

Abstract

A Study on Changes in Partner Relationship and Economic Vulnerability of Older Women

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This study is to shed light on the phenomenon centered on changes in spousal relationship and economic vulnerability of elderly women in the rapidly aging Korean society and to seek ways to respond with family-related laws and systems from the gender perspective.

The study analyzed the female family panel data as quantitative

research and conducted FGI on elderly women in their 60s and 70s as qualitative research for the purpose of identifying changes in spousal relationships and their economic vulnerability. Based on the analysis results and implications, it reviewed and analyzed the legislative cases of overseas countries that experienced aging and family changes. In addition, this investigation compiled the findings to present the direction and policy suggestions for the improvement of the legal system in response to the ageing society and family change.

The main analytical results are summarized as follows.

The quality of life of elderly women in their 60s and 70s varied widely depending on family situations and resources, including changes in family and spousal relationships and support of their children. Among them, those who did not constitute family or did experience spousal change faced socioeconomic status degrade to some extent, including reduced income. Their living expenses were relatively largely borne by spouse's wealth (or, inherited assets), or support of their parents or children. This means that while the quality of life of female senior citizens is stable when they belong to a typical "family," they have a weak socioeconomic status if they are outside the family system or are not supported by their family. The analysis found that the influence of family members on the quality of life for the elderly women is decided by social conditions that have been maintained around the gender division-based family system. Most of the elderly women who participated in the interview got married when they reached "proper" age and lived up to the social norms that kept women in housework and child-nurturing. Yet their labor and contribution were not rightly recognized in a male-dominated, wage-labor society, resulting in greater dependence on their spouses and

family.

Another inequality factor that affects the quality of life of female senior citizens should be noted that the burden of family care continues into their old age and they are faced with the lack of care. In this study, unlike male spouses who retired at retirement age, female seniors were still carrying out family care, including daily care for their spouses and parents as “active” workers even in their old age. However, when they get into a state that needs protection, they could not effectively expect any support. This led them to anxiety and concern in their later life.

Nevertheless, female seniors still wanted to work, learn and do something new in their old age, thereby securing enough opportunities for learning, education and cultural life. Moreover, female senior citizens wanted that they would “not be burdening” to their children. As such, they showed interest in and desire for economic stability that can be construed as stable housing, good jobs, and national pension benefits as well as personal and social measures with which they can take care of themselves.

Based on these findings, this study presented following guidelines for the improvement of laws and systems from a gender perspective that can respond to the aging society and family changes:

First, institutional improvement and policy supplementation should be made to more actively tackle or lessen gender inequality and its related vulnerability and to secure economic autonomy.

Second, it is necessary to improve the system and support policies in response to family changes so that marginalization and inconvenience do not take place in laws and institutions in the course of family formation, breakup, and diversification.

Third, policy support should be strengthened to ease elderly

women's burden of family care and to address caring shortage that follows.

Fourth, policies should be prepared to support for women to plan and prepare for their life in old age, reflecting women's life experiences and desires from a gender perspective.

Research areas: Family and care, Law and plan, Low Fertility and Aging

Keywords: Aging society, Older women, Improvement of laws and systems from family changes