

Policy Response to Low Birth and Aging Society in South Korea

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1. Introduction

Some developed countries such as France and Great Britain have got over perennial low birth and population aging while other countries such as South Korea and Japan have undergone deepening low birth and population aging. South Korea had implemented family planning as a population control method between the 1960s and the 1990s, and it has done a great reversal in population policy during the 2000s. Together with other socio-economic factors such as urbanization and women's economic and social participation, the family planning in South Korea had greatly contributed to low birth and population aging. However, it can be argued that family planning in South Korea did not take the future of Korea after 30 or 40 years down the line.

This presentation briefly looks at the current stage of, problems caused by, and factors contributing to, low birth and population aging in South Korea. And then it reviews the history of family planning in South Korea. Finally, it will suggest some lessons from South Korean case.

2. Current Stage of Low birth and Population aging and their causes

- Since the 1960s total fertility rate in South Korea has steadily declined. Since 1984 TFR has been under 2.00%.
- Percent distribution of population aging (65 years and over) has steadily increased since the 1970s
Ex) it had reached over 7.0% during the early 2000s

3. Problems Caused by Low Birth and Aging

- The rate of labor force participation would diminish.
- National consumption and savings are expected to diminish and the economic growth rate will lower
- Rapidly increasing cost of pensions and health care would lead to huge deficits in the national budget
- Creating a job opportunity would be getting difficult as the number of newly-born babies decreases

4. Factors contributing to low birth and population aging

- Demographic factors such as rising wedding age, decreasing women's childbirth capacity, and so on
- Socio-economic factors such as rising women's education opportunity and economic participation
- Conventional die-hard social-cultural environment, i.e., lack of work-life (family) balance
- Most importantly, family-planning policy between the 1960s and 1990s

5. South Korean Family Planning Policy in Historical Perspective

- 1962 is considered to be the first year of Korean government's introducing family planning. A slogan, "we cannot escape from poverty if you have a baby whenever you want," eloquently reflects it.
- During the 1970s, the slogan of family planning was "to raise two children well regardless of their sex".
- The 1980s saw the continuation of family planning. However, it was strengthened further. The slogan of the 1980s was "Two children are also too many, let's get just one child and raise it well".
- Korean government announced on September 5th, 1994 at UN International Conference on Population & Development that it has given up population control policy.
- In the 2000s, the slogan of population policy had shifted from "to raise two children well regardless of their sex" through "two children are also too many, let's just get one child and raise him/her well" to "Papa, I don't want to be alone. Mom, please have my younger sister or brother".

6. South Korean Government's Policy Responses to Low-birth and Aging Society

- It has actively been involved in reducing the low birth rate and population aging by legislating relevant laws, establishing relevant government organizations and agencies, and financing.
Ex) *Low Birth and Aging Society* (May 2005), *Basic Plan for Low Birth and Aging Society*

7. Concluding Remarks: Lessons from South Korea's experience of low birth and population aging

- Underdeveloped and developing countries facing overpopulation and adopting population control through family planning should be cautious. They should consider their countries' future prospect of population.
- Among other factors, work-and-life balance factor should be emphasized.