

Divorcees with gender disorder to challenge law

KOBE (Kyodo) Two people who have undergone sex change operations to become women will file requests with family courts in Nara and Hyogo prefectures to change their gender registrations, sources said Saturday.

Both were married while they were still male and are now divorced. Their requests to the courts are likely to stir debate over revising the 2004 law allowing people with gender identity disorder to change their sex registrations.

The law allows people with the disorder, known by its acronym GID, to change their sex registration only if they have not married and have not had children.

Both have been married and have children. One, a 46-year-old living in Ikoma, Nara Prefecture, who uses the name Sayaka Morimura, had a sex change operation at Osaka Medical College. The other is a 50-year-old company employee in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture, who had a similar operation overseas.

The two say they have regularly encountered problems at work and other circumstances in life because they are still listed as male in the resident registry.

It is estimated that the number of people with GID in Japan totals several thousands to several tens of thousands. Less than 10 percent of them are believed to have children.

Under the 2004 law, people diagnosed by at least two doctors as having a different psychological makeup from their biological sex and a desire to live as the opposite sex both physically and socially can apply to change their registrations.

Applicants must be age 20 or above, unmarried and have no children. Also, they must no longer have functioning reproductive organs of their former gender as a result of undergoing sex-change operations.

The law is to be reviewed three years after its implementation to take into consideration changes in the social environment surrounding GID sufferers.

"Sufferers (of GID) with children are mostly in their 40s and 50s, who reached a marrying age when the concept of GID was still new to society. Few sufferers under 30 have been married," said Toshiyuki Oshima, a Kobe Gakuin University professor who heads the Japanese Society of Gender Identity Disorder.

One of the applicants, Morimura, said she has lived her life by "suppressing her real self," and was bullied at junior high school because of the way she speaks and behaves.

Morimura said she decided to get married at age 29, believing she "could be more like a man" if she became a father, and also felt pressure from her parents' desire for grandchildren.

Morimura said she got divorced because she could not fully act like a husband or a father.

She had a sex change operation in January. She now looks like a woman but has been forced to endure a series of temporary jobs because she would have to submit her resident registry record if she becomes a full-time employee.

The other applicant, who asked not to be named, said some people criticized her, saying, "Are you saying you suffer from GID even after fathering a child?"

Under current law, there is little chance their requests will be granted. They said they want to start a campaign to revise the law with the help of experts and doctors.

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