

EXPERIENCE OF RISK COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES WITH A Q&A WEB SITE ON RADIATION AFTER FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI NUCLEAR POWER PLANT ACCIDENT

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Abstract

After the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant Accident, which occurred on 11 March 2011 (hereinafter referred to as "Fukushima accident"), we have been providing accurate information about radiation and radioactivity on a website. Immediately after the accident, volunteers of Japan Health Physics Society (JHPS) built up a website named Questions and Answers about Radiation in Daily Life. They carefully answered all the questions posted on the website. In August, Steering Committee of the Q&A website was officially established in JHPS. Since then, the Committee has been engaged in the risk communication activities to the public. The Committee consists of 53 members, among which 40 are from Young Researchers' and Students' Association in JHPS. The answers to the questions posted on the website are firstly prepared by the young researchers, and checked by the experts who work as consultants. Finally, they are confirmed by the executive members of the Committee.

The number of the questions answered has reached over 1500 as of March, 2012. We have analyzed characteristics of them. It has been found that a major portion of the questioners is mothers with infants through the entire period. Young mothers worry about the health effects on their children due to radiation from the accident. In addition, the questions are mostly related to the circumstances of the accident that are announced by the government or reported by the mass media. Through this analysis, we can know the information needs of the people in response to the changing situation after the accident.

We are planning to compile our Q&A into a book so that it will contribute to reduce the people's anxiety about radiation effects due to Fukushima accident. We hope our experience to be of help in establishing the good understanding between experts and the public.

1. Introduction

After the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant Accident occurred on 11 March 2011 (hereinafter referred to as "Fukushima accident"), we have been providing right information on radiation and radioactivity via an Internet website. Immediately after the accident, volunteers of Japan Health Physics Society (JHPS) built up a website named Questions and Answers about Radiation in Daily Life. They carefully answered all the questions posted on the website. In August, Steering Committee of the Q&A site was officially established in JHPS. We describes an outline of the contents of 1500 questions sent to our Q&A website, and the result of the time series analysis of the questions and questioners for-about one year after the Fukushima accident.

2. Activities using Question and Answer Website about radiation in Daily Life

(1) Steering Committee of Q&A about Radiation in Daily Life

The Committee has formally started on August 24, 2011 as a Standing Committee directly controlled by the executive board of JHPS. We have been carrying out risk communication activities to the general public using our Q&A website relating to radiation. The Committee consists of 40 persons belonging to Young Researchers' and Students' Association (hereinafter referred to as "Youngman researcher group"), in the JHPS and of 10 experts in each special field, and of five managers of the Committee.

(2) A correspondence process of answering

A correspondence process of answering is as follows. Firstly, the answers to the questions posted on website are prepared by the young researchers. Secondly, the answers are checked by experts within the group, and finally five managers approve the last answers. The presenters of this paper are five managers. The name and affiliation are officially published on the website. Figure 2 shows the correspondence process of answering the questions.

3. Activities using Question and Answer Website about radiation in Daily Life

(1) Change of the number of the questions

Our volunteer-based website started on March 25, 2011. At the beginning, questions more than 150 were sent to the website in a week. Therefore, volunteer members could not correspond to all of their questions. Accepting of question was unavoidably stopped for a period to June 5 from May 26 to June 5, and to August 21 from July 2. The number of questions was gradually decreased. In the end of February, it was nearly twenty per one week. Figure 3 shows the number of questions posted to the Q&A website during March 25, 2011 and March 1, 2012.

(2) A questioners' characteristics

A questioner can write a sex, an age, a hometown, and an occupation etc. in the website under the self-reported style. We analyzed questioners' characteristics using these data which were accumulated by the end of February, 2012.

About sex, women occupied the greater part of the questioners. An occupation of the woman was almost a full-time homemaker. About age, the most common age of the questioners was 30s, next was 40s, and the third was 20s. Refer graph about sex, age, occupation of the woman (from questioner to the website) in Figure 4.

(3) Question contents

When we published the answers on the website, we classified the questions using the keywords which are provided in the site as one of the functions. Top five of the key-words are "exposure", "radioactive material", "body influence", "child", and "decontamination". From this fact, we suppose that most of the questioners worry about the health effects due to radiation for their children. Figure 5 shows the analysis of question contents.

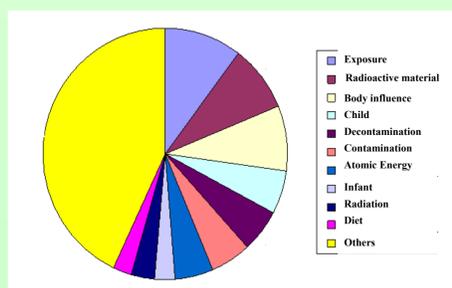


Fig 5. Analytical result of question contents



Fig 1. The Toppage on Q&A Website (<http://radi-info.com/>)

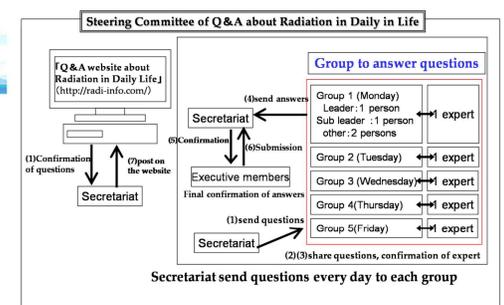


Fig 2. The correspondence process of answering

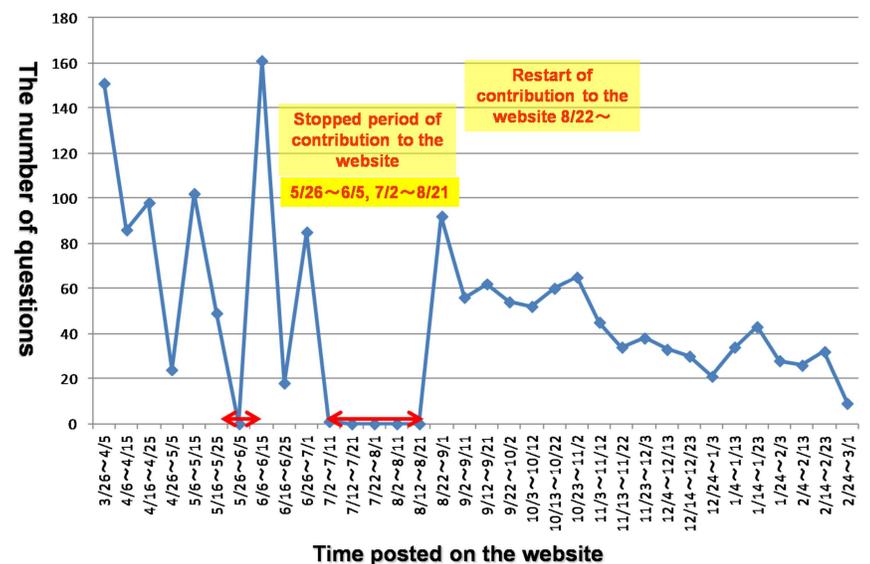


Fig 3. Change of the number of the questions

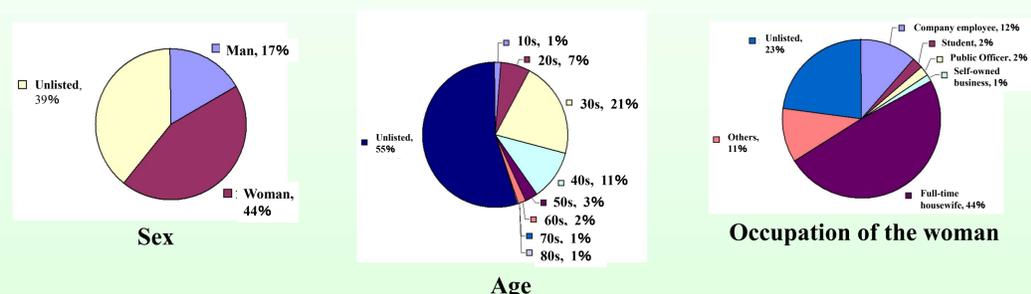


Fig 4. Analytical result about Sex, age, occupation of the woman

4. Summary

Most of questioners were **full-time housewives in their 20s to 40s living in the Kanto region** (East part of Japan). Considering the question contents, it is likely correct that the reason why many women sent many questions were that they worried about **the health effects due to radiation for a child**. At the beginning of the website, the most of the questions were about the health effects of radiation. But, the question content was gradually changed to the various field of the radiation. The number of questions to the website tends to decrease with time. We have carefully and politely answered many questions, which were sent by the people worrying about health effect due to the Fukushima accident, one by one. We believe that politely answering one by one is greatly effective in eliminating anxiety of the radiation. A Q&A publishing task group was set up in the Committee. We are working on the publication of the important Q&As. The book will come out in print by August 2012. We strongly hope that the book will help the citizens to eliminate anxiety of the radiation due to the Fukushima accident. Next step is to announce the contents of our Q&A website to many people in the world. The presentation in IRPA is one of the examples of our aim. We have many experiences gotten in risk communication with the citizens who worry about the effects of radiation by the Fukushima accident. We want to disseminate them to the people in the world.