

<PAA Abstract>

Who Should Be Responsible for the Latter-Life Security of Mid-Aged Koreans?

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Abstract

This study will examine the attitudes of mid-aged Koreans toward their own latter life security, focusing on the impacts of values on supporting their elderly parents and the level of social resources. In Korea, traditional filial duty has been considered as one of the most important factors in determining patterns of intergenerational support. However, with the recent changes in the traditional norms and values as well as the population structures in Korea, the importance of filial duty with respect to intergenerational support has considerably withered. Rather, it is suspected that the level of social resources including economic ability and educational attainments would play more important roles in determining the attitudes toward latter life security among mid-aged Koreans. We employ the Survey on Family Support and Plans for Latter Life Security Among Mid-Aged Koreans conducted in 1999 as a main source of information.

Introduction

In the past fifty years, South Korea (Korea, hereafter) has experienced rapid transition of population structure. One of the most notable changes in its population structure is the incredible growth of elderly population. Korea became 'aging society', where the proportion of elderly population aged 65 plus is over 7%, in 2000. According to the projection by the Korea National Statistical Office (2001), Korea will enter the era of 'aged society', where at least 14% of its population is 65 years old or more, in about 20 years. Compared to Western countries where the structural changes of population have taken place over generations, the pace of aging in Korea is incredibly fast. One of the most important social implications of the aging population, in general, is to prepare social welfare systems for the increasing elderly populations. Unfortunately Korea has not implemented social security systems or social support programs for the elderly populations yet, still shuffling off its responsibility to individual families.

Recently it has been reported that the support for elderly members by individual families has also noticeably weakened. With the advent of a new trend toward nuclear families, the traditional value of filial piety and duties, as social and cultural regulation, have been remarkably withered, and the value of individualism has substituted the value of familism in today's Korean society (Kwon and Park, 1995; Kim et al., 2000). Therefore, it is an important task to examine the attitudes of mid-aged adults on their own old-age security in Korea, because this generation has been known to be unique in light of their practice and belief on providing support for elderly generations. This means although they support their old parents materially and/or emotionally, they hardly expect to receive such supports from their children in their own old age. In other words, they are located in the marginal position in contemporary Korean society. Further, it is also interesting to compare the findings from Korea with the experiences of Western societies

that have already entered the era of "aging" or "aged" society. Increased awareness of the social problems associated with the increasing number of elderly populations might help Koreans develop long-term solutions for this population such as a public welfare system.

In general, exchange theory has been employed to explain the intergenerational flow of support, and they are mostly based on Western society (see Bengtson et al., 1997 for more information). However, it may not be useful to utilize the same theoretical perspectives based on exchange theory in analyzing the patterns of intergenerational support in Korea, especially for mid-aged adults, because to support their elderly parents is not optional that they can choose. Rather it is considered as a duty in Korean society to provide material and emotional help and support to their parents due to the strong social norm of filial piety rooted on their tradition and to the lower level of social welfare systems. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the attitude on the intergenerational support among the mid-aged Korean adults (aged from 40 to 59), with respect to their attitudes regarding their provision of support to their parents and future reception of support from their children.

Intergenerational Relationship

Perspectives of social exchange theory regarding the relationship between old parents and their adult children in Western society emphasize the exchange-relationship based on the concepts of support and rewards between generations. Recently, the exchange theory has been frequently utilized in the analyses of the social and economic exchange between generations, of an exchange structure of support and receiving, and of the exchange methods in various situations (Bengtson et al., 1997). Cox and Rank (1992) examine which is predominating motive of intergenerational transfer between altruism and exchange, investigating National Survey of Family and Households data. They conclude that intergenerational transfers are part of an

exchange and less consistent with the altruism. Using Data from National Survey of Family and Households, Hogan, Eggebeen and Clogg (1993) report that the types of giving and receiving supports are characterized by a systemic latent structure of intergenerational. This study explains that elderly parents and adult children share dyadic relationships, while the overall patterns of intergenerational support vary depending on ethnicity, gender and the needs and resources of each generation.

From the perspective of social exchange theory, the filial duty or responsibility to support elderly parents might be considered as a behavior of exchange between two generations, because the elderly parents could consider children's provision of material or emotional support as reward of their life-long nurture and care. However, under the unique settings of Korean society and its tradition, filial duty cannot be simply understood as a sign of rewards. Unlike Western society, where the elderly population generally has much financial abilities and material sources, the elderly persons in Korea are suffering from the poor personal economic situations and the lack of social welfare systems (Eun, 2002). This suggests that the elderly in Korea usually do not have material resources that they can provide to their mid-aged children. To the mid-aged children, there is largely nothing that they can expect from their elderly parents. Despite this, mid-aged children tend to support and care their elderly parents in Korea due to the social norm of filial duty unconsciously imposed on their value system.

The Change of Values on the Filial Duty in Korea

The filial duty to parents is the core of the behavioral code of Confucianism. The traditional idea of filial duty in Korean, which is the absolute support responsibility for elderly parents, is based on the authoritarian rank structure in a family. In spite of the weakening effect of such traditional norms, the idea of filial duty is one of the most important underlying social

norms even in today's Korea (Chang, 1994). Lee and Kim (2002) address that intergenerational support relationship in Korea cannot be successfully explained by the main ideas of exchange theory perspective. They argue that social norm for elderly parents support has maintained the supporting system for the aged in Korea.

In Asian countries where Confucian culture has taken an important part vis-à-vis the family relationship, the change of traditional pattern of intergenerational support relationship is reported. Thornton, Chang and Sun (1984) report, although not specifically on Korean society, that social changes, combined with rapid economic growth and the spread of formal education and employment of the youth have made children's behavior in intergenerational relationship being more independent. Analyzing the changes of living arrangements in Japan, Morioka (1996) explains weakening tendency of co-residence between old parents and married children. In cases of studies in Korea, examining population and housing censuses of Korea in the past 20 years, Park (2002) concludes that, despite intergenerational co-residence has been regarded as normative, actual practice of it has become more situational. The author finds that the proportion of single-person household among the elderly population in Korea has surprisingly increased in the past decade. It has increased from 8.9% in 1990 to 16.8% in 2000 (Park, 2002). This change of living arrangements is a good indicator of declining family support for the elderly parents in contemporary Korean society (Kim, 2001a). In another study, Eun (2001) finds that elderly Koreans tend to consider supporting elderly parents' old-age security being a primary responsibility of their first sons. On the contrary, younger generations included in the study have a tendency to consider it as a burden.

Thus, there has been a substantial modification in the social value and norm of supporting elderly populations in contemporary Korean society. Therefore, this study particularly focuses

on the mid-aged Koreans and their attitudes on their own latter life security, with respect to their attitudes and practices of supporting their elderly parents.

Moreover, we attempt to investigate social risk factors that are associated with the values and attitudes of mid-aged Koreans regarding their own latter life security. Kim (2001b) finds that among mid-aged Koreans, young in age, residence in urban areas, and the higher level of socioeconomic status are more likely to be associated with a stronger tendency of preparing their own latter life security. This suggests that mid-aged Koreans who have enough social resources to prepare their own latter life security may hold non-traditional attitudes toward responsibility of their old age. In other words, social resources including economic ability have become more important factors that affect attitudes toward latter life security among today's mid-aged Koreans, rather than the traditional value of filial duty.

Methods

Data

The Survey on Family Support and Plans for Latter Life Security Among the Mid-Aged Koreans is employed as a source of data. This survey, conducted in 1999, examines the intergenerational relationship of the mid-aged (40-59 years old) husband and wives living in Korea. This data set includes 1,200 nationally representative samples constructed by the multi-stage area sampling strategy. Since this current study targets only on the middle-aged whose parents are alive at the time of survey, a subset of 668 respondents are utilized here. This data was used for Kim et al.'s study (2000) and Lee & Kim's study (2002).

Measurement

Dependent variable

Since our study is about how the mid-aged Koreans view their own old-age security, the dependent variable of this study is the attitude toward one's own old-age security. In the survey employed in this study, there is a question on the latter life support and security. The actual question is "Whom do you think the responsibility of your own latter life security is on?" There are seven possible categories of answer that respondents can choose from. We combined those seven possible responses into two categories that represent a favorable attitude toward traditional values as opposed to an attitude toward non-traditional values, respectively. Traditional values include responses for 'the first son', 'any sons', 'one of any children', or 'all children' to the question. Non-traditional values include responses for 'self', 'nation', or 'social welfare facilities/systems.'

Independent variable

One of our main interests regarding the purposes of this paper is to uncover the effect of the attitude toward providing material support to their elderly parents among mid-aged Koreans. In the survey, there is a question on the material support for elderly parents: "What is your opinion on the material support from mid-aged children to their elderly parents?" Out of four possible answers, we combined two answers together to represent a traditional value on the material support for parents ("children should provide material support to their elderly parents," and "children should support their elderly parents as much as possible"). Rest two answers are combined together to represent non-traditional value on supporting elderly parents ("depending situations, it is fine not to provide material support to elderly parents," and "children do not need to support their elderly parents.")

Other independent variables that will be included in the analyses are the patterns of intergenerational relationship with respondents' parents, demographic, and SES characteristics of

respondents. For the intergenerational relationship, we consider three patterns: emotional support, instrumental support, and financial support, adopting Mutran and Reitzes (1984).

(Detailed discussion on independent variables of this study will be added.)

Descriptive Table is attached

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* denotes an English translation of the original Korean title.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Social Risk Factors by the Attitudes toward One's Own Latter Life Security among Mid-Aged Koreans, 1999.

		Attitude toward the One's Latter Life Security		Total
		Traditional (%)	Non-traditional (%)	
Attitude toward Elderly Parents Support	Traditional	57 (10.3)	499 (89.7)	556
	Non-traditional	20 (17.9)	92 (82.1)	112
Emotional Support	Child-Leading	16 (9.8)	148 (90.2)	164
	Mutual	22 (9.3)	214 (90.7)	236
	Parents-Leading	4 (12.5)	28 (87.5)	32
	Non-exchanging	35 (14.8)	201 (85.2)	236
Instrumental Support	Child-Leading	16 (8.7)	167 (91.3)	183
	Mutual	17 (18.5)	75 (81.5)	92
	Parents-Leading	3 (8.6)	32 (91.4)	35
	Non-exchanging	41 (11.5)	317 (88.5)	358
Financial Support	Child-Leading	39 (17.9)	324 (89.3)	363
	Mutual	11 (17.9)	71 (86.6)	82
	Parents-Leading	3 (17.9)	49 (94.2)	52
	Non-exchanging	27 (17.9)	147 (86.0)	171
SEX	Male	33 (9.3)	321 (90.7)	354
	Female	44 (14.0)	270 (86.0)	314
Area	Urban	48 (9.2)	473 (90.8)	521
	Rural	29 (19.7)	118 (80.3)	147
Son Order	First	51 (12.8)	294 (85.2)	345
	Else	26 (8.0)	297 (92.0)	323
Age	Mean	49.79	47.25	
# of Children	Mean	2.6	2.33	
Education	Low	15 (25.4)	44 (74.6)	59
	Middle	19 (17.1)	92 (82.9)	111
	High	33 (8.9)	459 (91.1)	498
Income	1	13 (23.6)	42 (76.4)	55
	2	18 (14.0)	111 (86.0)	129
	3	21 (13.0)	140 (87.0)	161
	4	11 (7.9)	129 (92.1)	140
	5	14 (7.7)	169 (92.3)	183
House	Own	64 (11.4)	496 (88.6)	560
	Rental	13 (12.0)	95 (88.0)	108
Total		77 (11.5)	591 (88.5)	668

Source: Survey on Family Support and Plans for Latter Life Security Among Mid-Aged Koreans