
Ten Years of Family-Friendly Community Establishment Policies: Evaluation and Issues

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This paper aims to assess the achievements and limitations of family-friendly community establishment policies from the changing perspectives of families, review the concept and elements of family-friendly communities and thereby discuss how to reorganize such policies.

The key research results are as follows:

First, the implications, limitations, and future direction of policies were identified by reviewing family-friendly community establishment policies-related laws and systems and looking into key policies in terms of the realities and needs of families.

Korea's family-friendly community establishment policies have contributed to creating a family-friendly society and culture. In the process, a variety of legal

and institutional frameworks such as the Family Friendliness Act, the basic plan for the promotion of healthy families, and a survey of the established family-friendly social environment have been set up, expanding related infrastructure. However, in spite of such policy achievements, many more issues need to be examined to craft appropriate and effective policies that can flexibly react to changes in the family environment.

The biggest limitation of current policies is that they very narrowly define families and family-friendly communities in the context of policy targets and spheres. As a result, current policies for the creation of a family-friendly social environment have focused on the establishment of a family-friendly workplace environment for double-income families and the introduction and facilitation of a diversity of related systems.

On the other hand, in connection with the community environment where various families live, such policies have been limited to the declaratory discussions on the importance of communities and the introduction of related cases, failing to sufficiently deal with the roles of central and local governments in creating communities that can reflect the various needs of families, as well as specific policy measures relating thereto.

Families and their members are hardly deemed to be single groups or to have unified needs. Diversity existing in and out of families is expected to further increase in the future. In this vein, existing policies whose focus has been put on specific types of families and their situations should be reviewed and revised, considering the following fundamental questions: ‘how should families be examined?’ and ‘what is a family-friendly environment?’ At the same time, new policies based on family diversity need to fairly assign necessary infrastructure and policy means to enable diverse family and individual needs to be satisfied in a balanced way, rather than to support specific types of families or to set a universal type of family as a key target group.

Second, analyzing family trends, conferences with 20-to-40-somethings, a key

group that brings about family changes, were held to reorganize a family-friendly community environment in terms of family changes and to shed new light on the characteristics and meaning thereof.

In the context of trends, how families have changed was studied and via consecutive conferences with 20-to-40-somethings, a main group that causes family changes, the meaning and realities of families were examined from their perspectives.

Family trends were identified through the following processes. Macro-environments affecting families such as an economic environment (low growth era), a demographic environment (a rise in the number of single-person households), a social environment (deeper social instability), and living and cultural environments (a quality of life-oriented culture) were looked into and based thereon, only the concepts that are recently highlighted in relation to families, among various trends, were chosen to present those with similar values.

As a result, the following three keywords in family trends were selected: 1) “Plat-home” -> houses, residential spaces used as platforms for various social activities; 2) “Bona fide relationships” -> a shift from blood ties-based families to those exchanging emotional support; and 3) Hyper-individualism -> put more emphasis on the values of individual family members than those of families as groups. The three family trends are characterized by ‘house reorganization,’ ‘redefinition of family relationships,’ and ‘individual members-based families.’ Participants in conferences with 20-to-40-somethings were chosen, taking into account diversity in family organization and lifestyle. In order to discuss current family characteristics and relationships and future family characteristics that they desire, two conferences with eight participants were held. Key results are as follows:

Families are blood ties-based entities that can’t be disconnected. After being separated from their parents, families represent a web of relationships with

spouses and children. Families are recognized as shapeless entities individually connected based on participants themselves. Participants tried to set up families that they want but experienced the barrier of reality featuring social norms. At the same time, in the web of family relationships, they wanted to stay as individuals, exchanging emotional support and care and thereby demanding changes in the environment.

Based on such research results, the concepts of a family-friendly environment were discussed, presenting the following ways to reorganize policies for the establishment of a family-friendly community environment.

First, a legal and institutional framework should be set up to support the formation of new relationships. To this end, it is necessary to revise related laws including the Act on the Promotion of Creation of Family-Friendly Social Environment. In connection therewith, this research study presents expanding the concept to include the co-existence of families and individuals, improving a system where related entities such as communities and central and local governments share roles, and enhancing research on the status of the family-friendly social environment to enable family changes and needs to be measured. Then, it is required to strengthen policies for the promotion of a family-friendly culture. To this end, existing family culture facilitation projects focusing on family activities and solidarity should be shifted to those where the values of new family relationships and coexistence are shared and disseminated. Such an initiative should be more widely carried out via education and promotion activities.

Second, phased strategy for the creation of sustainable family-friendly communities should be crafted. The ultimate goal of family-friendly community establishment policies is to delegate authorities and responsibilities to community members and to lead the residents themselves to devise and manage community schemes in a family-friendly way. At this time, administrative agencies can provide personnel and material resources until communities and

their members are ready to do so. Then, community enterprises should be cultivated to create an autonomous community environment. It is also possible to consider the promotion of community business as a sustainable mechanism that can function as an intermediary in place of administrative bodies.