

## A Support Plan for the Social Network Building of Young People in Single-Person Households<sup>1)</sup>

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- The number of young people in single-person households is constantly increasing. Hence, forms and compositions of social networks are changing.
- Social networks have both positive and negative influences on various areas of our lives, such as subjective perception of happiness, health, and quality of life, depending on their forms.
- Most current relevant research tends to focus on middle-aged or senior groups. In this regard, official statistical data are significantly lacking to monitor the status of the social networks of young people in single-person households.
- This paper examines the trajectory and features of changes in the social networks of young(aged 19-34) people in single-person households by gender. It aims to lay a basic theoretical foundation for statistical development and appropriate social network support plans tailored to gender and the characteristics of the youth.

| Category            | Details  |
|---------------------|--|
| Data                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA)</li> <li>- The 2019 Social Survey, Statistics Korea</li> <li>- The 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea</li> <li>*All data were weighted when analyzed.</li> </ul>  |
| Target              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young people aged 19-34.</li> </ul>   |
| Working definitions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Single-person household: A household that contains one person living alone.</li> <li>- Multi-person household: A household with two or more persons sharing the same residence (including non-family members).</li> <li>- Pre- and Post-COVID-19 periods: In the case of the Social Survey, the 2019 data are defined as 'pre-COVID-19 period', and the 2021 data as 'post-COVID-19 period'.</li> </ul> |

1) This paper partially modified and revised KWDI Gender Statistics Information System Report 22-2 (Status of Social Network of Young Single-person Households). The original version is available at <https://gsis.kwdi.re.kr/gsis/kr/board/BoardDetail.html>.

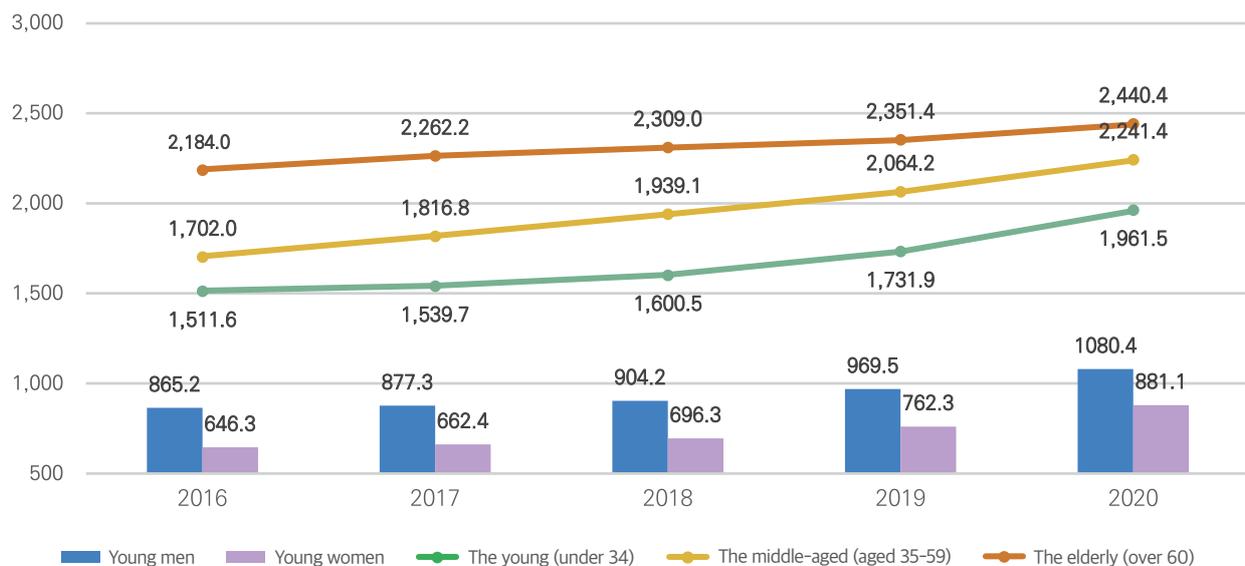
# Changes in Social Networks and Household Types

## Rapid increase in young single-person households

- According to the Population and Housing Census carried out by Statistics Korea, the number of single-person households is constantly increasing. Especially, young single-person households are rapidly expanding compared with other age groups. In particular, the number in 2019 more than doubled from the number in 2018. In 2020, it tripled from 2018.
- In young single-person households, there are more men than women. However, the number of young women in single-person households is increasing more rapidly.

<Figure 1> Single-person households by age group

(Unit: Thousand households)



<Table 1> Rate of change per year

(Unit: %)

| Category        |         | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----------------|---------|------|------|------|------|
| The young       | Overall | 1.9  | 4.0  | 8.2  | 13.3 |
|                 | Male    | 1.4  | 3.1  | 7.2  | 11.4 |
|                 | Female  | 2.5  | 5.1  | 9.5  | 15.6 |
| The middle-aged |         | 3.6  | 2.1  | 1.8  | 3.8  |
| The elderly     |         | 6.7  | 6.7  | 6.5  | 8.6  |

\* Source: The Population and Housing Census, Statistics Korea. The data for each year were modified.

\* Rate of change= $\frac{\text{the current year} - \text{the previous year}}{\text{the previous year}} \times 100$

- Besides, social networks are swiftly changing as the contactless lifestyle has expanded since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- According to the 2021 Social Survey conducted by Statistics Korea, more than one out of four young people responded that every social relationship, including family, has become estranged.
- Compared with multi-person households, a higher percentage of young people living in single-person households responded that every social relationship, except for friends, has become estranged. A considerable percentage of them responded that they have become alienated from blood relationships such as family members and relatives.

<Table 2> Impact of COVID-19 on the social relationships of young people

(Unit: %)

| Category         | Has become closer | Not changed | Has become estranged |                          |                         |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
|                  |                   |             | Overall young people | Single-person households | Multi-person households |
| Family           | 15.5              | 78.4        | 6.1                  | 12.5                     | 4.9                     |
| Relatives        | 2.9               | 70.2        | 27.0                 | 33.1                     | 25.8                    |
| Neighbors        | 1.1               | 70.7        | 28.2                 | 31.7                     | 27.5                    |
| Friends          | 3.2               | 71.4        | 25.4                 | 24.8                     | 25.5                    |
| Colleagues       | 2.9               | 70.7        | 26.4                 | 26.5                     | 26.4                    |
| Hobby clubs      | 1.8               | 53.8        | 44.4                 | 49.9                     | 43.2                    |
| Religious groups | 1.6               | 62.8        | 35.6                 | 36.8                     | 35.4                    |
| Others           | 1.2               | 58.2        | 40.6                 | 44.7                     | 39.8                    |

\* Source: The 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea

\* Note: 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded

# Young people in single-person households and social networks

## Status of the social networks of young people in single-person households

- Young people in single-person households tend to have more active social interactions than those in multi-person households and interact with many people, generally.

- It is assumed that the results of such active social interactions of young people in single-person households derive from the measuring approach. Since cohabitants were excluded from counting as social interactions, family members or people living together were excluded from the social interactions of people in multi-person households. On the other hand, everyone interacting with young people in single-person households was counted as social interactions.

- Within the single-person household group, men show a higher percentage in the category 'have not interacted with no one' than women. However, in the category 'have interacted with others', men have a greater number of people who they interact with. Thus, young men in single-person households present a stark contrast between 'interacted with no one' and 'interacted with others'.

<Table 3> Daily social interactions with others on average

(Unit: %, persons)

| Category                            | Single-person households |        |       | Multi-person households |        |       |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
|                                     | Male                     | Female | Total | Male                    | Female | Total |
| Have interacted with others (%)     | 86.8                     | 94.1   | 89.6  | 87.9                    | 92.3   | 90.1  |
| Persons                             | 8.08                     | 6.99   | 7.62  | 7.46                    | 7.35   | 7.4   |
| Have not interacted with others (%) | 13.2                     | 5.9    | 10.4  | 12.1                    | 7.7    | 9.9   |

\* Source: Analyzed the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea

\* Note: 1) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded. 2) Cohabitants and simple work-related relationships were excluded  
3) Social interactions include; in-person, internet-based, or phone interactions with more than one person who is a family member, relative, or another type of acquaintance.

- <Table 3> demonstrates that young people in single-person households tend to be active in social interactions. However, fewer of them have someone whom they can ask for help in the case of difficult situations.

- Young men in single-person households rank highest in the responses that they have no one else to ask for help in case of all types of difficult situations surveyed compared to other groups. Young men in single-person households have more number of people whom to ask for help than young women in single-person households. Even though there are not dramatically wide variations, it was found that there are differences across the groups.

- On the other hand, young women in single-person households recorded the highest response rate for the statement that they have someone that they can ask for help. However the number of contacts is fewer than for young people in single-person households in general.

<Table 4> Contacts whom to ask for help in case of difficulties

(Units: %, persons)

| Category   | Single-person households |        |       | Multi-person households |        |       |
|--|--------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
|  | Male                     | Female | Total | Male                    | Female | Total |
| Have someone to ask for help (%)                 | 86.2                     | 95.4   | 89.7  | 87.4                    | 92.4   | 89.9  |
| Number of persons (on average)                   | 3.62                     | 3.08   | 3.39  | 3.21                    | 3.00   | 3.10  |
| Being sick                                       | 3.10                     | 2.64   | 2.90  | 2.80                    | 2.60   | 2.70  |
| Suddenly need a large amount of money            | 3.01                     | 2.30   | 2.71  | 2.63                    | 2.39   | 2.51  |
| Experiencing mental health issues                | 3.75                     | 3.73   | 3.74  | 3.60                    | 3.54   | 3.57  |
| Have no one to ask for help in any situation (%) | 13.8                     | 4.6    | 10.3  | 12.6                    | 7.6    | 10.1  |
| Being sick                                       | 30.3                     | 13.3   | 23.7  | 24.9                    | 20.0   | 22.4  |
| Suddenly need a large amount of money            | 39.5                     | 30.3   | 35.9  | 42.0                    | 37.0   | 39.5  |
| Experiencing mental health issues                | 19.3                     | 9.1    | 15.4  | 18.2                    | 11.7   | 14.9  |

\* Source: Analyzed the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded. 2) 'Have someone to ask for help': To have someone whom the respondent can ask for help in case of one of the situations surveyed. 3) 'Have no one to ask for help in any situation': To have no one whom the respondent can ask for help in all types of situations surveyed.

## Social networks as perceived by young people in single-person households

- More young people in single-person households responded that they think there is no one to rely on than young people in multi-person households. Within the single-person household group, a higher percentage of young women perceive that they have no one to rely on than other groups, even though young women in single-person households show the highest response rate for that they have someone to ask for help in case of difficult situations.

<Table 5> Percentage of young people who think they have no one to rely on

(Unit: %)

| Category                 |        | 'I think I have no one to rely on.' |  |
|--------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------|--|
|                          |        | Agree<br>(Strongly agree & agree)   | Disagree<br>(Disagree & strongly disagree) |
| Single-person households | Total  | 20.7                                | 79.3                                       |
|                          | Male   | 19.1                                | 80.9                                       |
|                          | Female | 23.2                                | 76.8                                       |
| Multi-person households  | Total  | 18.0                                | 82.0                                       |
|                          | Male   | 17.3                                | 82.7                                       |
|                          | Female | 18.7                                | 81.3                                       |

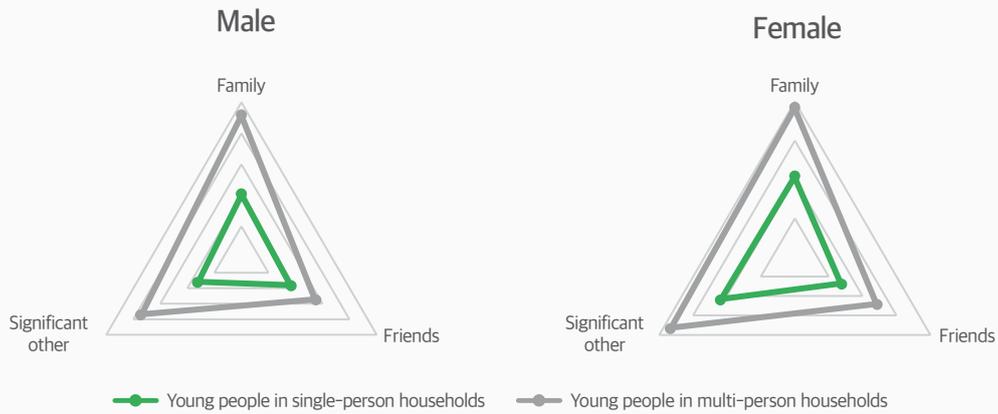
\* Source: Analyzed the 2019 Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs(KIHASA).

● When applying the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support(MSPSS)<sup>2</sup>, young people in single-person households, both men and women, have lower perceived social support than those in multi-person households.

- In particular, young men in single-person households show the lowest perceived social support. This finding from the MSPSS aligns with the pattern found in Table 4 that shows a high percentage of young men in single-person households think they have no one to ask for help.
- Young women in single-person households show a higher tendency in perceived social support. This finding contrasts with <Table 3> which shows a high percentage of young women in single-person households stating that they have no one to rely on. It seems that young women in single-person households think they have a big social support network but in practice, they do not have someone to rely on.
- Young people in every group perceive that they get the most support from their family. Young women in single-person households show a relatively higher percentage than men in the response that they get support from others who are significant to them.

<Figure 2> Perceived social support (MSPSS)

(Unit: points)



<Table 6> Perceived social support

(Unit: %)

| Category                 |        | Family | Friends | Significant other |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|---------|-------------------|
| Single-person households | Male   | 5.40   | 5.38    | 5.36              |
|                          | Female | 5.51   | 5.44    | 5.52              |
|                          | Total  | 5.45   | 5.41    | 5.43              |
| Multi-person households  | Male   | 5.66   | 5.48    | 5.57              |
|                          | Female | 5.69   | 5.54    | 5.67              |
|                          | Total  | 5.67   | 5.51    | 5.62              |

\*Source: Analyzed the 2019 Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA).

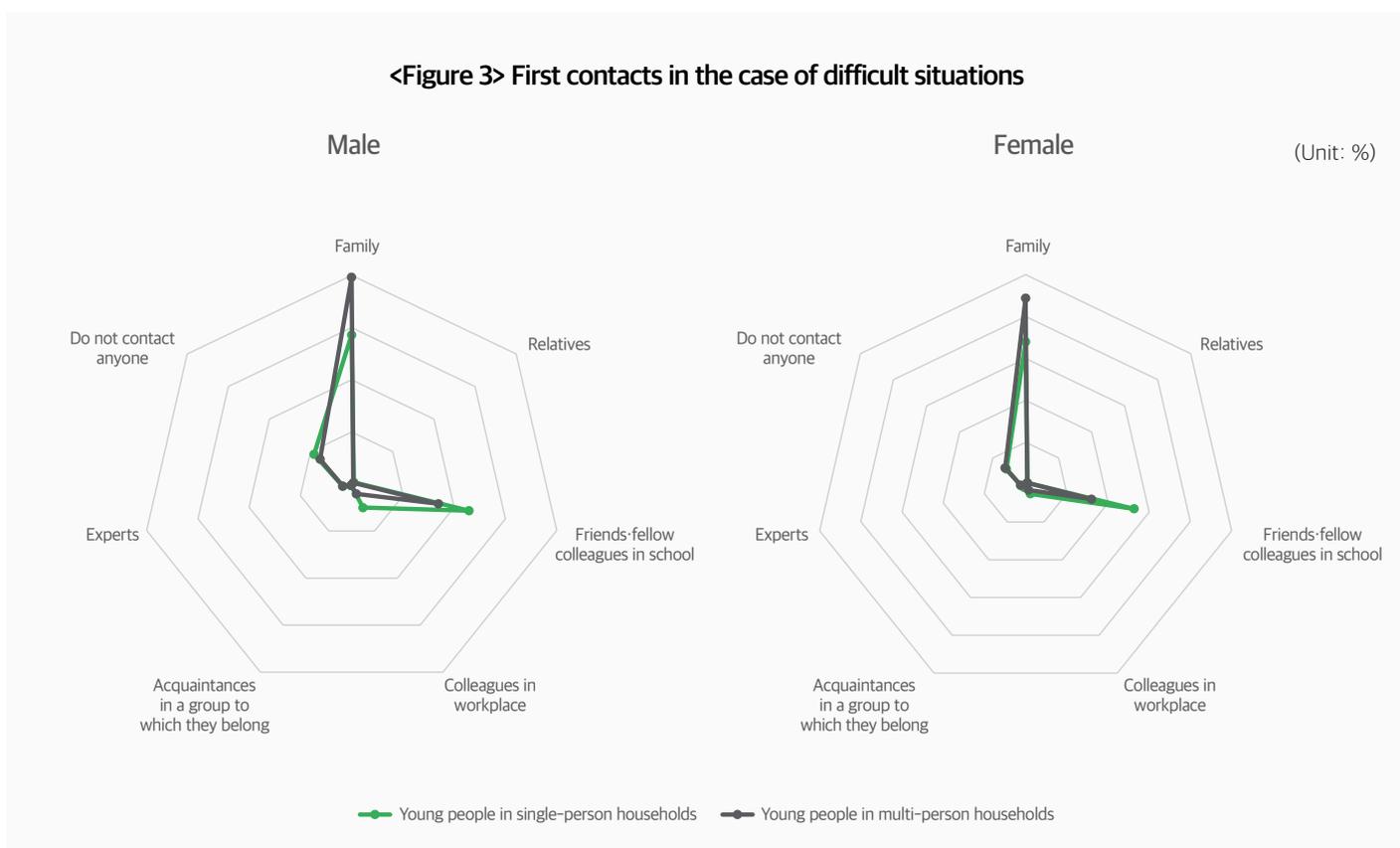
\*Note: 1) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded

2) The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support(MSPSS) was developed by Zimet et al. (1988). The MSPSS consists of 12 items measuring perceived adequacy of social support (See Appendix Table 1)

## Use of social networks by young people in single-person households

- Young people in single-person households contact friends-fellow colleagues in school first in the case of difficult situations, whereas young people in multi-person households contact family first.
- Contrary to <Figure 2>, showing that the most social support for young people in single-person households is perceived to be provided by family, it was found that they tend to contact friends-fellow colleagues in school first in reality. Thus, there are differences between their perceptions and reality when it comes to their social networks.

<Figure 3> First contacts in the case of difficult situations



\*Source: The 2019 Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA)

\*Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) Responses were considered duplicated for the questions on the following four types of situation; mental/psychological, health, financial, and safety.

● Young men in single-person households show the highest rates in not asking anyone for help in any difficult situation (Tables 7 & 8)

- Young men show a high percentage in not asking for help especially when it comes to safety-related matters. This contrasts with young women in single-person households not asking for help most for dating/marriage-related matters.
- Also, young men from single-person households show a high percentage in not asking anyone for help about health-related matters, which presents the biggest difference from young men in multi-person households.

<Table 7> The first contact for young people in single-person households in difficult situations

(Unit: %)

| Category                                 |        | Young single-person households |           |                               |                         |                          |         |      |
|--|--------|--------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------|------|
| Topic                                    | Gender | Family                         | Relatives | Friends, colleagues in school | Colleagues in workplace | Acquaintances in a group | Experts | None |
| Emotional                                | Male   | 19.0                           | 0.4       | 60.2                          | 6.0                     | 0.4                      | 1.8     | 12.3 |
|  | Female | 15.9                           | 1.4       | 70.6                          | 4.2                     | 0.9                      | 0.9     | 6.1  |
|  | Total  | 17.7                           | 0.8       | 64.7                          | 5.2                     | 0.6                      | 1.4     | 9.6  |
| Health                                   | Male   | 50.2                           | 1.2       | 22.9                          | 6.3                     | 0.4                      | 5.5     | 13.4 |
|  | Female | 60.6                           | 0.5       | 23.2                          | 1.5                     | 1.0                      | 5.6     | 7.6  |
|  | Total  | 54.8                           | 0.9       | 23.1                          | 4.2                     | 0.7                      | 5.5     | 10.9 |
| Financial                                | Male   | 62.0                           | 1.1       | 19.3                          | 4.4                     | 0.4                      | 0.7     | 12.0 |
|  | Female | 71.7                           | 0.5       | 15.7                          | 1.5                     | 1.0                      | 0.0     | 9.6  |
|  | Total  | 66.1                           | 0.8       | 17.8                          | 3.2                     | 0.6                      | 0.4     | 11.0 |
| Safety                                   | Male   | 37.6                           | 0.8       | 29.4                          | 13.1                    | 0.4                      | 2.4     | 16.3 |
|  | Female | 45.3                           | 1.2       | 35.5                          | 7.6                     | 1.2                      | 0.0     | 9.3  |
|  | Total  | 40.8                           | 1.0       | 31.9                          | 10.8                    | 0.7                      | 1.4     | 13.4 |
| Family                                   | Male   | 58.8                           | 2.4       | 24.3                          | 2.7                     | 0.4                      | 0.8     | 10.6 |
|  | Female | 64.2                           | 3.6       | 22.8                          | 1.6                     | 0.5                      | 0.5     | 6.7  |
|  | Total  | 61.2                           | 2.9       | 23.7                          | 2.2                     | 0.4                      | 0.7     | 8.9  |
| Employment/<br>Studying                  | Male   | 25.6                           | 0.4       | 52.0                          | 8.4                     | 0.4                      | 1.1     | 12.1 |
|  | Female | 20.9                           | 1.0       | 60.2                          | 5.5                     | 1.5                      | 1.5     | 9.5  |
|  | Total  | 23.6                           | 0.6       | 55.5                          | 7.2                     | 0.8                      | 1.3     | 11.0 |
| Dating/Marriage                          | Male   | 12.6                           | 0.3       | 71.3                          | 4.2                     | 0.0                      | 0.3     | 11.2 |
|  | Female | 4.9                            | 1.0       | 79.8                          | 2.0                     | 1.0                      | 0.0     | 11.3 |
|  | Total  | 9.4                            | 0.6       | 74.8                          | 3.3                     | 0.4                      | 0.2     | 11.2 |
| All topics<br>(considered as duplicated) | Male   | 220.3                          | 5.2       | 240.5                         | 37.6                    | 2.3                      | 10.4    | 73.7 |
|  | Female | 244.4                          | 7.9       | 274.7                         | 20.2                    | 7.1                      | 7.1     | 53.1 |
|  | Total  | 230.3                          | 6.3       | 254.7                         | 30.4                    | 4.3                      | 9.1     | 65.2 |

\*Source: Analyzed the 2019 Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA).

\*Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) All topics: Responses were considered duplicated for the questions on every topic of situations indicated in the table.

<Table 8> The first contact for young people in multi-person households in difficult situations

(Unit: %)

| Category                                 |        | Young multi-person households |           |                               |                         |                          |         |      |
|--|--------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------|------|
| Topic                                    | Gender | Family                        | Relatives | Friends, colleagues in school | Colleagues in workplace | Acquaintances in a group | Experts | None |
| Emotional                                | Male   | 33.1                          | 0.7       | 51.5                          | 2.9                     | 0.4                      | 1.2     | 10.2 |
|  | Female | 38.8                          | 1.1       | 48.5                          | 2.7                     | 0.7                      | 0.9     | 7.2  |
|  | Total  | 36.0                          | 0.9       | 50.0                          | 2.8                     | 0.5                      | 1.1     | 8.7  |
| Health                                   | Male   | 70.0                          | 0.5       | 12.9                          | 0.8                     | 0.2                      | 6.1     | 9.5  |
|  | Female | 75.0                          | 0.4       | 9.1                           | 1.9                     | 0.1                      | 5.2     | 8.2  |
|  | Total  | 72.5                          | 0.5       | 11.0                          | 1.4                     | 0.2                      | 5.7     | 8.8  |
| Financial                                | Male   | 74.9                          | 0.6       | 12.5                          | 1.5                     | 0.1                      | 0.8     | 9.6  |
|  | Female | 77.7                          | 1.0       | 10.7                          | 1.3                     | 0.2                      | 0.0     | 9.1  |
|  | Total  | 76.3                          | 0.8       | 11.6                          | 1.4                     | 0.1                      | 0.4     | 9.4  |
| Safety                                   | Male   | 53.6                          | 0.5       | 19.6                          | 7.5                     | 0.7                      | 2.0     | 16.2 |
|  | Female | 63.5                          | 0.4       | 21.2                          | 2.9                     | 0.0                      | 0.6     | 11.5 |
|  | Total  | 58.5                          | 0.4       | 20.4                          | 5.2                     | 0.3                      | 1.3     | 13.9 |
| Family                                   | Male   | 70.8                          | 1.0       | 18.2                          | 1.1                     | 0.2                      | 0.1     | 8.7  |
|  | Female | 71.4                          | 1.2       | 19.3                          | 1.5                     | 0.3                      | 0.4     | 5.9  |
|  | Total  | 71.1                          | 1.1       | 18.7                          | 1.3                     | 0.2                      | 0.2     | 7.3  |
| Employment/<br>Studying                  | Male   | 36.8                          | 0.9       | 43.7                          | 5.1                     | 0.8                      | 1.3     | 11.5 |
|  | Female | 42.1                          | 0.5       | 42.4                          | 4.3                     | 0.4                      | 0.9     | 9.4  |
|  | Total  | 39.3                          | 0.7       | 43.1                          | 4.7                     | 0.6                      | 1.1     | 10.5 |
| Dating/Marriage                          | Male   | 18.7                          | 0.6       | 65.0                          | 1.9                     | 0.3                      | 0.0     | 13.5 |
|  | Female | 23.2                          | 0.8       | 64.1                          | 2.5                     | 0.2                      | 0.0     | 9.3  |
|  | Total  | 20.8                          | 0.7       | 64.6                          | 2.2                     | 0.3                      | 0.0     | 11.5 |
| All topics<br>(considered as duplicated) | Male   | 301.5                         | 4.0       | 191.3                         | 17.1                    | 2.2                      | 9.7     | 66.3 |
|  | Female | 333.7                         | 4.6       | 181.9                         | 14.5                    | 1.6                      | 7.0     | 51.0 |
|  | Total  | 317.2                         | 4.3       | 186.7                         | 15.8                    | 1.9                      | 8.3     | 58.8 |

\* Source: Analyzed the 2019 Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA).

\* Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) All topics: Responses were considered duplicated for the questions on every topic of situations indicated in the table

# COVID-19 and young people's social networks

## Young women in single-person households the most affected by COVID-19

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, young women in single-person households record higher rates for becoming estranged from all types of social networks, except for friends

<Table 9> The percentage of young people who have become estranged from their social networks

(Unit: %)

| Category           | Single-person households |        |       | Multi-person households |        |       |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
|                    | Male                     | Female | Total | Male                    | Female | Total |
| Family             | 12.2                     | 13.0   | 12.5  | 4.8                     | 5.0    | 4.9   |
| Relatives          | 30.4                     | 37.4   | 33.1  | 24.2                    | 27.4   | 25.8  |
| Neighbors          | 28.5                     | 37.0   | 31.7  | 26.6                    | 28.5   | 27.5  |
| Friends            | 24.0                     | 26.1   | 24.8  | 23.0                    | 27.9   | 25.5  |
| Colleagues         | 24.8                     | 29.1   | 26.5  | 23.8                    | 29.0   | 26.4  |
| Hobby club members | 46.6                     | 55.1   | 49.9  | 41.2                    | 45.4   | 43.2  |
| Religious groups   | 33.0                     | 43.2   | 36.8  | 31.4                    | 39.5   | 35.4  |
| Others             | 44.6                     | 44.9   | 44.7  | 38.1                    | 41.5   | 39.8  |

\* Source: Analyzed the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

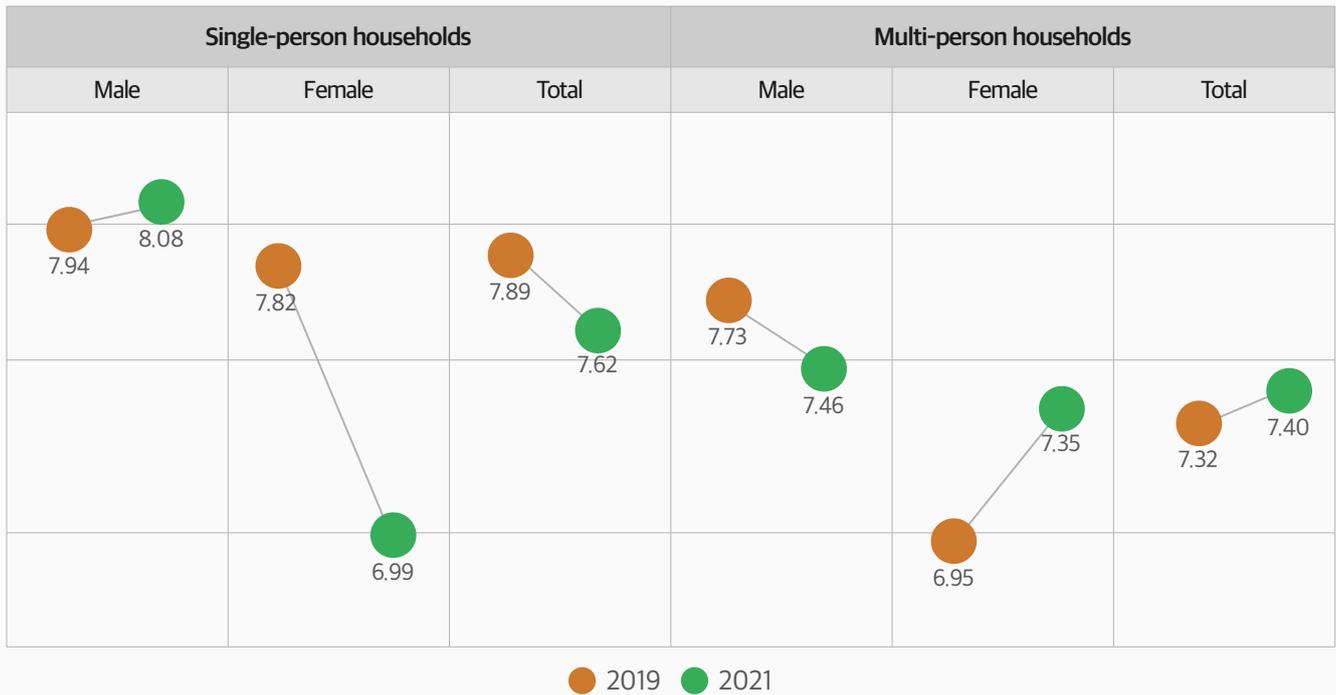
\* Note: 1) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded. 2) The percentage refers to the rates of respondents who stated they became estranged from the respective category of social networks due to the COVID-19

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of contacts for social interactions has decreased the most for young women in single-person households.

- This is contrary to an increase in the number of contacts for social interactions in young men in single-person households and in young women in multi-person households.
- In the group of young women in single-person households, the number of their contacts was higher than in multi-person households (men and women) before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the number has dropped and become smaller than in other groups. This pattern implies that the COVID-19 pandemic had significant influence on the social interaction activities of young women in single-person households.

<Figure 4> Before and after the COVID-19 pandemic: Change in the number of social contacts

(Unit: persons)



\* Source: Analyzed the 2019 Social Survey and the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded.

● For young women in single-person households, their social networks from which they can get support in a crisis situation have shrunk.

- Unlike the other three groups, in which the number of people to ask for help has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number has decreased for young women in single-person households.
- Looking at each given situation (<Table 9>), the number of people has increased whom the respondents can ask for help when they are sick or experiencing mental health issues. However, the number of people has decreased whom the respondents can ask for help in financially difficult situations. As a consequence, the average number of social contacts for help has been affected.

<Table 10> The number of contacts whom to ask for help in difficult situations

(Unit: persons)

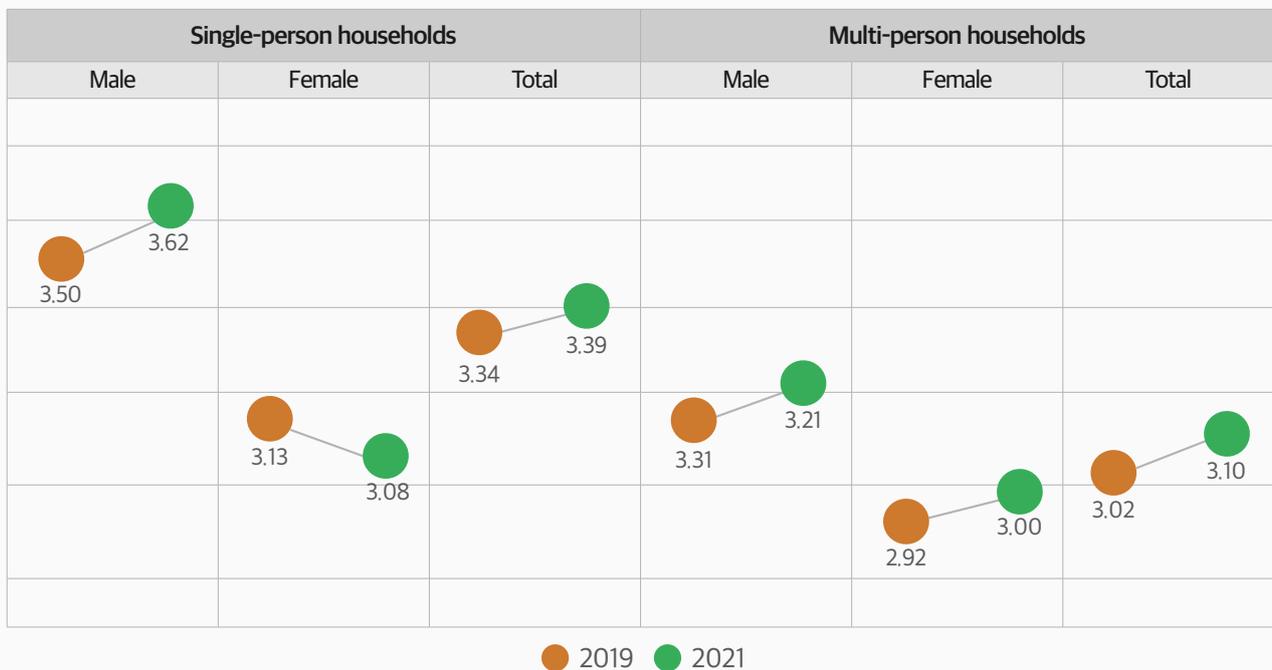
| Category                           |           | Single-person households |        |       | Multi-person households |        |       |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
|                                    |           | Male                     | Female | Total | Male                    | Female | Total |
| The average number of persons      | 2019      | 3.50                     | 3.13   | 3.34  | 3.13                    | 2.92   | 3.02  |
|                                    | 2021      | 3.62                     | 3.08   | 3.39  | 3.21                    | 3.00   | 3.10  |
|                                    | Variation | 0.12                     | -0.05  | 0.05  | 0.09                    | 0.08   | 0.08  |
| Being sick                         | 2019      | 2.90                     | 2.51   | 2.73  | 2.70                    | 2.51   | 2.61  |
|                                    | 2021      | 3.10                     | 2.64   | 2.90  | 2.80                    | 2.60   | 2.70  |
|                                    | Variation | 0.20                     | 0.13   | 0.17  | 0.10                    | 0.09   | 0.09  |
| Suddely need a big amount of money | 2019      | 2.81                     | 2.44   | 2.65  | 2.57                    | 2.25   | 2.40  |
|                                    | 2021      | 3.01                     | 2.30   | 2.71  | 2.63                    | 2.39   | 2.51  |
|                                    | Variation | 0.20                     | -0.14  | 0.06  | 0.07                    | 0.14   | 0.10  |
| Being mentally hard                | 2019      | 3.63                     | 3.57   | 3.61  | 3.52                    | 3.42   | 3.47  |
|                                    | 2021      | 3.75                     | 3.73   | 3.74  | 3.60                    | 3.54   | 3.57  |
|                                    | Variation | 0.12                     | 0.16   | 0.14  | 0.08                    | 0.12   | 0.10  |

\* Source: Analyzed the 2019 Social Survey and the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded.

<Figure 5> Before and after the COVID-19 pandemic: Changes in the average number of social contacts whom to ask for help

(Unit: persons)



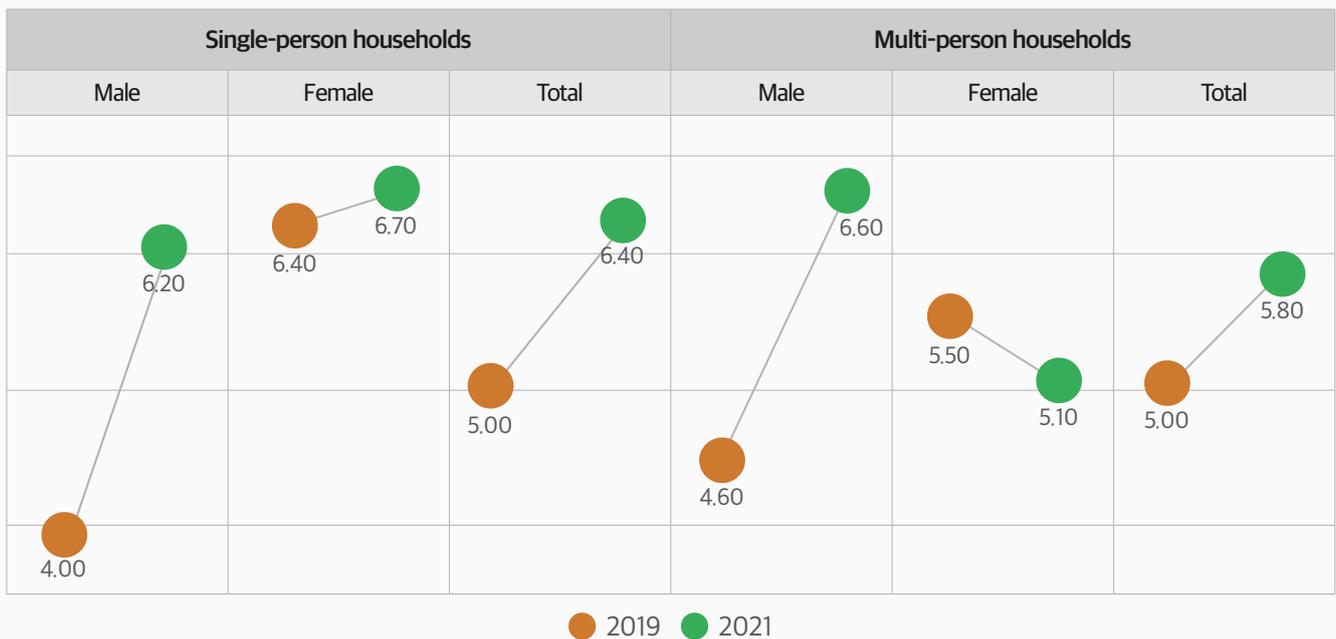
\* Source: Analyzed the 2019 Social Survey and the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded. 2) The numbers refer to the average number of contacts whom to ask for help when the respondents are sick, in need of money, and experiencing mental health issues.

- Young women in single-person households show the highest rates of dissatisfaction with relationships even before the COVID-19 pandemic. After the COVID-19 pandemic, they still show the highest dissatisfaction rates. Considering that rates of dissatisfaction with relationships among young women in multi-person households have decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on social relationships of young women in single-person households after the COVID-19 pandemic seems considerable.

<Figure 6> Before and after the COVID-19 pandemic: Changes in rates of dissatisfaction with personal relationships

(Unit: %)



\* Source: Analyzed the 2019 Social Survey and the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded. 3) The respondents stating that they are dissatisfied with personal relationships.

## Summary and implications

### Instable social networks of young people in single-person households

- Even though young people in single-person households have more social interactions than those in multi-person households, they show a higher percentage of having no one to rely on. Also, they have fewer contacts whom to ask for help in difficult situations
  - This pattern seems to derive from inappropriate social networks despite many social interactions.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, young people in single-person households have had fewer social interactions. Hence, the number of persons they interact with has more significantly decreased than for young people in multi-person households. Also, the rates of dissatisfaction with relationships of young people in single-person households have increased. Taking these findings into account, it is assumed that young people in single-person households have unstable social networks compared with young people in multi-person households.
  - Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and non-contact policies have been put in place. While family is perceived as providing most social support by young people in single-person households according to the MSPSS scores, they have become more estranged from family and relatives than young people in multi-person households. Considering these conditions, it is assumed that young people in single-person households were not able to build stable social networks during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Social networks and social support serve an important role in many aspects, nevertheless, research on vulnerability in social networks of people in single-person households has mainly concentrated on elderly people. Therefore, much policy attention should be given to social isolation of young people in single-person households.
  - Social networks and social support have a positive influence on mental health (e.g. depression, anxiety, stress, etc.) and emotional well-being (e.g. satisfaction with life)(Cohen et al., 1985; Han et al., 2003; Seo et al., 2006; Heo et al., 2009; Choi et al., 2010; Park et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2017). They also have a positive effect on young people's access to social resources and information, such as employment opportunities(Kim, 2003; Won, 2010; Hankyoreh, 2012).

## Policies tailored to the gender of young people in single-person households

- Young men and women in single-person households build and use social networks in different ways. Women have more social interactions and have more contacts whom to ask for help. On the other hand, they have fewer contacts to get support.
  - Men tend to have wider social networks with a variety of people, whereas women have narrower, more closed social networks(Kang et al. 2015). As found in a study by Kang et al.(2015), it is assumed that women have a small social network which they can make use of in practice. This feature needs to be taken into consideration for future policy development.
- Moreover, young women in single-person households demonstrate the most negative changes in social networks since the COVID-19 pandemic, with fewer contacts to interact with and ask for help from, and lower life satisfaction.
  - Women tend to have more insecure or lower-income jobs than men, and they are more likely to lose jobs or have their working conditions changed(e.g. shutdown, leave of absence, wage cuts, etc.). Women thereby are more likely to fall into poverty.
  - In practice, over 20% of female employees have become unemployed since the COVID-19 pandemic, among which the age group of 20-29 constitutes the largest portion(Kim, 2021). Also, 46.3% of female employees have directly and/or indirectly experienced employment adjustment. Among them, 35-47% of employment adjustment was implemented by targeting female employees (including pregnant employees) first(Kim, 2021).
  - It was not covered in the main chapter, but additional comparative analysis was conducted on the income decrease in the two groups (income decrease due to the COVID-19 pandemic-‘Subgroup A’; income decrease not related to the COVID-19 pandemic-‘Subgroup B’; see Appendix Figure 1). Compared with young men in single-person households, young women in single-person households show wide differences between the subgroups in every item studied; average number of people whom they interact with, average number of social contacts, and life dissatisfaction rates. Particularly regarding average number of social contacts, for men, Subgroup A is around 1.7 times bigger than Subgroup B. For women, Subgroup A is around 1.3 times smaller than Subgroup B.
  - Besides, rates of dissatisfaction with relationships for women are around 1.8 times higher in Subgroup A than in Subgroup B.
  - When women are high earners, they have an increased time spent on social relationships. This finding demonstrates an association between income and time spent on social relationships(Noh, 2018). Therefore, a pause in economic activities or an income decrease, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, may lead to poverty, and it is highly likely that financial hardship lessens not only consumption itself but also social interactions for the purpose of saving money.

- In particular, young women in single-person households can become isolated since they have no one living with them. For them, poverty seems to be caused by a condition under which they have to deal with difficult situations on their own.
- Hence, an in-depth study is needed on how social isolation is formed in the case of young women in single-person households. Then the study's findings will need to feed into specific policy measures.

● **Among young men in single-person households, there is huge difference between the subgroups 'having social interactions/networks' and 'not having social interactions/networks'.**

- Men have wider social networks in scope and range than women, building and using networks with a variety of people(Korean Women's Development Institute, 2015). Besides, men tend to perceive a various and wide network as providing more social support than frequency of interactions(Lee, 1999). Considering this feature, enabling conditions are needed for various and wide networks.
- Additional analysis(See Appendix <Table 2>) found that among young men in single-person households, there is a bigger difference in social interactions/networks between 'men working or studying' group and the 'unemployed/economically inactive or not studying' group than among women. It is assumed that those who find it relatively difficult to build social networks (unemployed/economically inactive or not studying) created such between-group differences. In future research, it is necessary to carry out in-depth analysis with more specified subgroups and develop policies tailored to each gender.

● **Differentiated approaches are needed for the protection of social networks, identifying gender issues and features of young people in single-person households.**

- There are gender differences in the patterns of social networks and their impacts(Park et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the current gender-sensitive policies for single-person households are limited to safety issues. In addition to safety issues,<sup>3)</sup> approaches should be taken to customize policies for gender and characteristics of young people in single-person households.
- Along with a continued increase in single-person households, policies and support systems for them have been developed. They can be classified into housing, financial support, care, safety, and mental health. As to young single-person households, policies for stabilization in housing constitute the largest portion(e.g. supporting public rental housing, rental by paying key money or monthly rent, consultation for housing safety, etc.). Since the social network development support plan for single-person households released by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2021, relevant projects are emerging at the municipality level. For example, the Seoul Metropolitan Government is implementing programs and projects for single-person households; they include single-person household support centers(individual and group consultations), self-help groups, mentoring, mental/emotional counseling support, community space support, hobby/leisure activities, etc<sup>4)</sup>

3) For example, safety kit support (e.g, double-locks, emergency bells, and safety sensors, etc.) and unmanned parcel pickup lockers.

4) This project is the so-called 'Single-Bungle', available at <https://1in.seoul.go.kr/front/user/main.do> (Accessed on May 26, 2022).

## Support tailored to young people is needed

- As most of the policies on social networks do not target specific age groups, there remain few policies tailored to young people.
  - Policies with little specification by age group hardly reflect various characteristics of young single-person households and it may be challenging for them to participate in or make use of such policies.
- Considering the low rates of young people seeking experts in difficult situations, it is necessary to improve the current consultation system that is concentrated on mental and emotional support.
  - Among the current policies, simply supporting expenses or spaces is much harder for young people who are socially isolated. Such support is mainly available for young people who have already established social networks, in this sense, young people with unstable social networks.
  - Rather than consultation or financial support, peer group programs are needed so that isolated young people in single-person households can form social networks.

## Official statistics for in-depth analysis and monitoring of young single-person household

- The analysis results show gender differences in forms and patterns of social support. Therefore, more in-depth analysis on gender differences should be made of all aspects of single-person households.
  - This study has a limitation that it made a simple comparison between young people from single-person and multi-person households. In future research, it is necessary to better identify social characteristics of young people and different features and conditions of single-person households by gender. The findings will have to be integrated into relevant policies.
- It is evident that people in single-person households are more vulnerable than those in multi-person households, but there is a lack of objective data to enable us to conduct monitoring regularly as well as precisely.
  - The social networks of young people in single-person households are constantly changing. Many media report such trends, yet official statistical data on their real status remain insufficient.
  - It is urgent to develop ways to collect data on the social networks of young people in single-person households or data with which regular monitoring can be conducted.

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● Appendix

<Table 1. The MSPSS questionnaire>

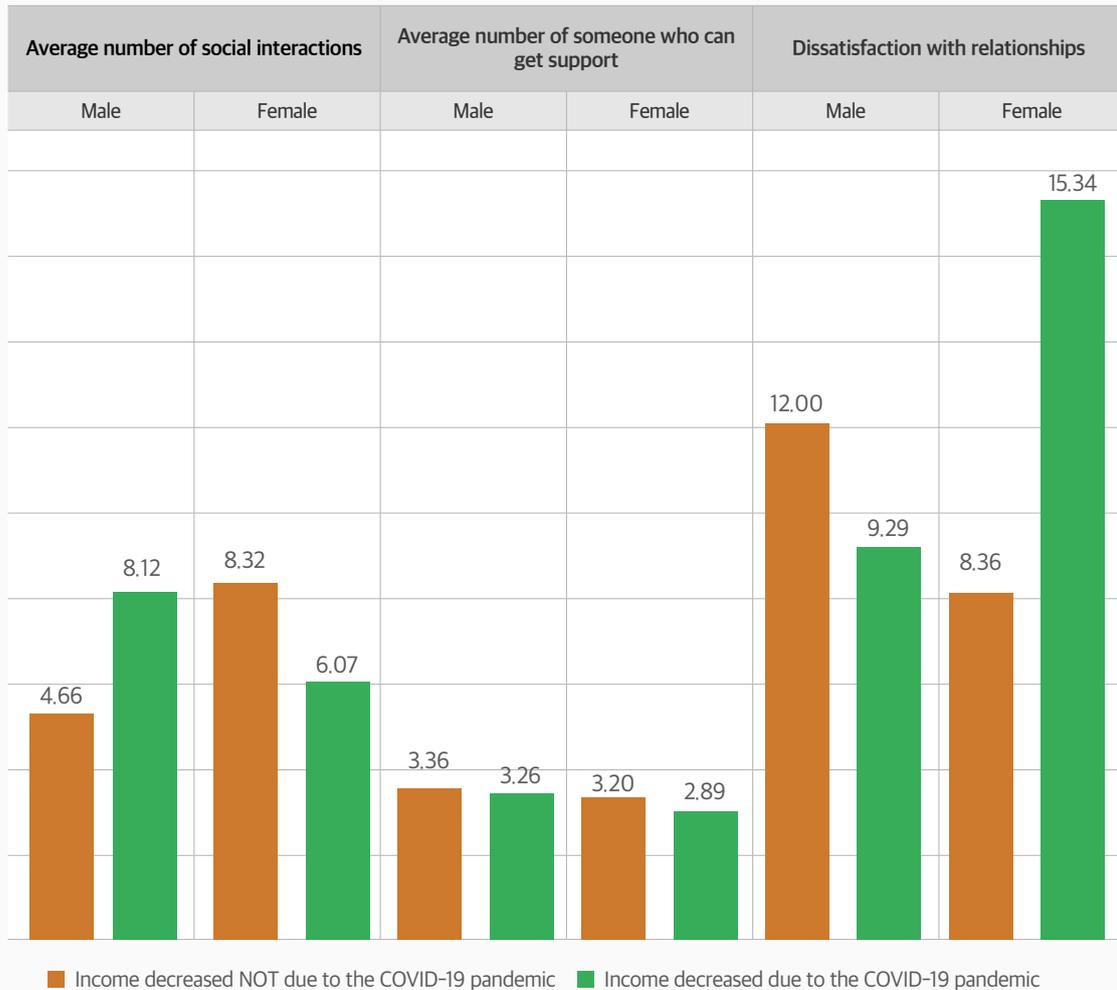
| Category          | Statement  |
|-------------------|--|
| Significant other | There is a special person who is around when I am in need.           |
| Significant other | There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. |
| Family            | My family really tries to help me.                                   |
| Family            | I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.          |
| Significant other | I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.       |
| Friends           | My friends really try to help me.                                    |
| Friends           | I can count on my friends when things go wrong.                      |
| Family            | I can talk about my problems with my family.                         |
| Friends           | I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.            |
| Significant other | There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.    |
| Family            | My family is willing to help me make decisions.                      |
| Friends           | I can talk about my problems with my friends.                        |

\* Source: Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52(1), 30-41; cited in Seocho-gu Banpo Social Welfare Center, Seoul National University Korean Academy of Social Work Practice and Research-Praxis (2007). *Handbook on Social Welfare for Practitioners and Researchers* (2nd edition); Recited in Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (2020). *A Survey on the Living Conditions and Welfare Needs of Youths*, p.211-212.

\* Note: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988).

<Figure 1> Status of social relationships caused by income decrease of young people in single-person households

(Unit: Persons, %)



\*Source: Analyzed the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded. 3) Average number of interactions: people who interact in-person or through the internet or phone. Cohabitants or simple work-related relationships were excluded 4) Average number of someone who get support: the average number of contacts whom to ask for help when the respondents are sick, in need of money, and experiencing mental health issues. 5) Dissatisfaction with relationships: responses 'strongly dissatisfied' and 'moderately dissatisfied' were combined.

<Table 2> Social interactions and getting support of young single-person households

(Unit: %, persons)

| Category                                 | Working/studying |        |       | Unemployed/<br>economically inactive |        |       |
|--|------------------|--------|-------|--------------------------------------|--------|-------|
|  | Male             | Female | Total | Male                                 | Female | Total |
| Having interactions (%)                  | 87.9             | 94.4   | 90.5  | 81.8                                 | 92.2   | 85.3  |
| Having interactions (persons)            | 8.32             | 7.02   | 7.76  | 6.86                                 | 6.86   | 6.86  |
| Not having interactions (%)              | 12.1             | 5.6    | 9.5   | 18.2                                 | 7.8    | 14.7  |
| Having someone to ask for help (%)       | 87.5             | 95.9   | 90.9  | 80.4                                 | 92.3   | 84.5  |
| Having someone to ask for help (persons) | 3.70             | 3.13   | 3.45  | 3.26                                 | 2.75   | 3.06  |
| Having no one to ask for help (%)        | 12.5             | 4.1    | 9.1   | 19.6                                 | 7.7    | 15.5  |

\* Source: Analyzed the 2021 Social Survey, Statistics Korea.

\* Note: 1) Weighted responses. 2) 'No response' and 'not applicable response' were excluded.