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Research Title

Study on Social Service Provision Considering Family Diversity and Gender

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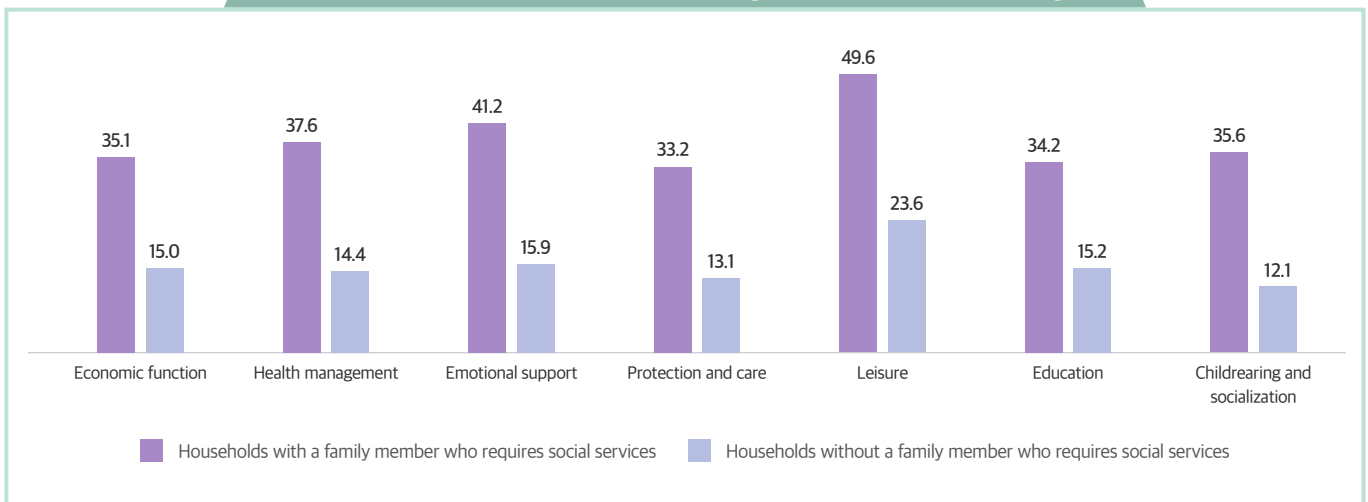
## Identifying Gaps in Social Services for Families and Strategies for Improvement

### Abstract

- ▶ Although social services are closely connected to families — particularly as they have traditionally supplemented and shared functions performed by family members — the family itself has been overlooked as a target of social service provision.
- ▶ This study, based on the premise that the demand for and supply of social services are interconnected, adopts the concepts of family diversity and the gendered characteristics of service recipients as an approach to identifying blind spots in social service delivery and responding to them proactively.
- ▶ Furthermore, through an integrated social service model for both individuals and families, this study proposes ways to incorporate not only individual needs but also the diverse needs and demands of families into social service policies.

Proportion of respondents reporting poor family functioning

(Unit: %)



\* This paper was produced by extracting and summarizing parts of a research report from the Korean Women's Development Institute. Source: Chung, G., Kim, H., Moon, M., Bae, H., Kwon, D., Park, K., & Sim, A. (2024). Study on Social Service Provision Considering Family Diversity and Gender. Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute.

## 1 Background and Issues

- ▶ In the relevant legal framework, social services focus primarily on enhancing quality of life and guaranteeing a dignified standard of living for citizens. Although the major components of social services are closely linked to the family — given that they traditionally supplement and share functions previously carried out by other family members — the ‘family’ itself has been relatively overlooked as a target of social service provision.
- ▶ To achieve the genuine universality of social services for the entire population, not only for vulnerable groups, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the needs and demands of diverse family types, in addition to those of individuals as (potential) recipients of social services, and to develop new services based on these insights.
- ▶ In this context, this study proceeds from the premise that the demand and supply of social services are interconnected. It incorporates the concept of family diversity and the gender characteristics of service recipients as an approach to identifying blind spots in social service provision and responding to them proactively, particularly in the development and supply of new services.

## 2 Research Findings and Analysis

### • Family Diversity and Social Services

- ▶ The purpose of applying a family-diversity lens in this study is not to call for a return to the refamilialization of care. Rather, it is to illuminate the aspects of care that current social services overlook — burdens that continue to fall on other family members and that often result in significant negative impacts. These hidden burdens must be made visible and addressed.
  - Although the continued individualization of social protection systems is necessary, the state cannot justify limiting its responsibility to the provision of services for the individual in need while leaving all remaining responsibilities to the family. The challenges experienced by other family members — such as increased hardships and diminished quality of life due to a member’s care needs — should also be taken into account within social service policymaking.
- ▶ One potential direction for the development of future social services that take family diversity into account lies in addressing the emerging demand for new services arising from changes in family types and structures.
  - The number of adults who remain unmarried into mid- and later adulthood is expected to grow, expanding the population of lifelong single-person households. At the same time, various non-legal and non-blood-based forms of companionship that share economic or caregiving functions are becoming more common. As a result, one- and two-person households — particularly elderly two-person households engaged in mutual elder care — are projected to increase substantially. Social services will need to respond to the health, social isolation, loss, and caregiving challenges faced by these groups.

- ▶ There is also emerging demand for new social services based on the level of (care) resources available within the family.
  - Families differ not only in socioeconomic characteristics but also in the time, capacity, and emotional resources that members can devote to one another. Although public or socialized care services provide important alternatives, many family caregivers continue to experience prolonged caregiving responsibilities, difficulty balancing work, daily life, and care, and unequal distributions of care labor within the household. These conditions indicate a growing need for social services directed specifically toward supporting family caregivers.
- ▶ New social service needs arise depending on the extent to which families are able to perform their functions.
  - When a family member experiences mental or physical health difficulties or lives with a disability, services may support the individual, but the remaining family members often face functional gaps or overload in meeting caregiving and daily living demands. Thus, the need for additional supports — such as counseling or supplemental services — for the rest of the family should be acknowledged and incorporated into social service design. Responses to such abrupt changes in family circumstances should be treated as distinct from predictable transitions in the family life cycle.
- Diagnosing Blind Spots in Social Service Provision
  - ▶ Are appropriate social services being provided across different family types?
    - This study confirms that demand for social services continues to vary by family type. For example, single-parent households exhibit relatively high demand for external support in children’s education, whereas elderly couple households show relatively higher demand for physical and mental health services.
    - The analysis also reveals additional family forms that are not recognized as legal families and therefore remain excluded from public social service systems. Moreover, mechanisms for identifying (potential) social service recipients who require separation from their families, as well as the corresponding support measures, require further development.
  - ▶ How are the characteristics and experiences of individuals and families considered in social service provision?
    - Blind spots arise due to eligibility criteria based on household income and household circumstances.
    - Social service demand can also vary depending on the experiences and characteristics of families and their members, yet these factors are not adequately taken into account.
  - ▶ Is the supply of social services adequately meeting demand?
    - Both qualitative and quantitative expansion of care services, particularly for elderly and disabled care, is necessary. Elderly and disability care services do not yet achieve the same level of universality as early childhood care services. Moreover, in the case of elderly care services, overall willingness to use these services is lower compared to other care services, highlighting the need for qualitative improvements.
    - There is also a need to address waiting lists for public developmental rehabilitation services and to establish certification mechanisms for private service providers. Waiting periods for public developmental rehabilitation are excessively long, and many private providers do not accept government vouchers. Government accreditation of private providers and their services is necessary to ensure service quality.

► Can families themselves be considered recipients of social services?

- Family caregivers — who support or care for family members who are (potential) social service recipients — experience feelings of helplessness, stress, burnout, depression, family conflict, and social isolation while caring for or assisting family members in need, and their families' capacity to provide economic support and emotional support is significantly weakened.

<Table 1> Degree to which families perform core functions — Proportion reporting 'Not performing well'

(Unit: %)

Category		Economic function	Health management	Emotional support	Protection and care	Leisure	Education	Childrearing and socialization
Total		26.7	27.9	30.7	24.8	38.8	27.6	27.4
Presence of Care-Recipient in Family	Yes	35.1	37.6	41.2	33.2	49.6	34.2	35.6
	No	15.0	14.4	15.9	13.1	23.6	15.2	12.1

- Family caregivers highlight that it is critically important for potential social service recipients to achieve 'safe independence.' To support this, they identified the need for services that help (potential) recipients develop future plans and prepare concretely for independent living, as well as services that strengthen their social skills and social relationships.

<Table 2> Support needs for (potential) social service recipients and their family members — Proportion reporting 'Very Necessary' or 'Somewhat Necessary'

(Unit: %)

Classification	Support Needed for Family Members Who Are (Potential) Social Service Recipients			Support Needed for the Rest of the Family			
	Support for developing self-care abilities	Support for future planning and concrete preparation	Support for improving social skills and social relationships	Support for strengthening the capacity to care for the family member	Support for improving family relationships	Support for planning for the future together as a family	Direct care services for the family member
Total	47.9	58.5	55.6	53.0	49.8	59.0	46.2
Presence of a family member requiring care	Yes	60.3	67.1	68.0	65.0	61.9	58.3
	No						
Gender of the family member requiring care	Female	64.5	71.3	70.6	67.5	64.9	62.5
	Male						

- Family caregivers of (potential) social service recipients reported greater difficulty when the family member with problems or challenges was an adult rather than a minor.
  - Family caregivers also describe several difficulties: having to independently search for social services that their family member may be eligible for — often by meeting and hearing directly from other caregivers facing similar difficulties; being unable to seek necessary information due to depression or fatigue; and the problem that the accessibility of services differs depending on the family's available resources.
- Is it possible to provide social services tailored to the gender characteristics of service recipients?
- Survey findings from this study indicate clear gender differences among (potential) social service recipients. Among minors, girls reported higher levels of violence victimization, bullying, and depression/fatigue compared with boys. By contrast, boys showed relatively higher rates of intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorders, language disorders, and other mental disabilities.

- Among adults, depression and fatigue were overwhelmingly the most common issues, with women reporting higher rates than men. For adult men, addiction emerged as the second most frequent issue, whereas for adult women, difficulties with anger and impulse control ranked second.
- Furthermore, when the (potential) social service recipient was male, reported rates of receiving services — including care services, physical health services, mental health services, rehabilitation services, cultural and leisure services, and educational support services — were lower than those reported for female recipients. Men also expressed lower intentions to use these services in the future compared with women.

<Table 3> Social services currently used by (potential) social service recipients — Proportion reporting ‘Currently Receiving’

(Unit: %)

Categories		Care services	Physical health services	Mental health services	Rehabilitation services	Cultural and leisure services	Educational support services
Total		16.1	11.5	14.1	10.1	20.6	12.8
Gender of the Family Member Requiring Care	Female	24.5	18.3	23.2	17.0	23.8	17.4
	Male	19.1	12.6	18.5	13.6	20.6	14.3

- The finding that male (potential) social service recipients demonstrate lower acceptance and utilization of social services compared with female recipients may reflect a tendency among men to prefer receiving care and assistance from family rather than seeking external support.
- For male (potential) recipients, it is particularly important to shorten the time between recognizing their own problems or difficulties and seeking external assistance. The same principle applies to situations in which a male family member must acknowledge the challenges faced by another household member and actively participate in resolving them together.
- Service providers should be aware that, particularly in the field of mental health, while awareness of overall gender distributions is important, care should be taken not to let this reinforce stereotypes.

### 3 Policy Recommendations

- Establishing Individual-Based Criteria for Assessing Social Service Needs and Eligibility
  - ▶ Conduct an in-depth review of whether the current household income-based criteria used to determine eligibility for various social services are appropriate, and establish a system in which individual-based social service needs are assessed consistently and services are provided in accordance with the assessment results.
  - ▶ A unified assessment framework should be established to determine how much (total amount), how often (frequency), and for how long (duration) a (potential) social service recipient requires each type of service.
  - ▶ Before considering the economic resources of the recipient’s household (income, assets, etc.), an individualized evaluation should first be conducted to determine the specific types and levels of social services the person requires. The content and extent of support should then be determined based on the assessment results and the expected duration of the individual’s needs.

- ◉ Proposing an Integrated Social Service Model for Individuals and, When Necessary, Their Families
- ▶ This study proposes an integrated service model that assesses social service needs at the individual level and allocates services accordingly, while also evaluating whether the recipient's family requires additional support. This approach recognizes both the individual and the family as potential recipients of social services.
  - ① Strengthening Family-Support Functions Within Existing Service Providers
    - Along with individual-based assessment and service provision, social service providers should incorporate a function that identifies whether family-level intervention is needed. By equipping each service provider with the capacity to support families, practitioners can better understand how the recipient and their family influence one another — particularly in terms of negative impacts — and determine what types of external support the family may require.
  - ② Expanding Collaboration Between Family Centers and Existing Social Service Providers
    - When a (potential) social service recipient receives support from a particular provider, collaborative networks should be established so that, with the recipient's consent, other family members can also receive education and counseling through local family centers.
    - Family centers should likewise offer recipients information on various social service providers and programs available within the community.
  - ③ Expanding the Functions of Family Centers to Provide Integrated Services for Both (Potential) Recipients and Their Families
    - Family centers could develop new service packages that target the entire family of a (potential) social service recipient, offering integrated support that combines individual- and family-level interventions.
- ◉ Expanding the Role of Family Centers: Responding to Changes Experienced by (Potential) Social Service Recipients and Their Families
  - When family type changes abruptly, when a family's economic or caregiving resources decrease or become depleted, or when difficulties arise in performing core family functions, the likelihood that a family member will require social services increases.
  - ▶ Conversely, when a family member first develops a need for social services, the family as a whole is likely to experience negative changes in terms of family type, family resources, and family functioning.
  - ▶ When the problems or difficulties of a (potential) social service recipient are prolonged or permanent, the impact on the lives of other family members is substantial and long-lasting.
  - ▶ To ensure that family centers can play a buffering role in mitigating these changes and negative impacts, support for families experiencing diverse difficulties should become more specific and evidence-based — through research activities, pilot program development, and related initiatives.
  - ▶ As the 'Comprehensive Family Support Program(온가족보듬사업)' is now implemented nationwide through family centers, continuous government funding is required to strengthen the competencies of staff who provide counseling and case management and to stabilize the service delivery system.

### ● Strengthening the Capacity of Local Social Welfare Officials in Service Provision and Referral

- ▶ Local-level social welfare officers (at the Eup/Myeon/Dong administrative units) must have the capacity to systematically explain accurate and up-to-date information on available social services when approached by (potential) service recipients or their families.
- ▶ Their knowledge base should encompass: the various types, contents, and eligibility criteria of social service voucher programs and community investment services; social services directly provided by local governments; services offered by social welfare, senior welfare, and disability welfare centers; and services provided by local family centers, mental health centers, and integrated crisis support centers at the municipal level.
- ▶ A system should be established in which social service information delivery and application occur simultaneously, preventing asymmetries in social service information access and utilization that arise from differences in family capacity and resources.

### ● Expanding Support for Elementary School Children and Their Families as Social Service Recipients

- ▶ In addition to developing programs for general students within the Neulbom Schools (all-day school program) system that reflect the latest trends, special programs should be created for elementary school students with borderline intellectual functioning — who have traditionally fallen between regular education and special education systems and remain in the service gap.
- ▶ When a child with borderline intellectual functioning is identified, close communication with parents is essential to ensure consistent and positive support across both school and home environments. The nationwide rollout of the integrated education-care model offers a valuable opportunity for early identification of and intervention for these children.
- ▶ Staff members in educational institutions and social service agencies who interact with individuals with borderline intellectual functioning need specialized training and capacity-building programs to identify these individuals and provide appropriate support.

### ● Expanding Support for Adolescents and Their Families as Social Service Recipients

- ▶ Local youth-support institutions should be funded not only to provide services for adolescents but also to offer specialized psychological counseling and parent education for parents/guardians aimed at restoring and strengthening parent-child relationships. This allows for in-depth and long-term interventions for adolescents and their families with difficulties.
- ▶ The capacity of 'Wee Class' teachers (school-based counseling support teachers) should be strengthened so they can more effectively connect with relevant community-based institutions.

### ● Expanding Support for Adults and Their Families as Social Service Recipients

- ▶ Similar to the short-term care and family caregiving leave currently available to families caring for elderly individuals with long-term care eligibility, short-term care and family caregiving leave should be introduced for families supporting adult members who are (potential) social service recipients.

- ▶ Consideration should be given to introducing adult family caregiving leave, allowing employees who must care for adult family members with long-term care needs to adjust and accommodate their work and caregiving responsibilities for a designated period.
- Expanding Support for Persons with Disabilities and Their Families as Social Service Recipients
  - ▶ The current design of disability-related care services — which implicitly assumes that families serve as the primary caregivers — should shift toward a model that respects the self-determination of persons with disabilities and supports them in ultimately living independent lives.
  - ▶ Beyond increasing the total amount of social services available to persons with disabilities, there is a need for systematic monitoring and accreditation to ensure service quality. Long waiting periods and high out-of-pocket costs currently limit access and must be addressed.
  - ▶ Disability-focused social service systems should ensure that access to rehabilitation and care does not vary according to the family’s resources or capacities, by centering services around the needs of the individual with disabilities.
  - ▶ Follow-up research is needed to explore new social service models, including: allowing family members to serve as personal care assistants, establishing dedicated family-care leave for disability caregivers, providing psychological and emotional support for families of persons with disabilities, and supporting planning and preparation for independent living for persons with disabilities.

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**Supervising  
ministries**

Family Policy Division, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

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**Related  
ministries**Division of Social Services Policy, Ministry of Health and Welfare

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