

Perceived Discrimination against People with Disabilities and Its Policy Implications

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Introduction

Following the adoption in 2006 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Korea, as a signatory to the pact, has legislated Anti-Discrimination and Remedies for Persons with Disabilities Act in 2007 and more recently, in 2015, made a substantial amendment to its Act on Welfare of Persons with Disabilities. Despite these and other efforts, however, discrimination against disability persists and tales thereof have been a ceaseless staple of media coverage in Korea. Thus, this study intends to look at changes over the past decade in discrimination against disabilities and draw policy implications.

Changes in the incidence of perceived discrimination against disability

In 2014, an estimated 37.8 percent of people with disabilities reported having experienced discrimination, a drop from 39.9 percent in 2011 but still high enough to be a cause for social concern. Not only was the first-hand experience of being discriminated against worryingly common among the disabled; a whopping 72.6 percent of those with disabilities viewed that discrimination against disability was widespread throughout society. By contrast, as little as 8.3 percent of Koreans with disabilities said they were aware of the Anti-Discrimination Act, which is a slight increase from 7.8 percent in 2011 but still a sign pointing to the need for education and awareness programs.

The incidence of perceived discrimination against people with disabilities has declined in some areas during the 10-year period. For example, the rate of perceived discrimination in marriage decisions dropped from 29.6 percent in 2005 to 16.4 percent in 2014; the rate of perceived discrimination in hiring process declined as well, from 39.1 percent in 2005 to 35.8 percent in 2014.

However, there occurred little, if any, change for the better over the 10-year period in most of the other areas, with certain of them seeing even higher incidence of perceived discrimination in 2014 than in 2005. Over the years, an increasing proportion of primary and middle school students with disabilities were found to have felt discriminated against in admission and transfer and by their peers. Also, the incidence of discrimination against people with disabilities in insurance contracts remained concerningly high at 45.4 percent in 2014.

<Table 1> Perceived discrimination on grounds of disability, for 2005, 2011, and 2014

		2005	2011	2014
Discrimination in admission and transfer	In kindergarten	23.0	30.5	27.1
	In primary school	33.8	34.2	38.8
	In middle school	27.0	29.8	31.6
	In high school	21.5	29.3	25.1
	In college and university	11.2	16.3	12.5
Discrimination at school	By teachers	17.5	21.4	18.7
	By peers	46.2	49.2	47.1
	By parents of peers	12.3	15.1	13.7
Discrimination at work	In hiring decisions	39.1	34.0	35.8
	In earnings	23.7	20.7	23.9
	In peer relationship	18.9	16.9	20.0
	In promotion	16.5	14.2	13.3
Community and social life	When obtaining driver's license	14.3	14.3	10.2
	Purchasing an insurance policy	39.8	53.7	45.4
	When using medical/health facilities	4.2	3.7	4.6
	When using IT services	1.1	2.0	1.9
	When using community social facilities	5.4	7.8	7.3
Marriage		29.6	26.5	16.4

Source: *Survey of the Living Conditions of Disabled People* for 2005, 2011 and 2014, Ministry of Health and Welfare & Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs

Incidence of perceived discrimination, by disability type

Discrimination against disability in school environments was found to be most often perceived in primary school admissions and transfers and more often by students with mental disabilities than by students with physical disabilities. Students with developmental disabilities as a group showed the highest incidence of perceived discrimination. The survey for 2014 found that more than half (51.7 percent) of primary school students with developmental disabilities have been discriminated against. Students with disabilities—irrespective of the type of disability—were discriminated against most often, in descending order, by peers, teachers, and parents of peers. As for students with developmental disabilities, as much as 63.6 percent felt discriminated against by their peers, an indication that they are at risk of school bullying and violence.

<Table 2> Perceived discrimination against disability at school (2014), in %

		Physical disability		Mental disability		All
		Disability of external bodily functions	Disability of internal organs	Disability caused by psychological development disorder	Disability caused by mental illness	
In admission and transfer	Kindergarten	17.8	14.3	37.2	20.2	27.1
	Primary school	32.9	27.6	51.7	38.3	38.8
	Middle school	24.8	16.2	46.6	42.1	31.6
	High school	18.0	10.3	41.0	40.5	25.1
In school environment	Teachers	12.7	15.3	31.1	30.5	18.7
	School peers	39.7	33.7	63.6	58.2	47.1
	Parents of peers	9.4	10.3	24.9	10.2	13.7

Source: *Survey of the Living Conditions of Disabled People* for 2014, Ministry of Health and Welfare & Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs

Koreans with disabilities were found to experience discrimination more often in hiring process than in income (earnings) and workplace peer relationships. The incidence of

perceived discrimination was higher in people with mental disabilities than those with physical disabilities, with some 60 percent of the former reporting having experienced discrimination in hiring or in on-the-job relationships. People with disabilities reported perceived discrimination in insurance contracts, the use of health services, and the use of community facilities (restaurants, cinemas, swimming pools, etc.) Discrimination in insurance contracts, in particular, was found to have been widely experienced by Koreans with any type of disability, with higher incidence found in those with organ-related disabilities or mental disabilities.

<Table 3> Perceived discrimination on grounds of disability at work and in community, in %

		Physical disability		Mental disability		All
		Disability of external bodily functions	Disability of internal organs	Disability caused by psychological development disorder	Disability caused by mental illness	
In workplace	Hiring decisions	33.6	41.0	48.4	69.8	35.8
	Income (earnings)	22.1	23.9	41.4	56.8	23.9
	Workplace peer relationships	18.0	14.2	37.0	64.7	20.0
In community settings	Insurance contract	42.0	61.5	68.8	59.4	45.4
	Use of medical/health services	4.0	3.6	9.4	9.0	4.6
	Use of community social facilities	6.1	4.0	19.1	13.2	7.3

Source: *Survey of the Living Conditions of Disabled People for 2014*, Ministry of Health and Welfare & Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs

Policy implications

Although recent years have seen improvements to some extent in social acceptance of people with disabilities in general, social perception and attitudes toward people with mental disabilities have remained largely unchanged over the years, pointing to a need for taking approaches which focus on this particular group. The ongoing disability awareness programs, centered as they are around disabilities in general or physical disabilities, have been less effective than intended; their focus need to be on promoting public awareness of people with developmental or mental disabilities. In addition, it is essential to provide education programs on disability prevention and human rights advocacy for people with developmental or mental disabilities, who are more likely to be discriminated against. Also, as people with disabilities often experience discrimination while at school, it is important to consider putting in place a permanent monitoring scheme with a view to preventing infringement of their rights to education and to not being discriminated against. In addition, as cases abound of those with disabilities being discriminated against in insurance contracts, particular attention should be paid to prohibit such unfair practices.