

Analysis Of Recent Trends In The Lives Of Older Koreans

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Abstract

Background: The purpose of this study is to conduct a secondary analysis to prepare for future changes in the increase of the elderly population by analyzing and predicting the trends in the lifestyle patterns of Korean elderly people.

Methods: The data used in this study is secondary data provided by Statistics Korea on September 29, 2025. The data used in this study is based on quantified data according to frequency and percentage. The collected data is quantified through comparisons of neighboring countries, age groups, usage frequency, etc., and the terms used in each analysis were adopted exactly as presented in the Statistics Korea data without modification.

Results: The results of this study showed that the relative poverty rate of the elderly in Korea in 2022 was 39.7%, the highest among OECD countries. Looking at the employment status of the elderly aged 65 and over in Korea, they account for approximately 38%, and this figure appears to be increasing every year. The internet usage rate among Korean seniors stood at 76.9% as of 2024, showing an increasing trend every year; while the life satisfaction rate dropped from 37.0% for those aged 65–69 to 33.8% for those aged 80 or older. The participation rate in lifelong education stood at 24.8% as of 2024, showing a steady increase since 2022.

Conclusion: It is considered necessary to meet the expectations of more elderly people and improve their quality of life. Therefore, it is considered necessary for the government to comprehensively analyze the quality of life that the elderly actually need and to establish customized welfare improvements and systems accordingly.

Keywords: Trends, Life satisfaction, Poverty, Korea

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I. Introduction

Recently, Korea has entered a super-aged society where more than 20% of the total population is elderly, and the life of the elderly is showing a completely different pattern from the past [1]. While old age in the past was defined as a period of physical decline and dependence, modern old age is undergoing multidimensional changes due to extended life expectancy and the heterogeneity of the population [2].

In particular, Korean elderly people are a generation that has overcome the pain of difficult economic times and enjoyed high economic achievements. They are striving to break free from the sacrifices of their children of the past, live their own lives, realize their own values, and enjoy the joy of life on their final journey [3].

However, as the times change rapidly and the latest socio-cultural elements are absorbed into our society, we have moved beyond the era of living on mere bread and rice, and the gap between the rich and the poor is continuously widening even among the elderly generation. Elderly poverty in a super-aged society must no longer be approached as a matter of individual lack of preparation, but as a structural social problem. In conjunction with the recently implemented 'community integrated care,' it is necessary to move beyond simply providing cash support and instead implement measures such as converting assets into income through the activation of reverse mortgages, providing robust income security targeting the elderly aged 75 and older, and strengthening access to jobs for the elderly by bridging the digital divide [4].

According to recent statistics, the labor force participation rate of the elderly population aged 65 and older is reaching an all-time high, which is considered to be an economic necessity resulting from the limitations of the income replacement rate of public pensions. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a policy paradigm shift to move beyond simple welfare benefits and secure institutional flexibility, such as extending the retirement age or implementing continuous employment systems, and to redeploy the elderly workforce as a new driving force for national growth by strengthening digital job capabilities [5,6].

According to the latest statistics, the overall level of digital literacy among the elderly averages 70.7%, which is the lowest among the four major information-vulnerable groups [7]. Artificial intelligence technology, which is becoming widespread and increasingly utilized in our society, can cause a digital divide, a new form of social problem, such as inequality and exclusion due to access to information, among information-vulnerable groups [8]. Therefore, we must urgently strengthen digital literacy education for the elderly to structurally prevent digital exclusion from becoming entrenched as socio-economic inequality.

Finally, as interest in education and the average age increase, interest in lifelong education is also

growing day by day. According to a recent survey, the participation rate of the elderly aged 65 and older in lifelong learning has improved compared to the past, but it shows a diversifying characteristic of self-worth through the improvement of quality of life [9]. In particular, the New Senior generation, centered on the Baby Boomer generation, shows a high demand for digital literacy and professional knowledge based on their high level of education, and it is being proven that such participation in education leads directly to a practical improvement in quality of life, such as the enhancement of self-efficacy and the alleviation of loneliness.

It is predicted that lifestyle trends for Korea's elderly population will change in various ways in the future. The future of old age is expected to shift away from the past, which focused simply on 'care,' and instead become the mainstream of 'Aging in Place,' where individuals maintain an independent life in their own homes using technology, and 'self-directed wellness management' combined with artificial intelligence and wearable devices [10]. In addition, the new generation of seniors, led by the Baby Boomer generation, places high value on 'productive self-realization' such as lifelong education, social contribution, and entrepreneurship beyond leisure consumption, and is leading the formation of inter-generational communities that seek intergenerational integration [11].

Therefore, it is necessary to simultaneously create an environment that alleviates loneliness in old age and maintains social self-esteem by encouraging intergenerational community activities that leverage the high educational attainment of the older generation. Ultimately, preparation for the future of old age must begin with institutional innovation that goes beyond charitable welfare to redefine the elderly as active producers, and with guaranteeing opportunities for social participation by bridging the digital divide. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to policy development that can encourage the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly population and promote the happiness of the elderly by analyzing recent life trends of Korean seniors based on the 2025 statistics on the elderly presented by Statistics Korea. Furthermore, based on this study, this research aims to provide basic data for forming a new culture of old age in which the elderly are self-directed and economic agents.

II. Research Methods

Research Design

This study is a secondary analysis data study designed to prepare for future changes in the increase of the elderly population by analyzing and predicting the trends in the current lifestyles of the elderly in Korea.

Research data

This study was analyzed based on the 2025 statistics on the elderly provided by Statistics Korea. These statistical data are provided annually by Statistics Korea, and the figures included in the press release have been rounded, so the sums or totals of each item may not match. This data was used for analysis based on a total of six categories: population and households, health, income security, social participation and relationships, living environment, and subjective well-being. In this study, five areas of interest (relative poverty rates, employment status, internet usage rate, life satisfaction, and lifelong education participation rate) explored in each category were used in the research results to suit the characteristics of the study. Meanwhile, statistics on the elderly serve as reliable foundational data regarding seniors in Korea, and beyond a mere list of numbers, they are utilized as a core basis for national policy formulation, corporate marketing strategies, and academic research.

Data Collection

The data used in this study was released by Statistics Korea on September 29, 2025. As secondary data provided by the government, its credibility has been proven for use in this research. The researcher used only the released data for this study and did not arbitrarily falsify or modify the figures. In addition, the researcher did not use the research data for any purpose other than this study, and checked whether there was any exposure of the subjects' names or identities in the data, and found no issues. Finally, data was selected and used only in five areas of life trend patterns of Korean elderly people to suit the research situation.

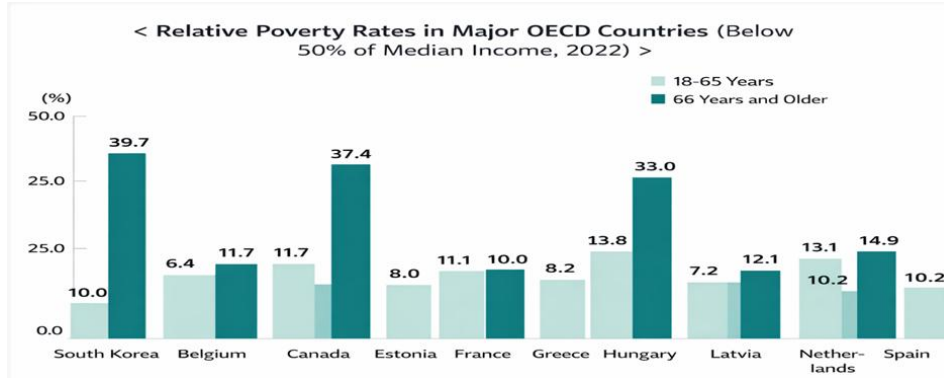
Data Analysis

The data used in this study were primarily based on quantified data derived from frequencies and percentages. Furthermore, the collected data was quantified through comparisons of neighboring countries, age groups, and usage frequencies, and the terms used in each analysis were adopted exactly as presented in the Statistics Korea data without modification. For example, the relative poverty rate was used as is, without any modifications or alterations, based on the OECD September 25 data presented in the statistics on the elderly. In addition, the lifelong education participation rate was based on the Survey on the Status of Individual Lifelong Learning provided by the Korea Educational Development Institute. Finally, the internet usage rate was based on the Survey on the Status of Internet Usage provided by the Ministry of Science and ICT.

III. Results

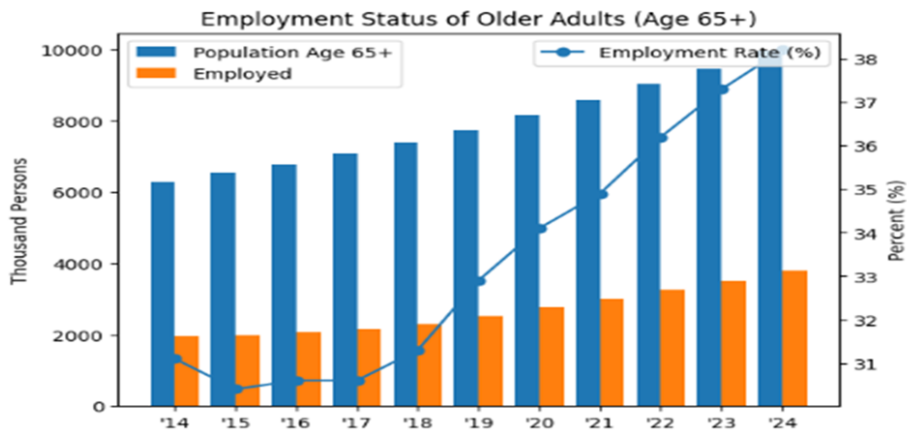
Relative poverty rates of the elderly

The results of this study showed that the relative poverty rate of the elderly in Korea in 2022 was 39.7%, the highest among OECD countries, and was found to be the highest when compared to developed Western nations. It was found that countries with more welfare benefits maintained a rate around the 10% mark.



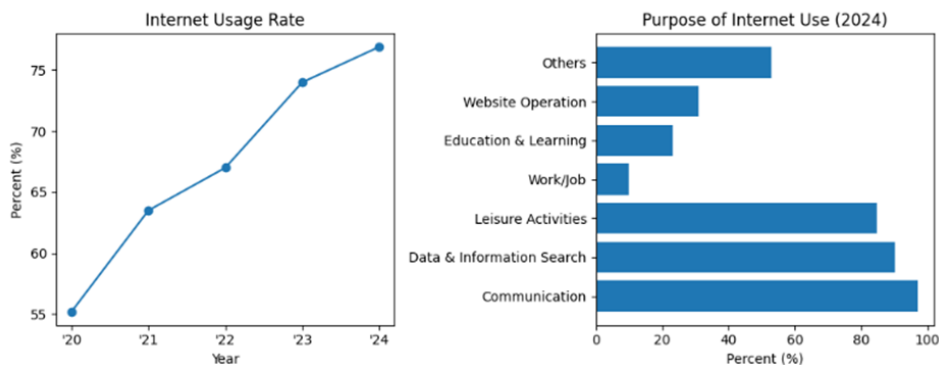
Employment status of seniors aged 65 and older

According to the results of this study, the employment status of the elderly aged 65 and over in Korea accounts for approximately 38%, and this figure is increasing every year. Specifically, based on the trend of annual increase, it can be estimated that as of 2024, a population of approximately 9 to 10 million people is employed and working.



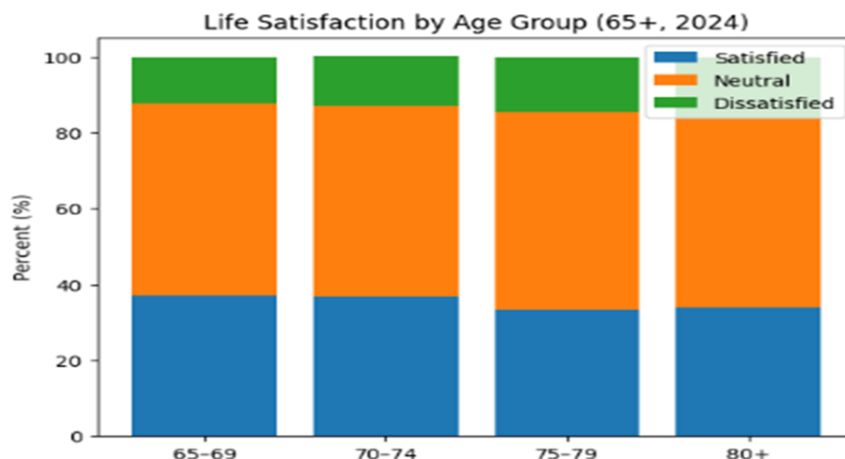
Internet usage rate

The results of this study show that the internet usage rate among Korean seniors is 76.9% as of 2024, showing an increasing trend every year, and specifically, the purposes of internet use were found to be communication and information searching. In light of this trend, it is projected that internet usage among seniors will continue to increase in the future.



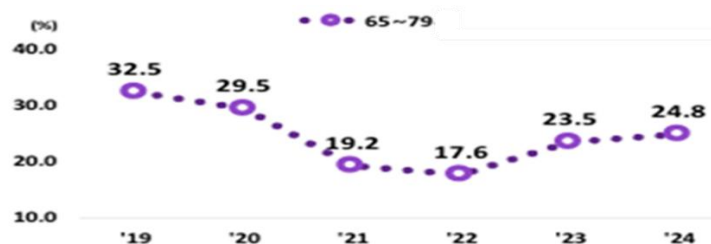
Life satisfaction

The results of this study showed that the life satisfaction of Korean elderly people was 12.3% for those aged 65–69, 13.1% for those aged 70–74, 14.7% for those aged 75–79, and 16.1% for those aged 80 or older, indicating that life satisfaction decreases as age increases. Additionally, the satisfaction rate also dropped from 37.0% for those aged 65–69 to 33.8% for those aged 80 or older.



Lifelong education participation rate

The participation rate of elderly people aged 65 to 79 in Korea in lifelong education was 24.8% as of 2024, showing a steady upward trend since 2022, and considering the current trend and social environment, it is expected to continue to increase in the future.



IV. Discussion

This study aims to examine social phenomena regarding changes in the lifestyle trends of the elderly in Korea and to analyze trends in relative poverty rates, employment status, internet usage rates, life satisfaction, and participation in lifelong education among the elderly population.

In this study, the relative poverty rate of the elderly population aged 65 and over in Korea was the highest among OECD countries and is expected to continue increasing.

This is closely related to the low benefit rate and short contribution period of the public pension (National Pension), as well as the inadequacy of the old-age income security system. In particular, a study by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs analyzed that the risk of poverty is higher for single-person elderly households and elderly women [12]. It is projected that as aging intensifies in the future, both the size of the elderly poverty population and the poverty rate are likely to increase. Accordingly, the need for policy responses such as strengthening the basic pension, eliminating blind spots in the public pension system, and expanding employment opportunities for the elderly is emphasized.

In this study, the employment status of the elderly population aged 65 or older in Korea was 9,953 as of 2024, and it is projected to continue increasing.

The number of employed older adults has been rapidly increasing, showing a continuous upward trend over the past few years and expanding the scale of employment. This increase is analyzed as a result of the deepening of the aging population and the rise in subsistence employment due to insufficient retirement income [13]. Meanwhile, as the health status of older adults improves and life expectancy increases, the demand for employment is also expected to rise. Accordingly, it is considered necessary for the government to establish institutional frameworks to increase employment and ensure income security for older adults.

In this study, the internet usage rate of the elderly population aged 65 and over in Korea was 76.9% as of 2024 and is expected to continue increasing, and the main purpose was confirmed to be communication.

It has been confirmed that internet use by the elderly has positive effects on the quality of life in old age, such as improved life satisfaction, reduced depression, and increased social activity [14]. The main purpose of internet use by the elderly was found to be communication activities, such as messenger services and sharing information. As the aging population and the widespread adoption of smart devices are expected to continue increasing, the rate of internet usage is projected to continue rising; therefore, the expansion of regular education and information provision regarding internet usage should be prioritized in the future.

In this study, it was confirmed that the life satisfaction of the elderly population aged 65 and older in Korea tends to decrease as the age group increases.

Life satisfaction among the elderly in Korea tends to decrease as age increases. This is influenced by complex factors such as deteriorating health, economic hardship, and reduced social relationships; in particular, the increase in the number of elderly people living alone and the disconnection of family and social relationships are cited as major causes of the decline in life satisfaction [15]. As the rapid aging of the population leads to an increase in the elderly population, which can result in a rise in poverty due to income loss and deteriorating health, it is urgent to devise measures to stabilize the lives of the elderly that can guarantee a stable life.

In this study, the participation rate of the elderly population aged 65 and over in Korea in lifelong education was 24.8% as of 2024, which was the highest in the last three years and is predicted to continue increasing.

Participation in lifelong education has a positive effect on the formation of social relationships and the improvement of life satisfaction among the elderly [16]. However, it is believed that there are gaps in participation depending on education level, income, and health status, and it is projected that the participation rate of the elderly in lifelong education will continue to increase with the entry into a super-aged society.

V. Conclusion

Korea is advancing as a leading nation in Asia, driven by recent rapid economic growth and the dedication and efforts of the Baby Boomer generation. This growth was made possible by the contributions of the current elderly population.

In this study, the relative poverty rate, employment status, internet usage rate, and lifelong education participation rate of the elderly population are expected to continue increasing; however, as the quality of life shows a declining trend, measures to improve the quality of life for the elderly must be continuously strengthened.

In particular, unlike the elderly who experienced the social environment of the past, the current elderly population in Korea is a generation that has experienced diverse cultural activities and quality of life; therefore, we must move away from the past perspectives on the quality of life of the elderly. This suggests that meeting the expectations of more seniors and improving their quality of life is necessary. Accordingly, the government needs to comprehensively analyze the quality of life that the elderly actually require and establish customized welfare improvements and systems to meet these needs.

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