed in Questions and Answers with “situation” and “solution”. Also strong significant differences can be seen in Explanations with “solution” and “others”. 45.8% of Answers indicate some kinds of “solution”. For Questions, many people introduce their own “situation” and ask for other “solutions”. From this result, “solution” and “situation” are categories that readers are interested in the most.

Table 4. The Relation Between “Questions”, “Answers”, “Explanations” and “Suggestions of Articles”
Articles (%)

	Content Categories of Suggestions of Articles								Total
	Factor	Situation	Solution	Factor & Situation	Factor & Solution	Situation & Solution	Factor & Situation & Solution	Others	
Questions	18(7.0) *	85(32.9) ***	59(22.9) ***	16(6.2)	19(7.4)	27(10.5)	17(6.6)	17(6.6)	258(100.0)
Answers	13(3.0)	64(14.6) ***	201(45.8) ***	12(2.7) *	48(10.9)	40(9.1)	31(7.1)	30(6.8)	439(100.0)
Explanations	0(0.0)	13(35.1)	3(8.1) **		0(0.0)	8(21.6) *	1(2.7)	9(24.3) ***	37(100.0)
Total	31(4.2)	162(22.1)	263(35.8)	31(4.2)	67(9.1)	75(10.2)	49(6.7)	56(7.6)	734(100.0)

χ^2 *: $p < 0.05$ **: $p < 0.01$ ***: $p < 0.001$

(4) The relation between the “section of diseases” and the “method of treatment”

Concerning the relation between the “section of diseases” and the “method of treatment”, most of diseases are commented with “folk remedies” treatments. However, with the following diseases, the use of “Western medicine” exceeds that of “folk remedies”: “blood disorders” (3:2.6%), “immune disorders” (3:2.6%), “eye disorders” (14:12.2%), and “women's health issues” (10:8.7%). We can detect that, “Western medicine” is regarded to be more effective to cure these diseases.

(5) The relation between the “section of diseases” and the “suggestions of articles”

There are close relation in the “suggestions of articles” with the section of “mouth and dental disorders”, “disorders of nutrition and metabolism”, “women's health issues”, and “accidents and injuries”. In the section of “mouth and dental disorders” and “accidents and

injuries”, the majority of articles are comments on “solution” (13: 52%, 9: 64.3%). In the section of “disorders of nutrition and metabolism” and “women's health issues”, articles which comment on “situation” are the majority (58: 51.3%, 8: 53.3%).

From this result, we can say that people are interested in general knowledge of nutrition in the articles of “disorders of nutrition and metabolism”. Special knowledge and information of medicine are needed in the section of “women's health issues”. And immediate relief and practical use are needed in the articles of “mouth and dental disorders” and “accidents and injuries”.

(6) The relation between the “method of treatment” and the “suggestions of articles”

As a result of the analysis of relation between the “method of treatment” and the “suggestions of articles” (Table 5), strong significant differences can be seen in “folk remedies” with “solution” and “factor”, in “Western medicine” with “solution”, “situation & solution”, and “factor & situation & solution”, in “both” with “factor & solution”, in “unknown” with “factor”, “solution”, “factor & situation” and “others”. 56.3% of “folk remedies” indicates “solution”. 34.7% of “both” indicates “factor & solution”. From this result, it can be said that the readers need “folk remedies” for their “solution” of diseases.

Table 5. The Relation Between the “Method of Treatment” and the “Suggestions of Articles”

		Content Categories of Suggestions of Articles								Articles (%)
		Factor	Situation	Solution	Factor & Situation	Factor & Solution	Situation & Solution	Factor & Situation & Solution	Others	Total
Categories of the Method of Treatment	Folk Remedies	5(1.4) **	65(18.7) *	196(56.3) ***	9(2.6)	23(6.6) *	31(8.9)	19(5.5)	0(0.0)	348(100.0)
	Western Medicine	2(1.7)	34(29.6) *	26(22.6) **	5(4.3)	12(10.4)	21(18.3) **	15(13.0) **	0(0.0)	115(100.0)
	Both	0(0.0)	4(8.2) *	12(24.5)	0(0.0)	17(34.7) ***	10(20.4) *	6(12.2)	0(0.0)	49(100.0)
	Unknown	24(10.8) ***	59(26.6)	29(13.1) ***	17(7.7) **	15(6.8)	13(5.9)	9(4.1)	56(25.2) ***	222(100.0)
Total		31(4.2)	162(22.1)	263(35.8)	31(4.2)	67(9.1)	75(10.2)	49(6.7)	56(7.6)	734(100.0)

χ^2 *: p<0.05 ** : p<0.01 *** : p<0.001

IV. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the health corner of *Family Life* in order to clarify everyday knowledge and interests of Amish and other Anabaptist people concerning information on health-related issues. From the analysis, it is clear that they are mainly interested in three categories of health issues such as “disorders of nutrition and metabolism”, “skin disorders”, and “bone, joint, and muscle disorders”. And for these diseases, they need professional medical information, but also wish to solve these health problems by using “folk remedies”. However for diseases such as “blood disorders”, “immune disorders”, “eye disorders”, and “women's health issues”, they tend to think “Western medicine” is more effective than “folk remedies”. Thus, it can be said that they are interested in both “folk remedies” and “Western medicine” on a case-by-case basis in order to maintain their health condition.

The same value within both modern society and Amish and other Anabaptist societies is the necessity of “Western medicine” to cure certain diseases. In Amish society, as they

resist taking higher education, there is no doctor from Amish background. However from the analysis, they accept “Western medicine” as well, and use *Family Life* to gain professional knowledge and information on “Western medicine.”

As mentioned above, there are few articles on cancer, as well as on cardiac infarction, and cerebral infarction, the three major diseases in modern society. One can say that the low number of cancer-related articles in the health corner reflects their low interests in these diseases. From the result, it has become clear that *Family Life* is an effective information source for its reader, because it caters for very specific needs and interests the readers have, offering solutions as well as professional knowledge that are suitable to their lifestyles.

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