

Research Title A Study on Gender Awareness and Attitude of Youths through Peer Culture (I): Comparison of Gender Awareness and Attitude in Peer Culture
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A Study on Gender Awareness and Attitude of Youths through Peer Culture (I): Comparison of Gender Awareness and Attitude in Peer Culture

Abstract

- Gender conflict is getting more intense in our society, and the trends of misogyny, sexual harassment, and violent culture spreading from misogyny and sexual harassment are actually being observed among a number of male students attending primary and secondary schools. The culture of hate and sexual harassment among teenagers is not unrelated to their peer culture, and it is particularly believed that the inappropriate and discriminatory gender awareness and hateful attitudes of the adult generation are passed down to the youth generation through a number of means such as media, cultural contents, etc. that are mainly used by teenagers.
- Under this premise, this study collected and analyzed a number of data including online culture, pornography consumption culture, fandom culture, appearance awareness and decorative culture, peer relationship, romantic relationship, sexual culture, school education, career path and social engagement, awareness on gender equality and feminism. Through this, the study explored the current status of the peer culture, and identified its gender gap, age gap, and so on. By identifying the characteristics of gender equality awareness derived from the analysis, and by examining their correlations with the peer culture, the study explored the characteristics and meanings of the peer culture and derived implications for future policy design or follow-up research.

1. Background and issues

- ▶ An increased level of awareness on gender equality is witnessed in younger age groups, but attitudes towards gender conflicts and related issues are also seemingly becoming sharper among those with younger age. This means that gender conflict is becoming intense in our society, and the trends of misogyny, sexual harassment, and the violent culture spreading from misogyny and sexual harassment are actually being witnessed among a number of male students attending primary and secondary schools.
- ▶ This culture of hate and sexual harassment in teenagers is related to their peer culture. In particular, the media and cultural contents that teenagers mainly use are embedded with misguided gender discriminatory awareness and hateful attitudes of the adult generation, and these are thought to be passed on to the youth generation through several mediums.
- ▶ Under this premise, this study intended to collect and analyze a range of data including online culture, pornography consumption culture, fandom culture, appearance awareness and decorative culture, peer relationship, romantic relationship, sexual culture, school education, career path and social engagement, and awareness on gender equality and feminism. With this analysis, the study aimed to explore the current status of the peer culture and identify its gender gap, age gap, and so on.
- ▶ Through this, gender role awareness, gender discrimination, gender issues, attitudes towards gender conflicts, and the relationship between these factors among teenagers were compared by gender and age to examine the characteristics of gender equality awareness among teenagers and also their correlations with the peer culture. Thereby, the study identified the characteristics and meanings of the peer culture and derived implications for future policy design or follow-up research.

2. Results of the survey and analysis

- ▶ In this study, 8,921 male and female teenagers aged from 6th graders in primary schools to 2nd graders in high schools across the country were surveyed on gender equality awareness and attitudes. For this study, the peer culture of teenagers was broadly divided into several areas such as peer relationship, online culture, fandom culture, body and appearance awareness, romantic relationship, sexual culture, school life, and gender equality awareness. Then, an in-depth analysis was performed for the peer culture and the characteristics for each area. The results are summarized as follows.



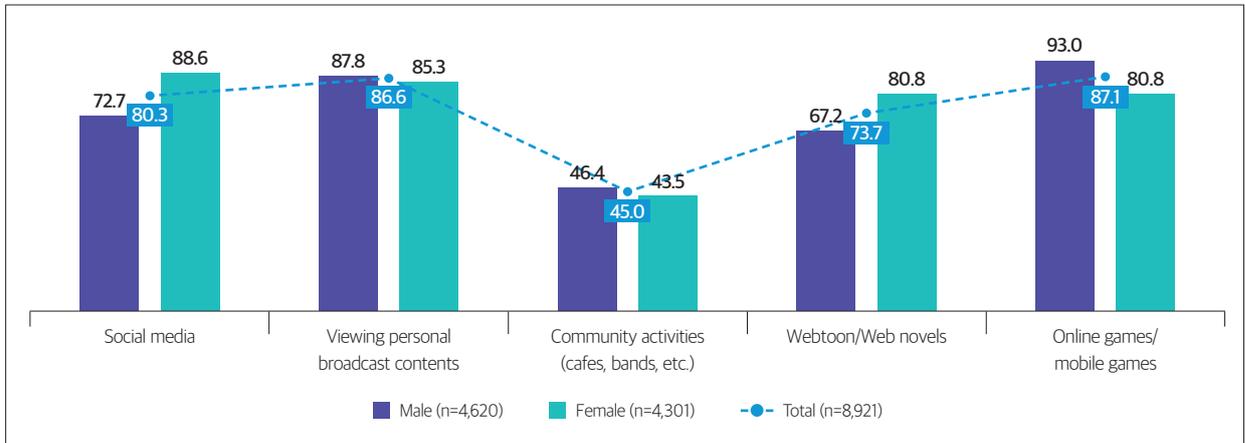
Online culture of teenagers

- ▶ Because male and female teenagers participate in online activities for different purposes and reasons, the male and female teenagers surveyed have been shown to engage in different areas of online activities. The study showed that the male teenagers were more likely to play games (12.2 %p) than their female

counterparts, while the female teenagers were more likely to engage in webtoons and web novels (13.6 %p) than their male counterparts. The female teenagers were found to be more dependent on social media than their male teenagers, and these results were also shown in the difference in preference for social media platforms (Twitter 26.3%p, Instagram 25.4%p).

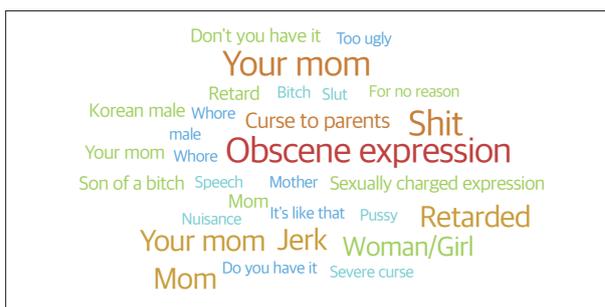
[Figure 1] Level of usual engagement in online activities

(Unit: %)



► The survey found that gender discrimination and hate expressions in online space were serious, and a number of teenagers were exposed to them. About a third of the teenagers surveyed (34.2% males, 34.6% females) who played games reported that they have heard or witnessed sexually discriminating hate expressions while playing games. Most of those were obscene languages or abusive expressions involving mothers or parents, but for the female teenagers, the abusive expressions directed at them were most likely to be related to their gender - “female (girl)”.

[Figure 2] Obscene expressions experienced while playing games (Male)



[Figure 3] Obscene expressions experienced while playing games (Female)



► Hateful expression towards women or men have been found to spread online with great force. To see how much hate culture was being shared among teenagers, the present survey selected several terms used in online membership space such as “Womad” and “Ilbe” which represent relevant cultures, and investigated how much the teenagers were aware of the terms. The results showed that 12.2% of the male teenagers and 7.5% of the female teenagers were aware of the terms used in Ilbe, and 10.6% of

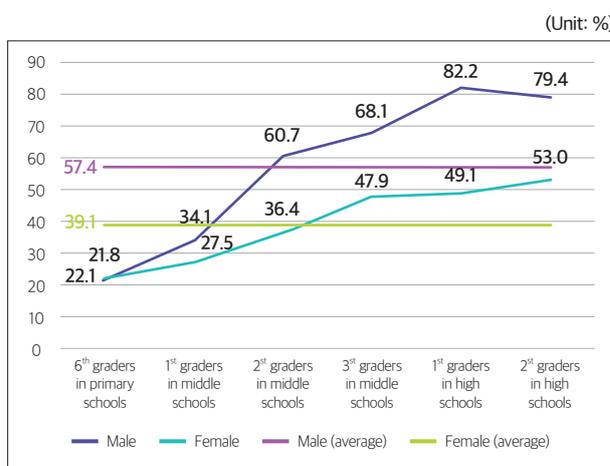
the male teenagers and 11.1% of the female teenagers were aware of the terms used in Womad. Given that the proportions of the male and female teenagers visiting the Ilbe website was less than 3% and the proportion of those visiting the Womad website was less than 1%, it appeared that the terms widely used in those websites have spread at least 4 to 10 times among teenagers.

- ▶ The survey confirmed that discrimination and hatred against women were deeply embedded in the game culture, and that this trend was strengthened especially through male game users, with 22.3% of the teenagers (20.8% males, 24.1% females) reporting that they witnessed men mocking or harassing women while playing games. About 20% of the male teenagers reported that they could in general curse or use hate speech towards people who are not good at playing games (22.2% males, 7.1% females) or kick out people who are not good at playing games (14.5% males, 14.7% females) for their own teams' victory. The results illustrated that they thought it was possible to make hateful remarks or ignore human rights when treating others for their own team to win. The survey also found that at least 10% of the male teenagers preferred female characters to male characters as they thought that female characters added fun to the games through sexual exposure and sexually provocative images rather than through their abilities.

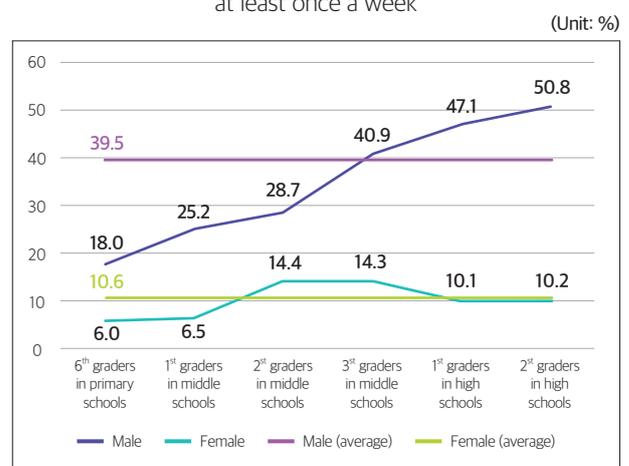
B Pornography consumption culture of youth

- ▶ The survey revealed that among those aged between 6th graders in primary schools and 2nd graders in high schools, 79.4% of the male teenagers and 39.1% of the female teenagers had watched pornography. On average, the first time they watched pornography was at the age of 13.1 for males and 13.2 for females. Also, 39.5% of the male teenagers and 10.6% of the female teenagers reported that they watched pornography at least once a week. The gender differences for this trend intensified depending on age/grade, and for the frequency of weekly viewing, the greatest gender difference was observed among 2nd graders in high schools (40%p).

[Figure 4] Proportion of those who have used pornography



[Figure 5] Proportion of those who view pornography at least once a week



- ▶ The survey found that the first time the teenagers saw pornography was when they were on the internet (40.6% males, 43.8% females), or through pop-up windows (18.7% males, 35.4% females) that were indiscriminately opened, indicating that the internet environment for children and teenagers is unsafe. The results suggested that the culture of pornographic consumption begins early among teenagers and can be sustained through the internet environment where pornographic materials are easily accessible.
- ▶ Clear gender differences were observed not only on the experience of using pornography, but also on the effect of using pornography. Compared to the female teenagers, the male teenagers were almost twice more likely to report that they wanted to repeat watching pornography (18.1% males, 10.0% females), saw their opposite sex friends as sexual objects after watching pornography (7.5% males, 4.1% females), wanted to imitate what they saw on pornography (15.6% males, 8.5% females), or felt an impulse to commit sexual harassment or sexual assault (3.1% males, 1.7% females). On the contrary, the female teenagers were more likely to feel discomfort or shame from pornography (25.7% males, 51.2% females) than their male counterparts.

C Fandom culture of teenagers

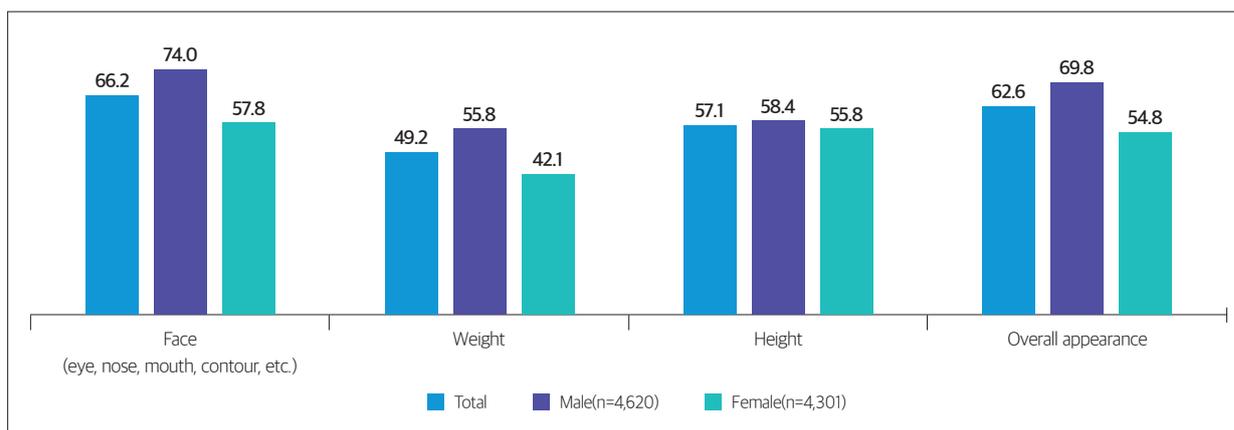
- ▶ The survey found that the celebrity fandom culture, which is one of the major characteristics of teenagers' peer culture, was predominantly led by female teenagers. Most male teenagers liked celebrities because they were attracted to celebrities' job-related skills such as singing and dancing, or their beautiful or handsome looks. In addition to those two reasons, the female teenagers were significantly more likely to be attracted to celebrities because they wanted to watch how the celebrities grew up or observe their relationships. Related consumption activities were also shown to be active among the female teenagers.

D Perception of appearance and decorative culture among teenagers

- ▶ Compared to the male teenagers, the female teenagers were found to be less satisfied with their appearance, were more strict in terms of women's appearance, and were more active in making themselves achieve ideal looks. The female teenagers' perceptions and behaviors related to bodies were also linked to their enthusiasm for dieting. The female teenagers were more likely to go on a diet (66.6%) than the male teenagers (48.1%). Also, the female teenagers' diet activities were shown to be more aggressive and provocative than male teenagers' dieting.
- ▶ Overall, the female teenagers were more likely than the male teenagers to be dissatisfied with their faces and weights, while the male teenagers were slightly more likely than the female teenagers to be dissatisfied with their heights. Interestingly, in terms of age, the female teenagers were more likely than the male teenagers to report increasing dissatisfaction until the 3rd year of middle school, but the proportion of those who reported dissatisfaction decreased once they entered high schools. By contrast, the male teenagers reported continuously increasing dissatisfaction as they grew up.

[Figure 6] Level of satisfaction with one's own body

(Unit: %)



- ▶ The survey showed that the male teenagers were more likely than the female teenagers to perceive the importance of appearance as they grew up. As the age increased, the male teenagers were consistently more likely than the female teenagers to report that they perceived the powerful impact of appearance in 1) popularity, 2) dating, and 3) employment. Interestingly, as they grew up, the male teenagers did not only perceive the importance of appearance for women, but they were also more likely than the female teenagers to perceive that men's appearance was important.
- ▶ The survey found that a number of female teenagers were wearing makeup, and they started to wear makeup from when they were young. This suggests that makeup seems to have become a part of the universal peer culture for female teenagers. However, the proportion of those who reported that they used to wear makeup in the past but no longer wear makeup also gradually increased with age. With respect to the reason for this, the female teenagers were more likely to focus on their schoolwork or develop antipathy towards women's labor in decorating themselves as they grew up.

E Peer relationships among teenagers

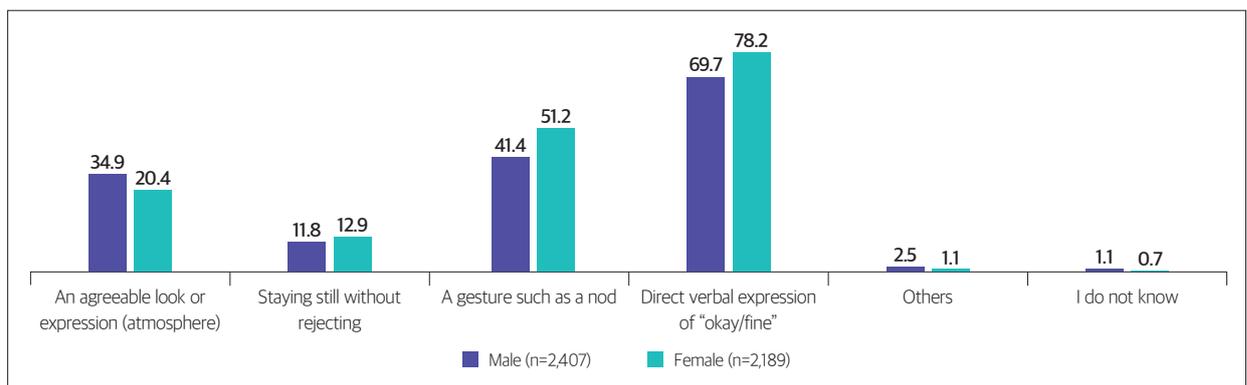
- ▶ An analysis of peer relationships in the male and female teenagers revealed that 'homophily' within the male teenagers and within the female teenagers was strong. The formation of relationships centered around the same sex has been shown to be based on several reasons related to the perception of opposite sex and vary by gender and developmental stage. Overall, younger male teenagers reported feeling more uncomfortable and prejudiced towards close relationships with the opposite sex. By contrast, this tendency became stronger among older female teenagers. Nevertheless, the common reason reported across all age groups surveyed was a belief that if one gets along with a friend of the opposite sex, 'others might wrongly assume that they are dating'.
- ▶ Notably, the fear of sexual harassment/sexual violence tended to hinder close relationship between sexes, and this tendency increased with age. In particular, the survey confirmed that the male teenagers were far more likely to fear committing such a crime than the female teenagers.

Romantic relationships among teenagers

- ▶ The male and female teenagers surveyed were found to still follow traditional gender roles in relationships. About 45.6% of the male teenagers with experience in dating reported that they confessed first to initiate their first relationships, while only 17.8% of the female teenagers reported that they confessed first and 82.2% reported that the other person confessed to them. And this trend appeared to become stronger as teenagers grew older.
- ▶ The teenagers surveyed were found to feel relatively free about physical affection when dating. The majority of teenagers (77%) who had experience in dating reported that they had experienced weak physical touch, and older teenagers were more likely to report having the experience of weak physical touch. The proportion of those who experienced strong physical touch, including kissing, also increased from 13.2% among middle school 1st graders to 34.6% among high school 2nd graders. However, apart from the perception of openness about physical touch, some teenagers were found to be insensitive about the problems that sexual intercourse could bring, and this was especially so among the male teenagers. Responses on contraception-related experience showed that at least a third of the teenagers surveyed were engaging in unsafe sex.
- ▶ The majority (73.7%) of teenagers reported that they considered verbal expression of “okay/fine” as an indication of ‘consent’ in a relationship, and this suggested that they thought that precise expression of intention was important. The teenagers reported other expressions of consent included ‘gesture such as a nod’ (46.1%), ‘an agreeable look or expression (atmosphere)’ (32.3%), ‘staying still without rejecting’ (12.3%). In regard to gender differences in perceptions, 69.7% of the male teenagers and 78.2% of the female teenagers considered ‘direct verbal expression of “okay/fine”’ as a consent, whereas 41.4% of the male teenagers and 51.2% of the female teenagers considered ‘gesture such as a nod’ as a consent. The results showed that the male teenagers were relatively insensitive towards accurate communication of expressions.

[Figure 7] What one thinks as a consent for a physical touch (multiple responses)

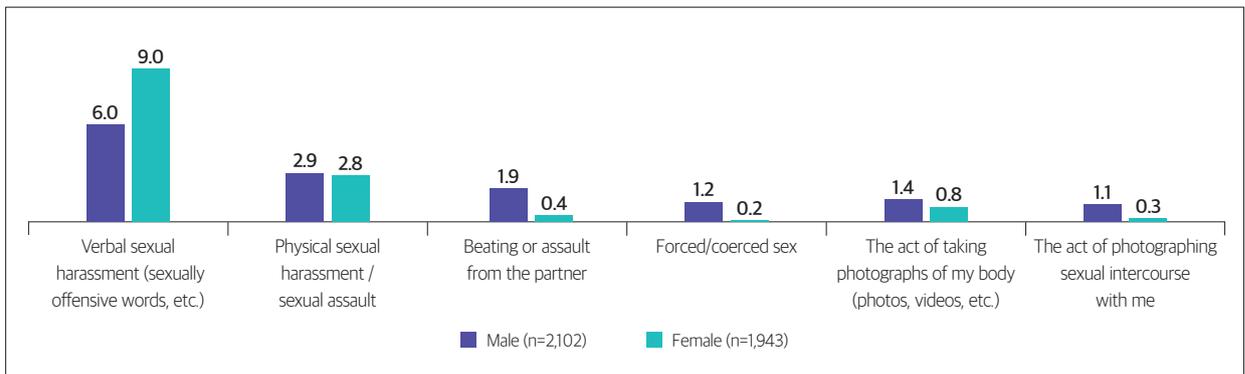
(Unit: %)



▶ The experience of couples' control within relationship, sexual harassment/sexual violence, and stalking were more frequently reported among the female teenagers than the male teenagers. Also, the female teenagers (21.4%) were more likely to report the experience of stalking than the male teenagers (16.9%), and the proportion increased with the respondents' age. Among those in the 2nd year of high school, 30.5% of the female teenagers and 24.7% of the male teenagers were found to have experienced stalking from their previous romantic partners.

[Figure 8] Experience of sexual harassment and sexual violence from dating partners

(Unit: %)



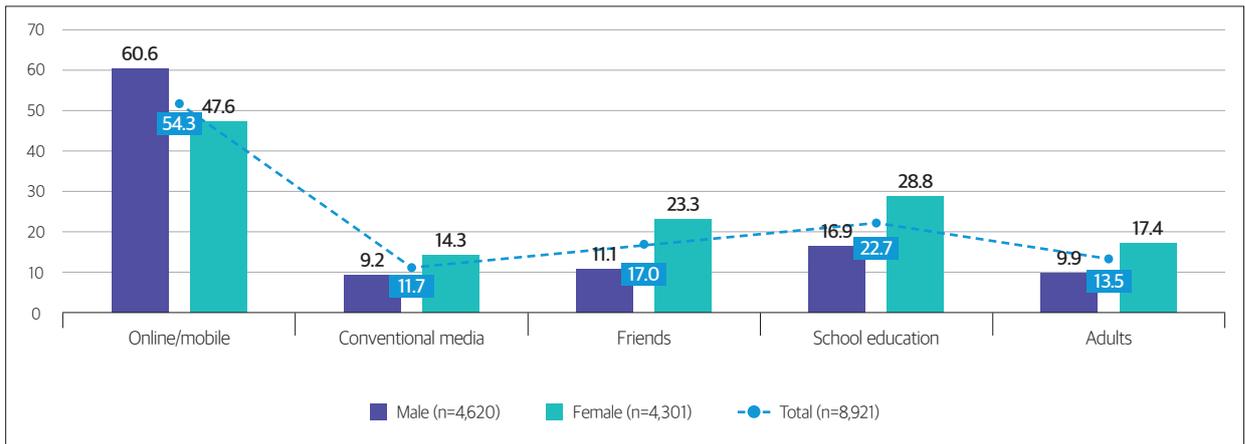
▶ The survey found large differences within the same generation on the experience of dating. Among the teenagers aged from 6th graders in primary schools to 2nd graders in high schools, the proportion of those who had never been in a romantic relationship was 48.5%, and the proportion was slightly higher for the female teenagers (49.1%) than the male teenagers (47.9%). Teasing and worries about being the so-called “mosol” (single since birth, who has no experience in dating) were found to increase with the teenagers' age, with the male teenagers being more likely to be the target of teasing compared to their female counterparts (28.6% for male 2nd graders in high schools, 22.6% for female 2nd graders in high schools).

G Sexual culture of teenagers

▶ The survey found that the teenagers satisfied their sexual curiosity and acquired relevant knowledge mainly through the internet or online space, not through school sex education or adults. In particular, the male teenagers relied more on online/mobile means than the female teenagers (60.6% males, 47.6% females) and this reliance increased with age, with 76.9% of male 2nd graders in high schools reporting that they generally resolved their sexual curiosity through online/mobile means. Presumably because of this reason, the level of knowledge on sex was found to be not low among the teenagers surveyed. However, the survey showed that despite the high level of knowledge about sex, conventional notions about sex still existed among the teenagers, and they were stronger among the male teenagers than their female counterparts.

[Figure 9] Means of satisfying sexual curiosity (multiple responses)

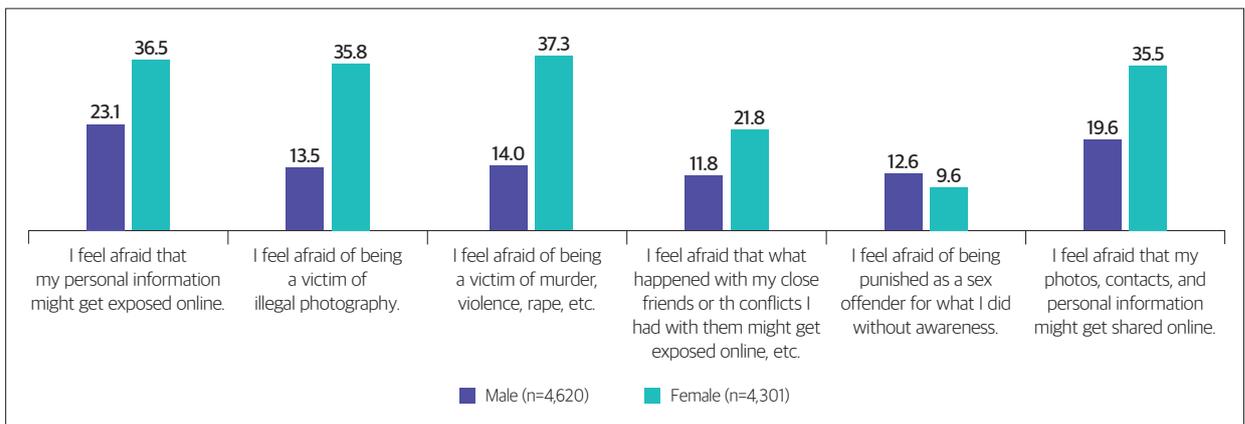
(Unit: %)



- ▶ The survey found that some teenagers had conventional beliefs that women were responsible for sexual harassment/sexual violence. This trend was stronger among the male teenagers than their female counterparts, with about 1/3 male teenagers believing that sexual violence could be reduced if women were more careful (31.0%) and about 1/5 thinking that sexual harassment cases generally happened due to the victim's sensitive response (22.1%) and that revealing clothes could lead to sexual violence (19.3%).
- ▶ The survey found that some teenagers suffered from anxiety over digital crimes or sexual crimes. This trend was more pronounced among the female teenagers, with more than a third of the female teenagers surveyed reporting that they felt anxious about illegal photography, the destructive power of violent crimes, and the leakage of personal information. Nearly half (47.2%) of female 2nd graders in high schools were concerned about the damage of illegal photography.

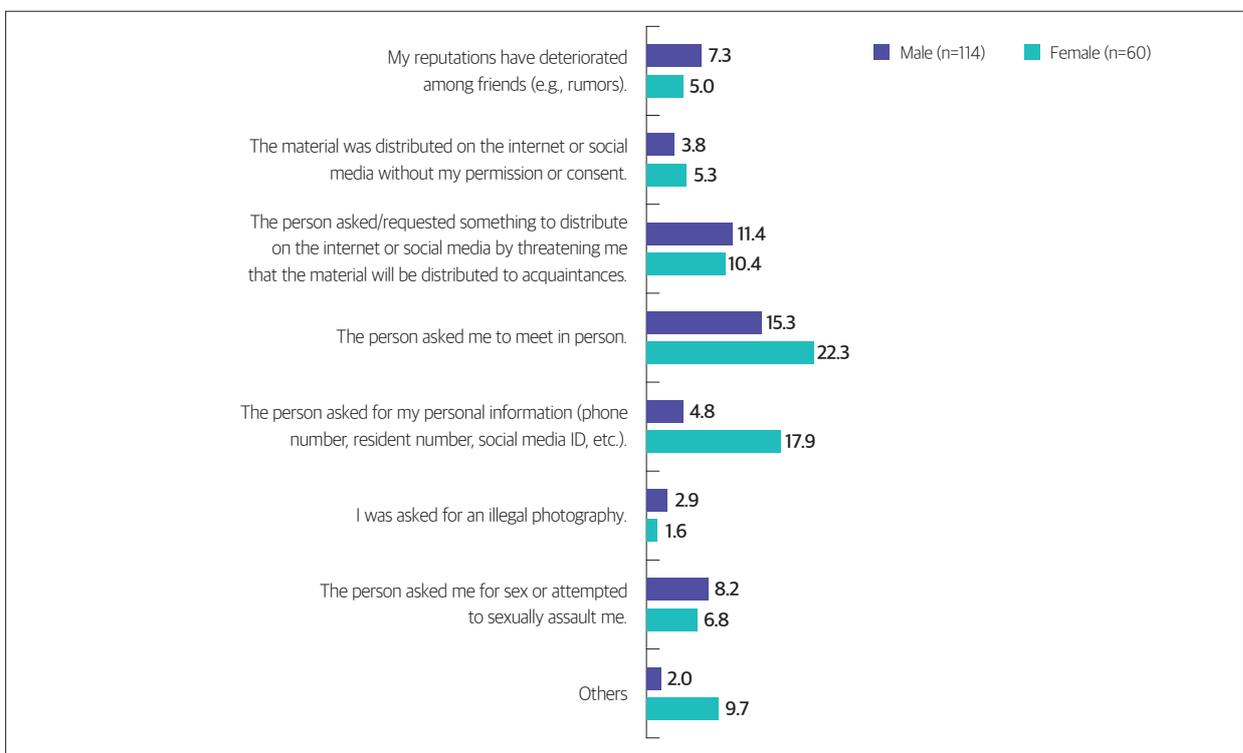
[Figure 10] Anxiety about digital crimes and sexual crimes

(Unit: %)



- ▶ The survey found that the teenagers suffered the risk of damage and harm caused by illegal photography, and in extreme cases, the harm could lead to damages such as the “Nth Room” case. About 23.9% of the teenagers reported that they had taken pictures of other people without permission, by taking funny pictures, pictures of someone who was sleeping, freaky pictures, pictures taken by hidden cameras, pictures of body parts, etc. (19.2% males, 28.9% females), and the proportions increased with age. Also, 8.0% of the male and female teenagers reported that they have shared or altered sexual photos/videos using mobile phones or computers. More than half (52.6%) of the teenagers who distributed their own physical/sexual images were found to have suffered from damages. Of them, 23.7% engaged in sexual intercourse or were sexually assaulted by those who received the images (29.1% males, 14.9% females). The proportion of teenagers who handed over their own personal information amounted to 12.5% and the female teenagers were more likely to do so than their male counterparts (31.0% females, 1.2% males).

[Figure 11] Experience of exchanging sexual images using mobile phones/computers (multiple responses)



Teenagers' perceptions about school education and school life

- ▶ First, the male and female teenagers in general thought that sex education at school was not helpful for obtaining knowledge or information, or for understanding and respecting the opposite sex. In particular, the female teenagers thought that sex education did not actually help them understand sex (34.1% males, 46.8% females), and that it did not give them the sexual knowledge and information they wanted (34.4% males, 47.3% females). The results suggested the need to change the contents and methods of sex education administered at schools.
- ▶ Second, the male and female teenagers perceived that gender equality education was also not helpful in making them learn new things or feel interested in the topic, and that it did not help alleviate the fixed

gender roles or stereotypes. In particular, 60.4% of the female teenagers reported that gender equality education was hard to get interested in because it usually taught them the things they already knew. Compared to the female teenagers, the male teenagers were more likely to agree that ‘school gender equality education seems to cause conflicts rather than improve gender equality’ (24.1% males, 20.7% females).

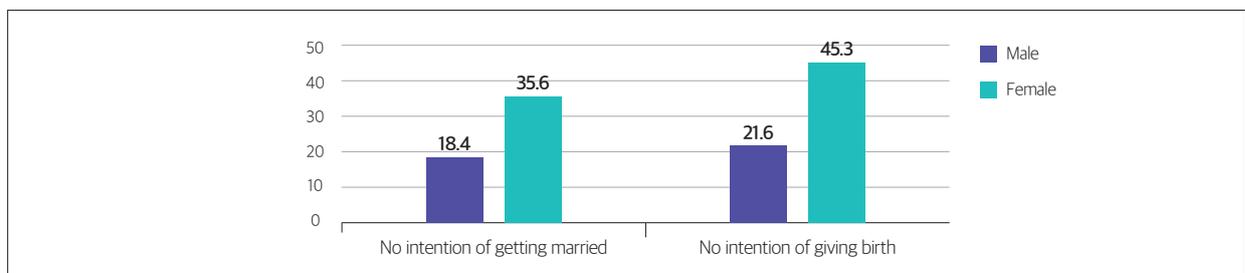
- ▶ Third, the teenagers recognized that various improvements were needed to operate schools in a gender-equal way. In other words, the survey found that both male and female teenagers have experienced discrimination due to the gender stereotypes of teachers, and both male and female teenagers seemed to feel negatively about school discipline, regulation, and excessive interference. Also, the teenagers thought that there should be no restrictions on students' clothing or hair, and that individual situations and characteristics, such as pregnancy, gender identity, etc. should not restrict students' right to study. The results illustrated that the male and female teenagers were highly aware of the need to improve school management through the incorporation of a gender equality perspective.

① Teenagers' preception on career path and women's social engagement

- ▶ First, in terms of preferred subject or desired major, the male teenagers were more likely to prefer mathematics compared to their female counterparts at the 6th grade in primary schools, but the preference among the male teenagers also decreased by 2nd grade in high schools, so there was no significant difference between the male and female teenagers. The female teenagers (8.2%) were slightly more likely than the male teenagers (7.0%) to report that they did not have any favorite subjects.
- ▶ Second, in terms of the criteria for selecting one's career (1st and 2nd choice), both male and female teenagers reported personal interest and curiosity as their first criteria (60.6% and 65.1% respectively). As subsequent choices, the male teenagers reported income and salary (53.4%), and aptitude and talent (53.1%). By contrast, the female teenagers' subsequent choices were in the order of aptitude and talent (55.1%) and income and salary (44.9%). The female teenagers were more likely to value criteria such as employment stability and work-life balance, while the male teenagers were more likely to value social status and honor.
- ▶ Third, clear differences emerged between the male and female teenagers regarding marriage and childbirth. About 35.6% of the female teenagers and 18.4% of the male teenagers reported that they did not want to get married in the future, and 45.3% of the female teenagers and 21.6% of the male teenagers reported that they did not want to give birth in the future. The survey revealed that nearly half of the female teenagers were not willing to give birth, and this would likely to intensify the low birthrate in South Korea.

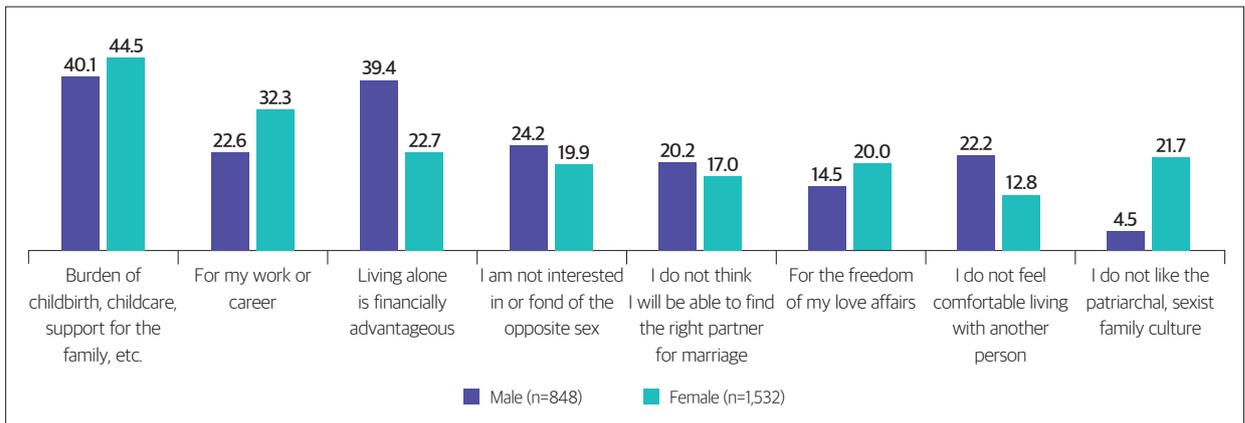
[Figure 12] Intention to get married and give birth in the future

(Unit: %)

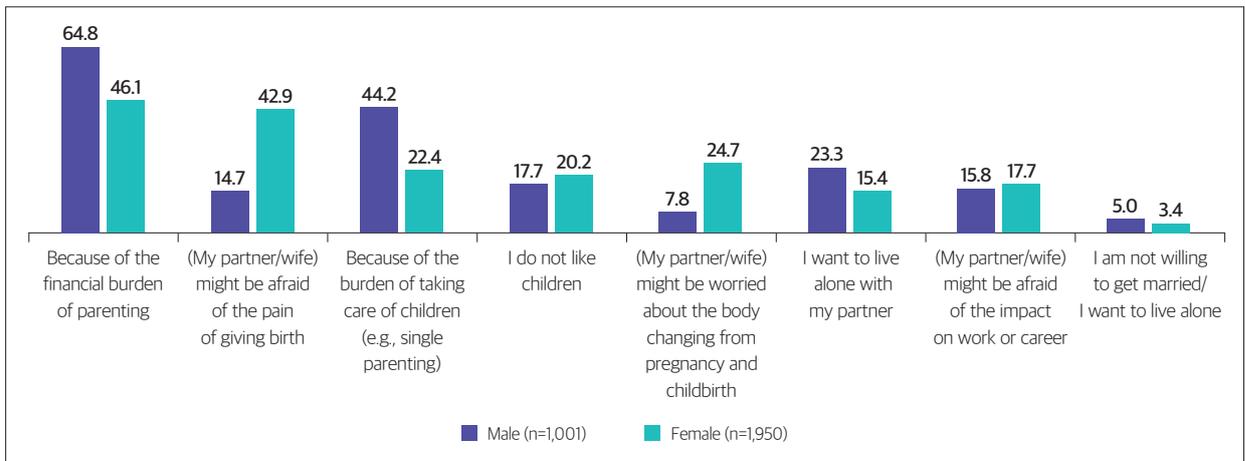


▶ The survey suggested that the reasons for rejecting marriage and childbirth were different among the male and female teenagers. Both male and female teenagers cited the burden of childcare and support as the reason, but the male teenagers reported their reason was mainly related to finances, while the female teenagers were more likely than the male teenagers to report that they rejected marriage and feared childbirth due to career interruption, patriarchal family culture, etc. The fear of career interruption and the fear of giving birth have been observed in previous generations, but the trend in which the patriarchal family culture is considered the main reason is new.

[Figure 13] The reasons why one does not want to get married in the future (1st + 2nd choice) (Unit: %)



[Figure 14] The reasons why one does not want to give birth in the future (1st + 2nd choice) (Unit: %)



▶ The female teenagers (70.0%) were much more likely than the male teenagers (38.3%) to perceive that social gender discrimination existed against women's social participation. In particular, a high proportion of the male teenagers cited the difficulty of continuing careers while achieving work-life balance and the lack of women's qualifications and abilities.

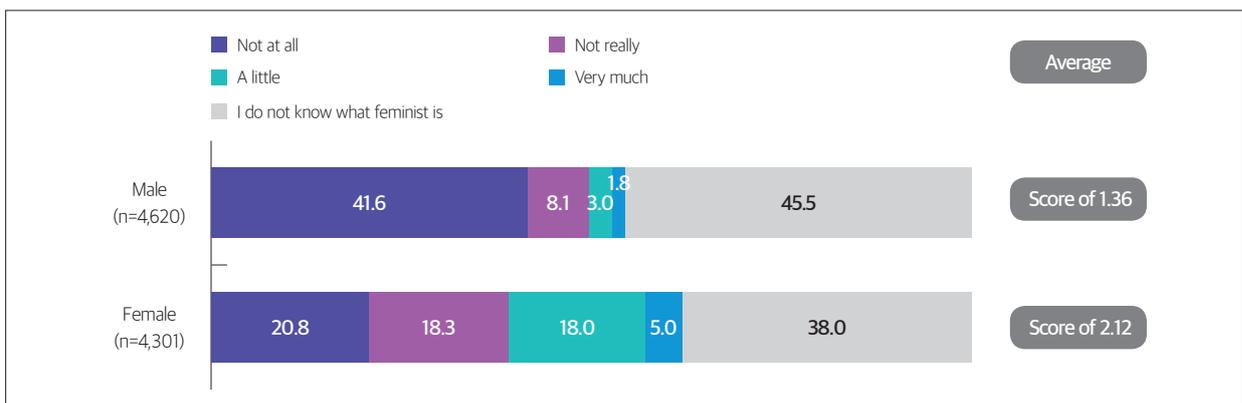


Perception of gender equality and feminism among teenagers

- ▶ The measurement on gender equality awareness in the male and female teenagers showed that the male teenagers reported lower level of gender equality awareness and stronger stereotypes compared to the female teenagers. In particular, large differences in perception between the male and female teenagers were observed for responses such as ‘The highest position in the company is more suitable for men than women’ (10.8%p), ‘Double income is possible, but men are mainly responsible for taking care of livelihood’ (10.7%p), and ‘People must hire more men than women’ (9.0%p). Benevolent sexism was also observed in 28.8% of the responses.
- ▶ Notably, these gender-related perceptions became more pronounced with age. For example, those who agreed with the statement ‘Men are mainly responsible for taking care of livelihood’ increased from 15.5% (6th graders in primary schools) to 25.1% (2nd graders in high schools) and those who agreed with the statement ‘Women do not fulfill their duties but only claim their rights’ increased from 11.6% (6th graders in primary schools) to 20.8% (2nd graders in high schools). This meant that the male teenagers’ traditional stereotypes became stronger as they grew older, while the female teenagers broke away from stereotypes, namely traditional gender stereotypes, as they grew older. The results suggested that various efforts were needed to narrow this gap.
- ▶ The survey indicated that many teenagers did not have sufficient understanding about feminism. About 41.9% of all the teenagers surveyed reported that they did not know what feminism was, with almost half (45.5%) of the male teenagers reporting so. Among those who reported that they understood what feminism was, 32.3% of the male teenagers perceived that feminism was about female chauvinism, and 29.6% reported that feminism was about hatred towards men. The results showed that 61.9% of the male teenagers and 24.0% the female teenagers surveyed perceived that feminism was not about equality but about discrimination and hatred.

[Figure 15] Whether one considers oneself as a feminist

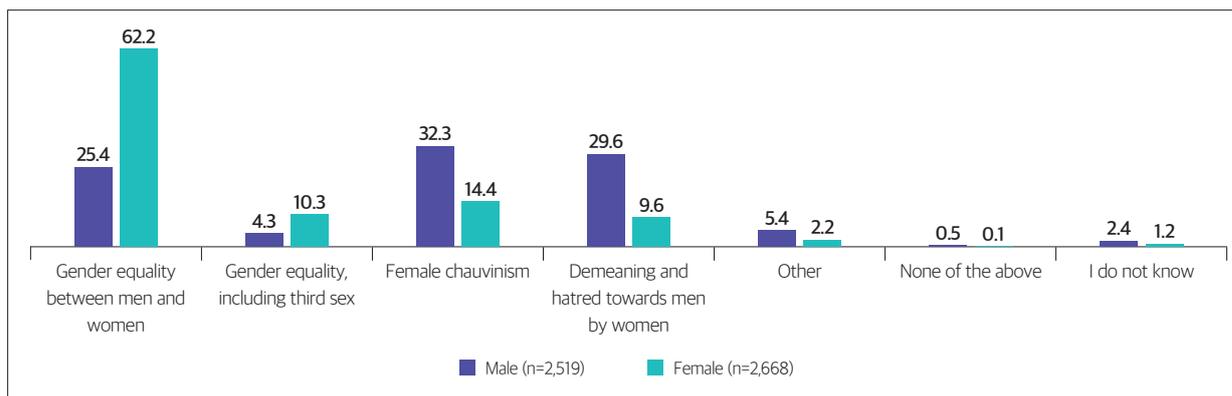
(Unit: %)



※ Average scores were calculated based on 'Not at all = Score 1' ~ 'Very much = Score 4'.

[Figure 16] One's own definition of feminism

(Unit: %)



▶ Many male teenagers believed that women's movement in general violates men's rights and puts men's position at a disadvantage in our society because men and women's rights are already equal. The problem was that compared to the female teenagers, the male teenagers' views clearly changed with their development stages, and they tended to have more masculine views as they grew up. Although the female teenagers' responses did not indicate great difference for 6th graders in primary schools and 2nd graders in high schools, male teenagers' responses doubled or tripled from 6th graders in primary schools to 2nd graders in high schools. The results demonstrated that the gap in gender equality awareness between the male and female teenagers did not arise from the beginning. Instead, the gap widened as they grew up, and when they became high school students, the gap reached the level commonly displayed in young adults.

3. Policy recommendations

- ▶ Strengthen the improvement in online environment for teenagers.
 - 'First, to provide a safe online environment for teenagers, online platform companies need to make efforts to provide differentiated services to various audience groups, present different standards for reviews, etc.
 - Second, indiscriminate online advertising, in addition to online contents provided through online platforms, also requires social review. More specific measures are needed to regulate indiscriminate advertising for adults on public websites, or to improve the issue autonomously through reporting, etc.
 - Third, despite the impact of games on teenagers' daily lives, regulations on game contents are quite limited, so it is necessary to improve this by providing undistorted contents on gender awareness and gender roles in online games.
 - Fourth, it is also important to remove gender-discriminatory and hateful contents from the online market, and produce alternative contents that break the traditional gender role stereotypes and present gender-equal social models. We need policy support to produce contents from a gender-equal perspective as opposed to discriminatory and hateful contents.
- ▶ Improve gender equality and gender awareness through education.
 - 'First, the most urgent aspect that needs to be tackled in order to enhance gender equality awareness and attitude

among teenagers is to change the contents and paradigms of school sex education. Current sex education is focused only on physical development and prevention of sexual violence to a limited extent. It is necessary to introduce and reflect the views on inclusive sex education.

- Second, media literacy education for teenagers should be strengthened. In the current situation where sexual harassment and sexist contents are prevalent, education should be reinforced to enhance individuals' gender sensitivity and improve their abilities to view and select contents critically from a gender equality perspective.
- Third, it is necessary to strengthen education on gender-equal career path. Efforts should be made to encourage teenagers to empathize and reflect critical views on gender issues throughout career education so that the teenagers can break gender stereotypes in choosing their majors or career paths. Career education materials, career education guidelines, etc. that reflect gender equality should be actively developed, and relevant personnel should be trained to be equipped with the knowledge on the need for gender-equal career education and related competencies.

Ministry in charge: Division of Youth Activities Promotion, Division of Youth Protection Environment,
the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

Relevant ministry: Gender Equality Policy Division, the Ministry of Education