Changing Family Structure and Family Support

- Outlook and Policy Implications

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Introduction

1. Research background
2. Research content and methodology
1. Research background

The rapid industrialization and evolution of Korean society has abruptly increased one-person households, broken families due to divorce or death, and elderly couple households. The family size in Korea has been shrinking, with the proportion of one-person households increasing from 15.5 percent in 2000 to 23.9 percent by 2010, while the ratio of early divorces decreased slightly from 2.5 to 2.3 per 1,000 people over the same period. By 2014, the number of households of elderly parents living separately from their children had exceeded two-thirds of all elderly households, at 71.6 percent. Between 2004 and 2014, the proportion of households composed of elderly couples living by themselves almost doubled, rising from 26.6 percent to 44.5 percent, while the proportion of one-person elderly households dropped slightly from 24.6 percent to 23.0 percent. Amid the changing social views of marriage and family, the types of families continue to diversify, including divorced families, re-married families, separated families (due to children studying abroad, etc.), communal families, and so forth; and this changing trend in family structure will likely ac-
The median age of household heads rose from 44.5 in 2000 to 49.0 in 2010, while the male-to-female household head ratio shifted from 81.5:18.5 to 74.1:25.9. The proportion of households with both husband and wife working full-time increased consistently from 35.4 percent in 2000 to 40.1 percent in 2009, and the proportion of single-parent households grew as well, from 9.4 percent in 2000 to 12.3 percent in 2010.

The types and needs of family support are similarly diversifying against the backdrop of changing family functions; yet there is no society-wide support system capable of responding to these diversifying and increasing needs. Korean society has come to place greater emphasis on society rather than the family as the primary caregiver responsible for children and seniors. Meanwhile, the weakening of family relations and ties continues to increase the social cost of supporting these weaker family members. In order to help Koreans maintain healthy and happy families, it is important for Korean policymakers to develop a more comprehensive and balanced family support system.

This study assesses and analyzes the changing perspective on, and dynamics of, family support in Korea, with the goal of
providing information that can be used in the development of a more balanced family support policy—one that rationally reflects the respective responsibilities of families, society, and the state. To this end, this study analyzes the characteristics and policy needs of family support, forecasts likely changes in the future, and identifies policy implications.

2. Research content and methodology

This study is divided into five sections, including the introduction. Of the four remaining parts, Section II is a review of the established theories on family support. Section III provides an analysis of the characteristics of family support and related policy needs. Section IV examines likely changes in family support and their policy implications. Section V summarizes the policy implications based on the foregoing analyses, current family support characteristics, and future outlook.

The research methodology involved the following. First, a review of existing literature was conducted to identify the concepts and typology of family support involved. The current perception and environment of family support in Korea were analyzed using the statistics from Statistics Korea’s Population and Housing Census and other family-related studies. In addition to these statistics, telephone interviews with 2,000 randomly selected Koreans were used to identify and analyze the charac-
teristics of family support and related policy needs. The telephone interviews were conducted via two surveys by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA), i.e., the Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Elderly Parents and Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Children, each targeting 1,000 respondents. The respondents were Korean adults aged 20 to 64, and the surveys were conducted from August 27 to September 10, 2015.
Literature Review

1. Concept and types of family support
2. Assessing the environmental factors of family support
1. Concept and types of family support

A. Concept and scope

There are multiple words in the Korean language that refer to family support1) (Song, 2004). The Grand Korean Dictionary (1997) defines *buyang* as caring for family members who are incapable of living on their own. The concept therefore includes not only family members living together to provide such support, but also family members who live separately, yet exchange financial, emotional, and physical support.

Different scholars define family support in different ways. The most common definition comes from Choi (2000), who defines it as providing emotional support and necessary material resources for individual family members. Jeong (2009) defines it as providing emotional support, necessary material resources, human relations, assistance with routine activities or mobility, and instrumental assistance in facilitating the daily activities of family members who either live with or do not live with the

1) In general, the word *buyang*, which is used in this study to refer to family support, connotes economic and financial support, while *bongyang*, *subal*, and *dolbom* tend to emphasize the physical and emotional aspects of support for weaker family members (Yang, 2009).

The concept of family support is often associated with providing support for the elderly. Cho (2004) thus focuses his definition on that aspect of support. Due to the decline of their mental and physical capabilities, the elderly require the help of others to maintain their standard of living. Children and the infirm are also weak members of families, and of society as a whole, whose dependency on others is natural. Some define family support as the process of satisfying the physical, psychological, and social needs of dependents by mobilizing not only the private resources of individuals and families but also social resources. Others attempt to define family support as a matter of interactions. Caplan (1976), for example, sees family support as involving the provision of emotional support and material resources for individuals, while also enabling those individuals to maintain relationships with the people on whom they may depend (quoted in Seo and Kim, 1998). Horowitz and Shindelman (1982) similarly define family support as consisting of lifelong and continuous interactions between the support provider and the dependent (quoted in Seo and Kim, 1998), while Warren defines family support as consisting of a series of services provided in the form of physical assistance, emotional support, treatment for physical pain, and provision of comfort and attention to prevent feelings of solitude (quoted in Lee, 2006).

Based on these concepts, we may summarize family support
as consisting of the provision of emotional, physical, and instrumental support for one’s elderly parents, whether one lives with them or not. For our purposes, the concept should be treated as interchangeable with care and support. Financial support involves the provision of money and other material resources, while emotional support involves an understanding of the emotional experiences of dependents and consolation to prevent feelings of solitude and isolation. Physical and instrumental support involves assistance with cleaning, housework, running errands, and mobility, which are tasks that dependents need to engage in to maintain their daily routine activities.

B. Types of family support

The established literature classifies family support arrangements based on who provides support, what services are involved, and who requires support. Multiple studies reveal important correlations between these factors and family support (Lee, 1980; Kim, 1981; Song, 1986; Seo and Kim, 1998; Kim and Kim, 1999; Lee et al., 2002; Cho, 2004; Song, 2005; Yun, 2006; Kim, J., 2008; Gwak and Hong, 2009). The review of existing literature reveals three main pillars in the division of family support types: namely, who provides support (public vs. private); what types of services are involved (financial vs. non-fi-
nancial, with non-financial services subdivided into emotional and physical/instrumental support): and who requires support (elderly parents vs. grownup children) (Table 2-1).

(Table 2-1) Dimensions and Types of Family support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>- Public support: social support provided by the state and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Private support: personal support provided by family members,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relatives, children, and/or neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of</td>
<td>- Financial support: provision of money and material resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support services</td>
<td>- Non-financial support: provision of emotional and/or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>physical/instrumental forms of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Emotional support: understanding of the emotional experiences of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dependents and comforting them against solitude and isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Physical/instrumental support: assistance with dependents’ routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>activities, including cleaning, running errands, help with mobility,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipients</td>
<td>- Elderly parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Grownup children aged 24 or older</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Assessing the environmental factors of family support

A. Accelerated deconstruction of the conventional family structure

The family size in Korea is shrinking. As early as 1990, nuclear families made up 68.0 percent of all households, while extended families made up 12.5 percent. The proportions of one-person households and non-kinship households were only
9.0 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively. Over the following 20 years, the tendency toward smaller family sizes continued, with nuclear families making up 61.6 percent; extended families, 6.2 percent; one-person households, 23.9 percent; and the proportion of non-kinship households remaining more or less the same. These noticeable changes in family structure reflect larger changes in society at large, such as growing individualism, aging of the population, increasing tendency to marry later in life, growing divorce rate, and low fertility.

[Figure 2-1] Changing Family Structure (1990 to 2010)

(Unit: percentage)


Another trend is the increasing deconstruction of the family structure due to the changing family values and weakening family ties. A strong sign of this is found in the changing gender and marital status of household heads. In 1990, men were five times more likely to be household heads than women (84.3 percent vs. 15.7 percent). That ratio shifted to 81.5:18.5 by 2000 and 74.1:25.9 by 2010. In other words, the number of male
household heads has decreased steadily over the past two decades, while the number of female household heads has increased, reflecting the growing number of divorced, separated, and widowed households. In 1990, four-fifths, or 79.6 percent, of household heads were married, while 12.0 percent were either widowed or divorced, and 8.3 percent were unmarried (Statistics Korea, 1990). By 2000, those percentages had changed to 75.0 percent, 14.8 percent, and 10.2 percent, respectively. By 2010, the percentages changed further to 66.6 percent, 19.0 percent, and 10.2 percent, showing prominent increases in the numbers of divorced, widowed, and unmarried household heads (Statistics Korea, 2000 and 2010). This smaller, more deconstructed family structure suggests that the declining ability of families to provide care for their own family members.

B. Changing family values

1) Changing perspective on supporting children

Ongoing industrialization, urbanization, and family nuclearization have all prompted changes in traditional family values in Korea. The decreasing number of people who view children as a necessary part of adult life or family has influenced the perception of childcare. KIHASA’s The National Survey on
Fertility, Family Health and Welfare in Korea from 2003, for instance, shows that 40.2 percent of respondents believed it is the duty of parents to support their children until they graduate from university, followed by 32.1 percent who believed support was needed until children got married, and fewer who believed support was needed until children found jobs. A similar distribution of answers was observed in the surveys conducted from 2006 through to 2012.

(Table 2-2) Opinions about Until When Should Parents Support Their Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Until graduation from high school</th>
<th>Until graduation from university</th>
<th>Until employed</th>
<th>Until marriage</th>
<th>As long as necessary</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>100.0(11,106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>100.0(10,117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>100.0(9,075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100.0(10,058)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While the proportions of parents willing to support their children until graduation from high school or university or until they find a job rose consistently over the nine-year period, the proportion of parents willing to support their children until marriage decreased by comparison, most likely due to the growing tendency of young Koreans today to postpone or avoid marriage. Since then, parents’ views on how long they should support their children appear to have changed dramatically, as
confirmed by KIHASA’s telephone interviews in 2015. When asked to rate the extent to which parents are responsible for supporting their children until they find jobs, helping children with their wedding expenses, providing children with assistance in financing their first homes, and helping children raise their grandchildren, interviewees gave scores ranging from 2.22 to 2.94 out of a possible five, suggesting relatively little responsibility on the part of parents to help their children in these four areas. Specifically, assistance paying wedding expenses, financing children’s first homes after marriage, and raising grandchildren garnered scores ranging from 2.08 to 2.94 from interviewees of all age groups. However, interviewees in their 40s or younger rated parents’ responsibility to support children until they find jobs at 2.68 to 2.95 on average, while interviewees in the 50-64 age group gave scores ranging from 3.19 to 3.21 in the same area. In other words, younger parents tend to attach less importance to supporting their grownup children until they gain economic self-sufficiency than do their older counterparts, which will likely serve to change the dynamics of family dynamics between parents and their grownup children in the future.
2) Changing perspective on supporting elderly parents

Filial piety—children’s duty to respect and care for their parents—has been a core principle of family and society in Korea. However, due to increasing family nuclearization and deconstruction, women’s increasing participation in the workforce, and changes in related laws and policies, care for the elderly is becoming more a matter of state policy than a matter of family self-help. This is apparent in the changing perspective on supporting elderly parents. In 1998, 89.9 percent of people surveyed chose the family as the party with primary responsibility for supporting elderly parents, with only 8.1 percent answering that seniors should take care of themselves and 2.0 percent picking society and other parties. As for which children should
bear the greatest responsibility for supporting their parents, first sons and sons in general were chosen by 29.4 percent, and all children, including daughters, were picked by 15.0 percent. The most popular answer, chosen by 45.5 percent of respondents, was “capable children.” By 2008, the proportion of respondents selecting families as the party with primary responsibility had almost halved, dropping to 40.7 percent, while the proportions of respondents who indicated that seniors should take care of themselves or society should take responsibility grew to 11.9 percent and 47.4 percent, respectively. The same tendency is noted in the survey conducted in 2014 as well. While the proportion of those who picked first sons or sons in general as primary caregivers dropped to 9.7 percent, the proportion of those who answered “all children, including daughters,” rose to 24.3 percent by contrast.

[Figure 2-3] Primary Caregivers for Elderly Parents

(Unit: percentage)

Notes: 1) Respondents to the surveys from 1998 through to 2010 were aged 15 or older, while respondents to the surveys from 2012 and afterward were aged 13 or older.
2) “Other” includes children’s teachers, hometown friends, and alumni.
By 2014, the proportion of respondents choosing families as the “primary care provider” dropped radically to 31.7 percent, only one-third of the proportion in 1998, while the proportion of respondents indicating that seniors should take care of themselves or society or other parties should be responsible grew to a combined 68.3 percent. In addition, 24.1 percent of respondents answered that all children, regardless of gender, should be responsible for their parents, while only a marginal number picked first sons or sons in general, indicating that the primogeniture and son-centered culture of Korean families is beginning to fade. On the contrary, there is growing demand for society, as well as seniors themselves, to take greater responsibility for supporting the elderly.

![Figure 2-4] Opinions about Which Children Should Be the Primary Caregivers for Their Parents

(Unit: percentage)

Note: Respondents to the surveys from 1998 through to 2010 were aged 15 or older, while respondents to the surveys from 2012 and afterward were aged 13 or older.

Source: Statistics Korea (1998-2014), Social Survey Results.

As for when children should support their elderly parents, 31.9 percent of respondents chose “when parents desire,” fol-
followed by 27.0 percent who chose “when parents are ill,” 21.9 percent who chose “when parents lack the financial ability,” and 16.8 percent who chose “whenever possible, irrespective of parents’ ability.” In other words, Koreans tend to view supporting their elderly parents as a conditional matter of forced duty more than as an undertaking one takes up actively and willingly.

To summarize, the changing perspective on supporting elderly parents reflects the weakening primogeniture- and sons-centered culture of families in Korea and the growing emphasis on society’s responsibility to care for the elderly. Nevertheless, the declining birth rate and aging of the population will likely increase the burden on the younger generations to support the elderly, amplifying conflicts between older people and their adult children and between grownup siblings.

[Figure 2-5] Opinions about When Should Children Support Their Elderly Parents (2014)

(Unit: percentage)

Note: A survey of 1,000 randomly selected people in Korea.
Characteristics of family support and policy needs

1. Support for grownup children
2. Support for elderly parents
3. Implications
1. Support for grownup children

A. Characteristics

The survey concerning support for grownup children involved 690 married individuals out of the total of 1,000 respondents. Of these 690, 38 percent, or 262, had children aged 25 or older of whom 39 percent, or 102, were supporting grownup children. The proportion of parents with a single grownup child receiving such support was the largest at 69 percent, followed by parents with two children receiving support (30.2 percent) and parents with three or more children receiving support (0.8 percent). The average number of grownup children receiving support was 1.3 per family.

[Figure 3-1] Grownup Children Receiving Support from Parents

(Unit: percentage)

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Children, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.
The proportion of grownup children receiving support from their parents even after getting married was 13.1 percent, which is far less than the 86.9 percent of grownup and unmarried children receiving support. Of grownup children receiving support, 58.9 percent had jobs, 28 percent had no jobs, and 13.1 percent were enrolled in schools.

Of the grownup and married children receiving support from their parents, 12.4 percent had spouses who were also working, and 5.3 percent worked while their spouses stayed at home. The vast majority, accounting for 82.3 percent, were unmarried.
B. Exchange of support

The 102 parents who had supported grownup children answered that they provided such support for a period of 4.13 years on average. More specifically, the largest group, accounting for 32.3 percent, provided support for two to three years, followed by 24.1 percent who provided support for one year or less, 19.9 percent who provided support for six to 10 years, 17.8 percent who provided support for four to five years, and six percent who provided support for 11 years or longer. Also, 68 percent of these parents lived with the grownup children they supported.
The proportion of parents who had provided regular financial assistance to their grownup children over the past year was 66.8 percent, 18 percentage points higher than the 49.2 percent of parents who had provided help on an irregular basis. In addition, 67.8 percent of parents had provided cash, while 72.6 percent had provided in-kind support. The average amount of regular cash support amounted to KRW 872,000 per month, while the average amount of irregular cash support amounted to KRW 251,000 per month. In addition, 41.9 percent of parents had provided in-kind support on a regular basis, while 42.0 percent had provided in-kind support irregularly.
As for non-economic (i.e., emotional) forms of support provided by parents to their grownup children over the past year, 38.4 percent of parents answered that they had provided no such support, followed by 19.7 percent who had provided emotional support once or twice a month, 8.6 percent who had provided it two to three times a week, and 8.6 percent who had provided it once or twice throughout the year.
As for physical/instrumental forms of support provided by parents to their grownup children over the past year, 76.8 percent of parents answered that they had provided no such assistance, while the next largest proportion answered that they had provided such support once or twice throughout the year.
On the contrary, over half of the parents, or 55.6 percent, answered that they had assisted their children with daily routine tasks over the past year, while 23.2 percent answered that they had provided no such support.

[Figure 3–8] Non–Economic (Daily) Support Provided for Grownup Children
(Unit: percentage)

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Children, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.

C. Cost of supporting grownup children

The telephone interviews revealed that the cost of supporting grownup children over the past year amounted to KRW 737,000 per month. More specifically, 56.2 percent of the parents spent KRW 500,000 or less per month; 26.6 percent, KRW 1,000,000 or less per month; and 17.3 percent, KRW 1,010,000 or more per month.
The cost of supporting grownup children, on average, claimed 27 percent of parents’ household income. In 40.4 percent of parents’ households, support for grownup children accounted for 21 percent or more of the parents’ household income: in 30.7 percent, it was 10 percent or less; and in 29 percent, 20 percent or less. When asked about the extent of the financial burden parents took on to support their grownup children, 42.4 percent answered that it was manageable; 26 percent, not burdensome at all; 17.4 percent, somewhat burdensome; and 14.2 percent, significantly burdensome.
III. Characteristics of family support and policy needs

[Figure 3-10] Financial Burden of Supporting Grownup Children on Household Income

(Unit: percentage)

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Children, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.

D. Difficulties in supporting grownup children

When asked to point out the greatest difficulty they had had in supporting their grownup children, 39.2 percent of parents point to the financial burden; 29.8 percent, conflicts with their children; 10.1 percent, limits on personal and social time; 4.3 percent, deterioration of health; and 3.1 percent, conflicts with spouses and other family members. These difficulties indicate the growing policy needs in terms of financial support as well as support for family relations and health.
2. Support for elderly parents

A. Characteristics

Of the 1,000 survey respondents, 791 had living parents and thus answered questions about the support they were providing to their parents. Of the 791, 33.9 percent supported their parents only, while less than half, or 15.8 percent, supported their spouses’ parents only. Another 7.1 percent supported their parents as well as their spouses’ parents.
III. Characteristics of family support and policy needs

Let us now confine our focus to the 501 out of the 1,000 respondents who were supporting their parents. The vast majority of these 501 respondents, or 64.4 percent, had fathers in their 70s or older, followed by 25.3 percent with fathers in their 60s and 10.3 percent with fathers in their 50s. The average age of fathers was 73.1 years old. On the other hand, 68.1 percent had mothers in their 70s, followed by 20.3 percent with mothers in their 60s and 11.7 percent with mothers in their 50s. The average age of mothers was 73.7 years old, which is 0.6 years higher than that of fathers. As for parents’ health, 18.6 percent of respondents had fathers who were in poor or very poor health, followed by 38.7 percent with fathers in average health and 42.7 percent with fathers in good or very good health. In summary, 81.4 percent of respondents had fathers who were in average or good health. On the contrary, 31.1 percent had mothers who were in poor or very poor health, followed by
39.2 percent with mothers in average health and 29.6 percent with mothers in good or very good health. This shows that mothers receiving support tend to be less healthy than are fathers receiving support.

[Figure 3–14] Health of Parents Receiving Support

(Unit: percentage)

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Elderly Parents, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.

B. Length of time support was provided and closeness to parents

Of the 501 respondents, 44.4 percent had supported their parents for 11 years or longer; 28.3 percent, five years or less; and 27.3 percent, six to 10 years. The average length of support was 12.9 years.
How close children are to their parents, while living in separate homes, can be measured by the frequency with which they contact and meet with each other. Of the 1,000 respondents, 329 were living separately from their parents and thus answered the question about the frequency with which they contact their parents. Of these 329, 23.3 percent called their parents once a week; 22.7 percent, once or twice a month; 21.9 percent, almost every day; and 20.2 percent, two or three times a week. In other words, the vast majority (88.1 percent) called their parents at least once a week. However, there were 4.5 percent who rarely called, only once or twice a quarter or a year, and another 4.5 percent never called their parents at all.
In terms of meeting with parents, 40.5 percent met with their parents once or twice a month; 18.3 percent, once or twice every three months; 16.3 percent, once a week; 14.2 percent, almost every day; and 14.2 percent, two to three times a week. Over two-thirds, or 71.0 percent, of respondents met with their parents at least once a month, and only a quarter, or 25.5 percent, met with their parents once or twice a quarter or a year.

C. Types of support for elderly parents

Of the 501 respondents who were supporting their parents, 27.9 percent lived separately from parents who were economically self-sufficient, while 24.8 percent lived with parents who were economically dependent. Another 23.5 percent of respondents had parents who did not live with them but were still
economically dependent on them. Finally, 20.7 percent of respondents lived with parents who were economically self-sufficient. Overall, 45.5 percent lived with their parents, while 51.4 percent did not. In addition, 48.3 percent of respondents had economically dependent parents, while 48.6 percent did not.

(Economic support included cash allowances, living allowances, medical expenses, and financial assistance for the purchase of real estate, as well as in-kind support, such as travel- and tourism-related gifts, health devices and supplements, daily tools and appliances, electronics, dining out, and groceries. Of the respondents, 63.9 percent provided economic assistance regularly, while 80.2 percent provided such assistance on an irregular basis. Also, 92.5 percent provided cash, and 86.0 percent in-kind support.)

The average amount of regular cash support provided by respondents was KRW 441,000 a month, while that of irregular cash support was KRW 130,000. As for in-kind support, 35.6 percent of respondents provided it regularly, while almost double, or 68.5 percent, provided it on an irregular basis over the past year.
Non-economic support included emotional support (such as listening to parents’ worries and concerns), physical and instrumental support (nursing care and accompaniment to hospitals, etc.), and assistance with routine activities (cleaning, preparing meals, washing laundry, etc.). Well over half of the respondents, or 68.4 percent, had provided emotional support for their parents over the past year, while 61.8 percent had provided physical/instrumental support. Another 48.7 percent had provided assistance with routine activities.

![Non-Economic Support for Parents](image)

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Elderly Parents, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.

D. Cost of supporting parents and burden on household income

The average amount of money spend by the 501 parent-supporting respondents on their parents over the past year amounted to KRW 348,000 a month. Respondents in their 20s spent the greatest amount, at KRW 435,000 a month, while those aged 60 to 64 spent the least, at KRW 150,000. First sons
spent an average of KRW 476,000 a month, which is KRW 128,000 more than the overall average. Second or younger sons spent KRW 339,000, while first daughters spent KRW 287,000 and second and younger daughters spent KRW 266,000. The gender gap in the amount spent ranged from KRW 50,000 to KRW 210,000 a month.

Nearly half of the respondents, or 48.7 percent, answered that the cost of supporting their parents had taken up five percent or less of their household income over the past year, while 24.5 percent answered 10 percent or less; 16.1 percent, 20 percent or less; and 10.7 percent, 21 percent or more. The average proportion of household income occupied by the cost of supporting parents was 9.7 percent. In particular, the ratio of parent-supporting cost to household income was the highest among respondents in their 50s, at 11.0 percent, followed by 10.8 percent for respondents in their 30s and slightly above eight percent for the other age groups. Over half of the respondents, or 55.8 percent, answered that the cost of supporting their parents was manageable. Another 19.6 percent found it not burdensome at all, while 24.6 percent found it burdensome. People aged 60 to 64 gave a score of 2.4 out of four regarding the financial burden of supporting their parents, while people in their 20s gave a score of 1.8, which was the lowest. In other words, the financial burden of supporting one’s elderly parents increases as one ages.
E. Difficulties in supporting parents and policy needs

When asked about the greatest difficulty they faced in supporting their parents, 48.4 percent of the respondents indicated financial difficulty, followed by 18.2 percent who felt
burdened by the need to visit and care for their parents often. Other respondents pointed to the limitations it placed on their professional and social lives, conflicts with siblings and parents, and the negative impact on their health.

Of the 1,000 respondents who were asked about what types of policy support were most needed for elderly care, 33.6 percent answered subsidies and grants, and 24.6 percent answered jobs for seniors. Subsidization of the cost of elderly living facilities, family vacation programs that provide care for elderly family members, and diversification of living arrangements for the elderly were also included among the answers, alongside greater provisions for elderly care at work and facilities.

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Elderly Parents, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.
3. Implications

The aging of household heads, women’s increasing participation in the workforce, growing number of dual-income married couples working full time, and increase in the number of single-parent households, along with other societal factors, continue to expose Korea’s traditional family dynamics to the risks of the new society. As people’s values and perspectives on family continue to change, the problems related to the provision of support for elderly parents and grownup children are now emerging as new social issues.

Of the 1,000 respondents surveyed, 10 percent supported their grownup children for an average span of 4.13 years. While over half of respondents supported their grownup children for three years or less, 26 percent supported their children for six years or longer. As many of these respondents are baby boomers who are nearing retirement or have retired already, policy support is needed to alleviate the financial burden placed on them due to their provision of support for their grownup children. Furthermore, 68 percent of these respondents lived with the grownup children they supported. Of these children, 13 percent were married and 87 percent were unmarried, while 59 percent also had jobs. In other words, the vast majority of grownup children receiving support from their parents are unmarried and employed adults. Over the past year, 67 percent of
respondents had provided economic support regularly, as opposed to 49 percent who had provided economic support on an irregular basis. More respondents (73 percent) provided in-kind support than cash (68 percent), with the average monthly amount of regular cash support amounting to KRW 872,000, and irregular cash support amounting to KRW 251,000. Approximately 42 percent of the respondents provided in-kind support to their children, on both a regular and irregular basis. As for non-economic forms of support, 62 percent of respondents provided emotional support for their grownup children once or twice a month. Only a fifth of the respondents (23.2 percent) provided physical/instrumental support, and less than 13 percent provided non-economic forms of support twice or less a year. On the contrary, 76.8 percent of the respondents answered that they provided help with routine activities, including 56 percent who did so on a daily basis. This is most likely because these respondents lived with their unmarried grownup children. The average cost of supporting grownup children over the past year amounted to KRW 738,000 a month, occupying 27 percent of parents’ household income, which 31.6 percent of the respondents found to be burdensome. In fact, nearly 40 percent of the respondents identified financial difficulty as the greatest difficulty in supporting their grownup children. Conflicts with other family members also figured prominently, indicating the need to allo-
Next, of the 1,000 respondents to the survey, 791 had living parents. Of these, 56.7 percent supported their parents for an average span of 12.9 years. Also, 51.4 percent of respondents supported their parents while living separately from them, and 45.5 percent lived with and supported their parents. Of these 791 respondents, 48.6 percent had economically self-sufficient parents, and 48.3 percent had economically dependent parents. It was found that respondents were more likely to have supported their parents regularly over the past year than irregularly, with 92.5 percent providing cash and 86.0 percent providing in-kind support. As for non-financial assistance, 68.4 percent provided emotional support, and 61.8 percent provided physical/instrumental support for their parents, while less than half, or 48.7 percent, assisted their parents with routine activities. On average, the respondents spent KRW 348,000 a month over the past year, accounting for 9.7 percent of their household income, with 24.6 percent finding it burdensome. Respondents aged 60 to 64 were most likely to feel burdened, giving an average score of 2.4 out of four. As for the difficulties they experienced in supporting their parents, financial difficulty was found to be the greatest difficulty, followed by the burden of visiting parents and helping them with their housework often, the limitations it place on their professional and social lives, conflicts with siblings and parents, and negative
impact on their health, in descending order. Respondents’ answers revealed a wide range of needs in terms of policy support, including subsidies, increasing jobs for seniors, subsidies for the cost of elderly living facilities, and more opportunities for vacations for families caring for elderly members. Older respondents were more likely to support their parents than younger ones; yet older respondents had fewer economic resources and were in poorer health than their younger counterparts. Public support is thus needed to enable older generations to better support their elderly parents. There was also growing demand among respondents for entrusting their elderly parents to the care of professional facilities, indicating the need for policy support for more diverse living arrangements for seniors.
Changing dynamics of family support and future outlook

1. Outlook for support for grownup children
2. Outlook for support for elderly parents
3. Implications
1. Outlook for support for grownup children

A. Belated adulthood and extended parental economic support

The increasing education level of young people, the rising unemployment rate, and the tendency to put off marriage until later in life are all factors that have contributed to the growing economic dependency of young adults on their parents and families of origin. The rapid increase in the number of young people “not in education, employment, or training” (NEET) is indeed a worrisome phenomenon. It reflects the ongoing economic recession, the prevalent job-skills mismatch caused by the oversupply of highly educated personnel, and the soaring unemployment rate that has led a growing number of young people to cease any and all attempts at finding jobs. There is also a growing pattern of the so-called “yo-yo transition,” with young adults returning to their family homes after losing their jobs or getting divorced (Lee, 2014).

According to KIHASA’s The National Survey on Fertility, Family Health and Welfare in Korea, the proportion of parents willing to support their children until graduation from uni-
versity rose steadily from 40.2 percent in 2003 to 49.6 percent in 2012. The proportion of parents willing to support their children until they find jobs similarly rose from 11.5 percent in 2003 to 15.7 percent by 2012. However, the proportion of parents willing to support their children until marriage shrank drastically, from 32.1 percent in 2003 to 20.4 percent in 2012 (Table 2-2). In other words, the majority of Korean parents are still willing to help their children at least until they graduate from university and find jobs.

The telephone interviews conducted for this study revealed that 70 percent of respondents in their 50s and 60s were living with their grownup children. Of these older respondents, 67 percent provided economic support for their grownup children regularly, while 49 percent provided such support on an irregular basis (Figures 3-4 and 3-5). Economic support for grownup children occupied 27 percent of parents’ household income on average, and 32 percent of respondents found supporting their grownup children to be burdensome, pointing to financial difficulty as the greatest factor (Figures 3-9 and 3-10). In other words, the continued dependency of adult children is exerting increasing financial burdens on their parents.

The current phenomenon of grownup children refusing to sever their attachment to and economic dependency on their parents is characterized as a delayed transition to adulthood. Younger generations today are more individualistic than their
parents, but are forced by social and economic circumstances to continue depending on their parents despite their ideals of autonomy and independence. Today’s generation of parents, who have internalized boundless family responsibility and an emotional brand of “familyism,” thereby causing the declining birth rate, have responded favorably to this phenomenon. While parents are still relatively young, they may be able to manage supporting their grownup children; however, as parents age and become more dependent on assistance, the reversal between parents and their children in terms of the dynamics of support is not taking place so readily. The protracted dependency of grownup children will most likely undermine their parents’ quality of life in old age. As the current economic uncertainty and recession is expected to continue for some time, it is critical to consider, identify, and devise measures for ensuring sustained and long-term satisfaction of mutual needs between parents and children.

B. Children’s marriage and support for married children

In Korea, finding a suitable place to live, whether on one’s own or with the help of parents, is often regarded the first and foremost requirement for getting married. In other countries, grownups can readily find homes on a rental basis insofar as they have regular sources of income. In Korea, on the contrary,
people much prefer either buying homes or signing two-year charter leases, known as *jeonse*, which require sizable security deposits. After finding their first full-time jobs, it can take young Koreans well over 10 years to save enough money to buy their own homes. Therefore, young Koreans whose parents are incapable of helping finance homes for them and their spouses upon marriage face a significant setback that young people with capable and well-off parents do not. The socioeconomic impact of this difference in starting position in life goes on to widen the socioeconomic gap among classes as people age, making it nearly impossible for people without well-off parents to rise to a higher class. For this reason, middle-class parents in Korea consider it their chief duty to ensure the grounds for the upward mobility of their children upon their children’s marriage. It is a known fact that marriage serves as a transaction through which one’s social class is determined for the rest of one’s life. Therefore, middle-class parents in Korea take on incredible burdens, such as financing new homes for their children using their own retirement savings, in order to ensure that their children are able to marry well.

This practice, however, leaves the majority of middle-class parents with the prospect of a precarious and vulnerable post-retirement life. We therefore need a new wedding and marriage culture that minimizes the burdens placed on parents and is devoid of lavish celebrations, burdensome cash gifts ex-
pected of guests, and expensive furniture and gifts for parents-in-law that sons or daughters-in-law are supposed to provide in exchange for their new homes. This, of course, requires a paradigm shift between young people and their parents, but also demands that societal efforts be made toward promoting and accepting alternative weddings. As more and more young people today attempt “small weddings,” such a new culture will eventually emerge.

Importantly, policy support is needed to enable young newlyweds to secure their homes without depending on their parents. The Korean government has already begun to provide special jeonse loans as well as public and private housing for newlyweds. As the interest rate continues to plummet, the Korean housing market is shifting its center from jeonse leases to semi-jeonse rents. Such semi-jeonse rents still differ markedly from the usual type of rental housing in other countries, where people need to pay security deposits of only one or two months rents to start living in rented homes. Yet it signals a positive sign toward the establishment of monthly rents as the norm on the Korean housing market in the future. In the long term, policymakers should establish a monthly rent model akin to those in other countries so that young people with jobs can freely choose homes in line with their monthly income level. According to the National Fertility & Family Health and Welfare Survey, as we have seen, the majority of parents expect to sup-
port their children until they graduate from university, find jobs, or get married (Table 2-2). In reality, however, parents continue to support their grownup children well after their wedding day. The telephone interviews conducted for this study confirm that regular economic support for married children imposes significant financial burdens on parents and their household income (Figures 3-9 and 3-10). Parents helping their married children finance their homes or businesses by using their retirement savings or taking out new loans are taking risks that could devastate their post-retirement savings and plans.

Extended economic support for grownup children is the biggest threat to the economic stability of parents in old age. Many middle-class baby boomers in Korea today are considering taking out instant pension or reverse mortgage loans as a source of income security for their post-retirement life and their desire to help their children. Society as a whole, however, needs to adopt the perspective that supporting grownups should not be solely a family matter and find measures to support young people’s employment, business, and housing security.
2. Outlook for support for elderly parents

A. Families no longer the parties with primary responsibility for caring for the elderly

1) Erosion of the patriarchal family support

Traditionally in Korea, family ties were nearly unbreakable, in large part due to the moral compulsion of the patriarch’s authority and the pressure of social norms. The patriarchal family head registration system, however, was abolished in 2005 and replaced with a new status registration system. The new system records all changes in individuals’ status in family relation registries, including changes related to individuals’ parents, children, and spouses. Women in Korea today retain their birth parents on these family registries and not their parents-in-law. This change, however, will serve to accelerate the collapse of the patriarchal system of family support, in which daughters-in-law were expected to care for their parents-in-law.

As Koreans bear fewer children and the mobility of occupations increases, first sons and their wives are no longer the ones solely responsible for caring for their parents: today, children of both genders take on the duty of supporting their elderly parents (Ochiai, 2004). In cases where the parents of both
the husband and wife require support, middle-aged couples no longer limit their available resources and support to caring for the husband’s parents only.

Few newlywed wives today start their married lives in the same homes as their parents-in-law. Newlyweds, if anything, prefer to have their own homes, located near either their workplaces or the wife’s birth family. In addition, the number of couples living with the wife’s parents is growing, mostly due to practical reasons, such as the assistance with routine daily activities and childcare that the wife’s parents are able to provide. At any rate, the strong patriarchal family order that has reigned supreme since the mid-Joseon period is quickly and irreparably eroding today. Some suggest that young married couples today still exchange economic support and opinions on important matters with the husbands’ families, while also exchanging routine and emotional support with the wives’ families (Lee, Y., 2008). This may distinguish the bilateral tendency that is emerging in Korea from those of Western societies, and suggests the persistent influence of the patriarchal social order. Nevertheless, the closeness of young married couples to their parents on either side can most certainly be measured by the distance between their homes and the homes of their parents and the frequency with which they contact their parents. There is a clear tendency toward favoring the wives’ parents as providers of childcare over the husbands’ parents,
with children growing up meeting their relatives on their mothers’ side more often than their relatives on their fathers’ side (NYPI, 2011). These trends will undoubtedly accelerate the collapse of the patriarchal family order in Korea. Lee (2011) also predicts that, as elderly parents enjoy far more comfort and experience fewer conflicts when receiving help from their daughters than from their daughters-in-law, parents will depend increasingly more on their daughters and sons-in-law than on their sons and daughters-in-law.

There is no longer the absolute moral and social pressure demanding that children must live with and care for their elderly parents who are physically or mentally unfit to live on their own. As more and more married women continue to work, they are simply unable to serve as primary caregivers in such instances. The growing economic independence of women has thus contributed to the weakening of the family patriarchy. Moreover, as divorce and re-marriage rates continue to rise, the number of parents grownup children will have to support will increase, diluting any sense of filial duty the children may feel, and the likelihood of conflicts among step- and half-siblings will grow as well, reducing the amounts and quality of support available for elderly parents in children’s homes in the long term.
2) Absence of primary caregivers

The amended Family Act of 1990 officially repealed the primogeniture provision, which required that first sons inherit 50 percent more of the family wealth than any of the other siblings. Instead, the amended law officially guarantees the rights of all siblings to equal shares of the family wealth. While the dying may determine the amounts of family wealth their children are to receive via a notarized will, each inheritor may still appeal the will after the bequeathor’s death and thereby secure up to half of the legally guaranteed share of the inheritance. The law protects the equal rights of all people, irrespective of birth order or sex; however, it does recognize that children who have supported their elderly parents are entitled to a greater share of the inheritance. Whether one is entitled to a greater share for that reason over one’s siblings, however, is to be determined either by the siblings’ consent or through litigation.

The introduction of the equal shares system has opened the door to interpreting which of the children bears the greatest responsibility for caring for their elderly parents, a question to which the definite answer used to be first sons and their wives. This, in turn, has led to a growing absence of primary caregivers for elderly parents in families. First sons, no longer entitled to a greater share of the inheritance, now refuse to bear
the responsibility of caring for their elderly parents, at least not exclusively. Other siblings, however, may be tempted to pressure first sons into taking up the burden in line with the past custom, and yet still demand equal shares of the inheritance under law. The disparity between law and custom in this case has thus led to escalations of conflicts among siblings over caring for their elderly parents and also amplified the sense of insecurity the elderly feel about their prospects in old age (Lee, Y., 2008).

The rights and duties of primogeniture in Korea originate from the neo-Confucian school of thought that went on to become the governing ideology of the Joseon period. In the Goryeo Kingdom, which preceded Joseon, there was no discrimination among children of different birth orders or sexes regarding their shares of family inheritance or responsibility for caring for their parents and performing ancestral vener-ation rituals (Lee, Y., 2010). Nevertheless, in both Goryeo and Joseon, the children who did the most for their parents were naturally able to claim the greatest shares of family wealth. This is not the case in Korea today. Whether this law-custom disparity is a characteristic of a transition period or will develop into a new model of social practice remains to be seen and decided.

Due to the legal and normative pressure on first sons and their wives to become primary caregivers for their parents, children today are not free of the responsibility of caring for
their parents, and it is difficult for parents to entrust their fate to any of their children. At present, the long-term result of this situation is unclear: either the declining birth rate will lead to the establishment of a much smaller family size as the norm, with only one child to support the parents, or caring for the elderly will no longer be a matter of family support, but of state policy.

B. Reality of care for the elderly

1) Economic support

For the reasons outlined so far, care for the elderly is increasingly moving beyond the bounds of the family and driving change in the family dynamics. The telephone interviews reveal that 82.5 percent of respondents share the cost and burden of caring for their elderly parents with their siblings, and 38.9 percent share the cost and burden with their parents themselves. First sons, in other words, are no longer exclusive or primary caregivers.
In addition, the cost of caring for elderly parents accounts for significantly greater portions of the household income of respondents in their 50s and 60s, whose parents are quite old, than of respondents in other age groups. Accordingly, those in their 50s and 60s felt most burdened by caring for their parents (Figure 3-27). Yet, in general, the respondents spent far more of their household income on supporting grownup children, yet reported feeling less burdened by that than they do by supporting their elderly parents. In other words, supporting elderly parents ranks below supporting grownup children in terms of priority. As respondents in their 50s and 60s retire and require support from others, more of them will need to find and secure means of supporting themselves than people in their parents’ generation did. There is thus a societal transition underway into an age of self-support, even for those in old age.

Old-age pension insurance, National Pension, reverse mortgage, and instant pension insurance are popular financial
buzzwords in Korea today. However, not all classes of the elderly are able to benefit from these instruments, nor are the benefits provided by these instruments sufficient for maintaining a decent quality of life. The unpreparedness of baby boomers for old-age security is a major social issue in Korea today.

The telephone interviews show that only 3.2 percent of respondents received support from the state for caring for their elderly parents. By contrast, almost three-fourths (74.1 percent) answered that policy support is needed most urgently with respect to the cost of caring for the elderly (33.6 percent for subsidies, 24.6 percent for increasing jobs for seniors, and 15.9 percent for subsidization of the cost of elderly living facilities; Figure 3-29). These responses suggest that the policy financial support currently available for caring for elderly parents is far too small and distributed too selectively in comparison to actual demand. Families may still serve as primary caregivers of the elderly, but they require far greater social and policy support with respect to caring for the elderly than for other members. The Korean government thus has a significant public role to play in this regard.

Once it becomes necessary to support baby boomers, the largest age cohort in Korea, using tax revenue levied from the labor of the younger generations, the intergenerational conflict will reach a new height across Korean society. The younger generations will likely attempt to reduce their current levels of
spending, including investment in the future of their children, in preparation for old age. Savings, however, will not be a sufficient means of guaranteeing old-age comfort amid the continued economic recession and low growth.

Korean society today faces a major dilemma between increasing economic support for the elderly and raising taxes to a level sufficient to provide such support. As this dilemma will likely persist for years to come, it would be more reasonable for policymakers to concentrate state support on certain types of the elderly and elderly support.

2) Instrumental support

The range of services available for seniors in recuperation, such as care workers visiting homes and adult day care centers, continues to expand, along with the number of available nursing homes. Aside from financial support, the respondents to the telephone interview also pointed to the diversification of living arrangements for the elderly (10.2 percent) and increasing opportunities for vacations (11.7 percent) as forms of policy support that were required (Figure 3-29). When asked how they would like to be cared for in old age, 34.1 percent of respondents chose public nursing homes run by the state, and 8.4 percent chose private nursing homes. By contrast, only 16.9 percent said they wanted to live with their spouses, and 24.5
percent expected to live with their children. These answers reflect the decreasing expectations of receiving care from immediate family members and the shrinking range of choices rather than individual preferences for facility care.

[Figure 4-2] Opinions about How To Be Cared for in Old Age

(Unit: percentage)

Source: Survey on the Perception and Current Status of Support for Elderly Parents, based on telephone interviews conducted for this study.

While families should certainly be allowed to choose living facilities that they can afford, the central and local governments should also increase the availability of facilities and services so that the elderly of all economic classes are able to receive the care they need. In other words, the types of quality private facilities from which families can choose should be diversified, while the state guarantees an adequate level of care for all families irrespective of their affluence. This is necessary in order to realize equality in public benefits while also respecting families’ freedom of choice. It is not far-fetched to predict that the market and the state will eventually replace
families as the parties primarily responsible for the care of the elderly, which is why it is necessary to both increase and improve the public services available. The growth and specialization of senior care industries will likely ensue.

3) Emotional support

While economic and instrumental support for the elderly are increasingly moving beyond the bounds of family to become matters of public responsibility, emotional support still remains an important function of the family. The telephone interviews show that 65.4 percent of respondents who did not live with their parents called their parents at least once a week. A third of them even called their parents on a daily basis. Overall, 88 percent of respondents called their parents at least once or twice a month (Table 3-16). Whether out of a sense of duty or affection, adult children in Korea continue to maintain close contact with their elderly parents.

It is well known worldwide that seniors who receive sufficient emotional support are happier and healthier than those who do not. Emotional support is the form of support that seniors require most, and for which they will likely continue to depend on their families and children. The quality of emotional support seniors receive, however, will inevitably differ depending on the strength of their relationships with their children.
Today, women are more likely than men to provide emotional support for their parents. Parents may connect and build relationships with their daughters differently than they do with their sons. At any rate, the focal point of elderly support in families is moving decisively toward women.

According to a survey conducted by KIHASA in 2014, however, 23.4 percent of respondents reported conflicts with their own parents, while another 28.2 percent reported conflicts with their spouses’ parents over matters of elderly support, suggesting that the emotional relations between grownup children and their elderly parents are less than perfect (Kim, Y. et al., 2014). Emotional support need not come from families only. The volunteers who actively visit and listen to low-income elderly citizens who live by themselves provide a good example of emotional support available outside of family relations. Room-sharing arrangements, a recent topic of public debate, encourage home-owning seniors to lease spare rooms at affordable rates to young people, creating an intergenerational living environment that leads to greater mutual support. Room sharing is a feasible means through which seniors can satisfy their needs for emotional support, and young people, often struggling financially, are able to satisfy their housing needs. In order for such living arrangements among strangers to work, however, it is important to ensure the status and safety of both sides through legal and institutional means.
3. Implications

The shift of the center of care from families to society and the state is a phenomenon that has been observed not only in Korea, but all around the world. Familyism may still retain a strong influence over people’s behavior and customs in Korea, but it is indisputable that today’s younger generations are increasingly accepting and internalizing individualist values, making it impossible to expect families, exclusively or even primarily, to continue to care for their weaker members. As the social environment makes it impossible for families to seek adequate compensation for their hard work and sacrifice, individuals are placing increasing emphasis on self-protection and economic independence. In particular, fewer women today abandon their careers for the purpose of raising their children; even fewer would abandon their careers to care for the elderly in their families. Future generations will not be as unsparing in investing in the future of their children as their baby-boomer parent generation has been so far.

At present in Korea, parents’ support for their grownup children has almost reached a peak, while grownup children’s support for elderly parents has begun to decline. Sooner or later, however, families will no longer be the sole or main caregivers. Nevertheless, complete emancipation of families from dependency and care will not be possible, let alone ideal; yet the cur-
rent situation and level of burden placed on families in caring for their weaker members are too much to families to bear. It is therefore crucial to find suitable compromises between families and society regarding family support.

Faced with the dilemma of the growing demand for social and public support for care, on the one hand, and the inability to raise the taxes to a level sufficient to provide such care, on the other, policymakers are advised to carefully select and focus the limited resources of the state. First and foremost, parents should stop supporting their grownup children. Grownup children should be encouraged to earn their own living and secure their own homes by earning sufficient income through their own labor. Care for the elderly, in the meantime, has become a peripheral issue of family care and therefore urgently requires the greatest amount of support from society. Government authorities need to increase their efforts to find recipients in need and provide support of adequate quality and in sufficient quantities. The government should also encourage the development of diverse care products on the market while expanding and strengthening the public social security system.

Providing equal social benefits for all is neither feasible nor ideal for Korean society today. This is not only because of the scarcity of human, financial, and material resources, but also because of the residual tradition of familyism and the freedom of individuals and families to seek and obtain the services they
can afford. Families will still continue to pay, alongside the state, for at least part of the cost of supporting their family members. In the meantime, it is in the provision of emotional support where families will be expected to play the leading role. While the level of economic support families must provide will vary from class to class, supporting grownup children will be regarded more as a family matter, while care for the elderly will increasingly become a social responsibility. Instrumental support may still remain predominantly a matter of family affairs. Due to the shortage of financial and human resources in families, however, families have already begun outsourcing the provision of instrumental support for their elderly to outside service agencies, and the social perception thereof is changing accordingly. The number of care workers, adult day care centers, and nursing homes for the elderly is rising rapidly, and the middle-aged are increasingly deciding to spend their old age in nursing homes. Therefore, the market and infrastructure will continue to expand in proportion to the growing power and willingness to purchase elderly care services in the future.
Conclusion and policy implications

1. Conclusion
2. Policy implications
1. Conclusion

Multiple and complex factors are accelerating changes in family structure and functions. Korea’s rapid industrialization and transition to a post-industrial society are contributing to the growing individualism and aging of the population, thereby increasing the elderly population; these factors are also increasing the tendency to postpone marriage, the divorce rate, and the decline in the birth rate. These external factors, in turn, conspire with multiple internal factors, such as the weakening of family values, smaller family size, aging and womanization of household heads, and increase in the number of dual-income married couples working full time, to make it impossible for families to maintain the conventional structure of family dependency.

Until recently, the governing ideal in Korea was that families should be the primary and even exclusive providers of care for their members (Kim, S., 1990). In the past, there were few seniors in Korean society to begin with; and seniors were assigned greater social respect and prestige than people of other age groups, while the doctrine of filial piety made families’ ut-
most care and respect for their elderly members mandatory. In contemporary society, however, the elderly no longer possess such significant roles or influence. Families are growing increasingly smaller, and women’s participation in the economy continues to grow, inviting a change in the perception of caring for elderly parents. The rapid growth of the elderly population and the changing social values are exerting increasing pressure on the state to increase support for the elderly. As the elderly care index—a ratio of the economically active population to the non-active population—indicates, the social cost of family dependency and care continues to rise.

Yet the level of support the Korean state provides for families lags far behind those of Western welfare states, and is nowhere near sufficient to resolve the escalating conflict between working women and the pressure to care for the elderly members of their families. Supporting elderly parents is no longer a social norm, but a matter of transaction, and is likely to have a negative impact on family relations as well. A sustainable arrangement of care for the elderly that is responsive to the diversification and growth of the need for care services requires effective partnerships among families, local communities, society at large, and the state.
2. Policy implications

Sustainable family care is a policy issue that requires differentiated approaches tailored to different types of recipients and required services.

Policy support for grownup children should be geared toward minimizing the conflict of parents who have to support themselves and their grownup children at the same time. Public assistance will also be needed to help grownup children get married and find jobs, so as to shorten the length of time during which they are economically dependent on their parents. Parents, nonetheless, may continue to provide non-economic (emotional and instrumental) forms of support for their grownup children. Policy measures that aim to reduce inequality in the younger generation by increasing jobs could help young people become economically independent earlier; policy support catering to different stages or life events in young people’s lives and housing support should be considered as well. Non-economic support could also be provided as a policy matter, such as the dual system linking schools and labor markets that is being practiced in a number of other countries. Local communities should also increase their emotional and psychological support in order to promote greater democracy and independence in the relationships between parents and their grownup children.
As the erosion of traditional family values and growing intergenerational conflict will likely make care for the elderly a major social issue, the socialization of care for the elderly should continue. While public provisions of instrumental support for the elderly should be the principle, families should also be allowed to diversify the services they seek and receive according to their means. In order for families to continue providing emotional support, intergenerational rapport and solidarity is crucial. Public provisions of economic support should involve expanding the scope of the universal minimum income guarantee system and improving the old-age preparation programs. Furthermore, in order to enhance families’ ability to provide emotional support and care for their elderly members, opportunities for family vacations should be increased, along with the establishment of a more rational and balanced culture of supporting elderly parents.
References


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